

School referendum seeks \$6 million

Written by Carol Pomeday
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Impact of scaled-back plan to take advantage of elementary debt payoff

A scaled-back plan to renovate rather than replace Cedar Grove-Belgium Middle School and build a technical education center will go to voters on Tuesday, April 6.

The referendum seeks permission to borrow \$6 million for projects that address safety, educational and maintenance needs at no additional cost to taxpayers.

The school district will pay off its existing debt on the elementary school this month. The 48 cents per \$1,000 of valuation for the old debt would finance the new projects.

If the district receives federal stimulus funds, homeowners could see their taxes drop by 21 cents per \$1,000 valuation.

The state has received \$100 million to be allocated for qualified school construction bonds for “shovel-ready” projects approved by voters, Supt. Steve Shaw said.

“Some people think it’s going to be another tax. We’ve already been taxed for it. If Cedar Grove-Belgium doesn’t get it, another school district in the state will,” Shaw said. “I can’t guarantee we’ll get the funding, but our financial advisor says it looks good.”

In November, residents defeated by a two-to-one margin a \$20.7 million spending plan to build a new middle school and a tech-ed center. A proposal to add a \$4.5 million competitive swimming pool was defeated by a larger margin.

“This plan, I think, is doing what our constituents asked. They said, ‘We can’t afford the money’ and ‘Why didn’t you take care of the building?’” Shaw said.

“We’re telling people, ‘The needs haven’t changed, but the solution has.’”

Unlike last time when there were organized efforts to defeat the referendum, there doesn’t appear to be the same opposition.

“It’s been kind of quiet. I’m hoping that’s a good sign,” Shaw said. “I met with

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some senior citizens and I was pleased with that.”

The proposed plan, developed by Abacus Architects and Joseph Schmitt & Sons Construction, would relieve crowding by adding classrooms at the middle and elementary schools, moving middle-school science rooms to the office area and enlarging classrooms.

It also proposes relocating the middle-school office to control access to the building and installing energy-efficient windows, lights and heating system, new plumbing and wiring for technology needs.

The technical education center would provide programs for high-school and middle-school students and adult classes.