

A \$6 million question to be on April ballot

Written by Carol Pomeday
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Middle school changes, more classrooms, tech-ed center are top priorities

An April 6 referendum to borrow \$6 million was expected to be approved by the Cedar Grove-Belgium School Board at its Wednesday, Feb. 10, meeting.

Borrowing that amount will not increase taxes because the current elementary school debt will be paid off, officials said.

The referendum question will seek voter approval borrow money to pay for “renovating and remodeling the middle school, including improvements to address safety, security, mechanical systems and Americans with Disabilities Act issues; providing a new computer room at the elementary school; constructing and equipping classroom additions at the middle and elementary schools to meet current and short-term demands; constructing and equipping a technology education center; and providing district-wide technology upgrades.”

Several board members expressed concerns that \$6 million would provide only a short-term fix.

Supt. Steve Shaw disagreed, saying it addresses safety, maintenance, technology and current enrollment needs.

The money can only be used for items listed in the referendum, he said.

“How much we can do will depend on what the bids come in for,” he said.

If a referendum is approved in April, the district has a good chance of getting a no-interest Department of Public Instruction Qualified School Construction Bond for 25% of the project cost and federal Build America Bonds for the remaining 75% at a low-interest rate, financial adviser Lisa Voisin of Robert W. Baird told the board.

If full stimulus funding is available, the tax rate would decrease 21 cents per \$1,000 of equalized valuation or the board could pay off the loan earlier, Voisin said.

If stimulus funding is not available, borrowing \$6 million at 5.25% interest for 20 years would keep the tax rate the same as last year, she said.

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In November, district voters defeated by a 2-to-1 margin a \$20.7 million referendum to build a new middle school and technical education center and convert the current middle school for elementary use.

The concept presented last week by Abacus Architects of Sheboygan calls for a new entrance and office on the west side of the middle school, removing non-weight-bearing interior walls to increase classrooms from 730 square feet to 900 square feet and installing energy-efficient windows and new heating and cooling systems.

Four classrooms — two each at the elementary and middle schools — would be added. The interior middle school office would be converted to science labs. An elementary computer room would be enlarged.

A technology-education building is proposed for the west side of the high school near current tech-ed rooms.

“This solves our immediate needs and allows for some growth,” Shaw said. “If you give teachers more room to teach, they can do more innovative and creative things. The only thing that has stifled the staff is the 730-square-foot rooms.”

Operating costs should be less with window and heating-system upgrades, he said.

The renovations will make the building viable for 20 to 30 years, Salkowski said, and should handle growth for six to eight years.

The University of Wisconsin Applied Population Laboratory in Madison is doing a 10-year growth projection study for \$3,000. The report is expected in March.