Cedar Grove-Belgium residents are divided on two building projects

Belgium resident Tracy Ploeckelman doesn't want her children to go to school in a trailer or spend tax dollars renting them. She plans to vote "yes" to a referendum question on Tuesday, Nov. 3, that would authorize spending $20.7 million to build a middle school and technical education center in Cedar Grove.

"It is time to take the border wars out of the equation and do what is best for children. With low construction costs and interest rates, now is the time to build," she states in a letter to Ozaukee Press.

But Scott Olsen disagrees, saying the timing is poor and the next school belongs in Belgium.

"I fail to see how the timing of a project of this scale is appropriate given the current state of the economy," he wrote. "A vote of yes on this referendum further seals the deal that a school may never be built here. It's time for Belgium residents to speak their minds with their votes."

The web site www.voteyescgb.com promotes a yes vote on the referendum, showing pictures of art classes being held in the elementary school commons because there is no other room available and the rusting heating and ventilation system in the middle school.

There doesn't appear to be an organized effort to defeat the referendum, but the faltering economy and the desire for a Belgium school present a two-pronged attack.

Supt. Steve Shaw said people can still visit the schools and tour the facilities to see students squeezed into rooms designed for fewer students, the middle school with windows so inefficient that they are boarded up and science rooms with no lab tables and the high school's limited space for technical and vocational education classes.

Administrators, board members and members of the Long-Range Planning and Building

Steering Committee have gone to senior citizens, organizations, business leaders and village and town boards to explain the proposed building project and why it was deemed the best option to meet the current and future needs of the growing district.

“I think the board, steering committee and administrators have done everything they can to inform voters,” Shaw said. “We tried to be as transparent and open about this as we could. People have been coming for tours, and I’ve gotten a lot of phone calls and e-mails from people with questions.”

Residents will be asked to answer yes or no to the following questions on the referendum:

• Borrow $20.7 million to construct and equip a middle school for grades five to eight utilizing solar and geothermal technology; construct a technical education building; refinance property for the new middle school site; and remodel the existing middle school building to accommodate expansion of the elementary school into the space.

• Borrow $4.5 million to construct an eight-lane, 25-yard competitive swimming pool with seating for 300 spectators attached to the new middle school and the conversion of the current pool into educational space.

If both projects are approved, the owner of a home with an equalized value of $200,000 would pay an additional $328 in taxes annually for 20 years based on a 5.25% interest rate.

If only the $20.7 million is approved, the same homeowner would pay an additional $252 annually.

Recently, interest rates were at 4%, Shaw said.

There is a good chance of obtaining 2010 federal stimulus money for a portion of the project at no interest, he said. Other districts have received no-interest stimulus funds for 30% of their project costs.

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS headed for buses at the end of the school day Monday. The referendum vote on Tuesday will determine if a new school for students in fifth through eighth grades and a technical education center are built north of the high school.
Photo by Sam Arendt