

Voters approve \$6 million school plan

Written by Carol Pomeday
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Scaled-back Cedar Grove-Belgium referendum will allow upgrades to middle and elementary schools

The Cedar Grove-Belgium School Board was given the go-ahead by a 547-419 vote to spend \$6 million to upgrade and remodel the middle and elementary schools and build a new technical education center.

But it was a tense night for school officials until the Village of Belgium results came in after 10 p.m.

While Cedar Grove residents voted 282-156 for the project that keeps all students at the Cedar Grove campus, Town of Holland residents defeated it 104-81.

Ozaukee County voters were on the fence, with village residents supporting it 139-125 and town residents passing it by a tight 36-34 vote.

“When the Town of Holland vote came in, I thought, ‘Oh no, is this what’s going to happen?’” board president Jim Lautenschlaeger said Wednesday.

“The minute we found out it passed last night, we got the paperwork done for the qualified school construction bonds and Steve (Shaw, superintendent) mailed it this morning.

“That’s a huge part in passing the referendum — making sure we don’t raise taxes. If we can give money back, that’s what we on the School Board want.”

The school district is applying for a portion of the \$100 million in federal stimulus funding allocated to Wisconsin for no-interest qualified school construction bonds. The school district’s financial advisor, Lisa Voisin of Robert W. Baird, said the district could receive an interest-free loan for 40% of its construction costs, saving \$1.65 million over the life of the loan.

If the district receives the funding, the tax rate could drop by 21 cents per \$1,000 of valuation, Voisin said.

The goal is to have the majority of the work done on the middle and elementary schools by the start of the 2010-11 school year, Lautenschlaeger said.

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“We have a lot of work to do,” he said. “We’ll talk a little bit about it at the next board meeting Wednesday (April 14), but we will have to be meeting more to get down to the nitty-gritty.

“We’ve already talked to the middle school staff and know what their needs are. We’re very excited about the opportunity to move forward with this project now.”