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Winchester to host 4 town halls on sales tax referendum

Star staff report

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The City of Winchester and Winchester Public Schools will co-host four town hall meetings to provide residents with information about an upcoming local sales tax referendum that will appear on the ballot during the November general election, including the early voting period, according to a Monday media release from Winchester Public Schools.

Winchester voters will be asked if they want an additional general retail sales tax of up to 1% levied in the city. Revenue from the tax could only be used for qualifying capital projects involving the construction or major renovation of public schools serving Winchester.

This tax would not take effect automatically; City Council would still need to consider a rate up to 1% and adopt an ordinance. Additionally, the tax would not apply to qualifying food purchased for home consumption or essential personal hygiene products.

Winchester residents are invited to learn more about the referendum at one of four town hall meetings:

- Wednesday, Aug. 26, at Garland R. Quarles Elementary School. Building tours will begin at 5:30 p.m. and discussion will begin at 6 p.m.
- Thursday, Sept. 10, at Frederick Douglass Elementary School at 6 p.m.
- Wednesday, Sept. 23, at Virginia Avenue Charlotte DeHart Elementary School at 6 p.m.
- Thursday, Oct. 15, at Daniel Morgan Middle School at 6 p.m.

Winchester Public Schools has approximately \$135 million in identified capital needs over the next 10 years, the media release states. Revenue from the proposed sales tax could help fund major projects, including:

- **Garland R. Quarles Elementary School & Early Learning Center:** Construct a new K–5 elementary school and repurpose part of the existing building for a centralized preschool program. The project would also support division-wide realignment by:
 - Returning 5th grade to elementary schools
 - Creating permanent space for alternative programming at the Daniel Morgan campus
 - Freeing space to expand automotive and cosmetology programs at the Innovation Center
- **Virginia Avenue Charlotte DeHart Elementary School:** Upgrade major building systems, including HVAC, lighting, fire/life safety systems, and bathrooms.
- **John Handley High School Athletic & Performance Facilities:** Improve athletic and performance spaces with practice fields, gym Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) upgrades, a football scoreboard, synthetic turf replacement, baseball facility improvements, and updates to the Patsy Cline Theatre.
- **Emil & Grace Shihadeh Innovation Center:** Construct garage and classroom space to expand Career & Technical Education programs in automotive service technology and cosmetology.
- **Daniel Morgan Campus:** Address aging infrastructure with needed boiler and roof replacements.

The referendum also will appear on the Nov. 3 ballot in Frederick County.

Last week, the county and Frederick County Public Schools announced they will hold town hall sessions on the referendum on the following dates:

- Thursday, Aug. 27, from 6 to 7 p.m. at Millbrook High School
- Tuesday, Sept. 1, from 6 to 7 p.m. at Sherando High School (The meeting will also be livestreamed at <https://www.youtube.com/live/gXe7kLBiY5U>)
- Tuesday, Sept. 8, from 6 to 7 p.m. at James Wood High School

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