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Boiler upgrade highlighted in Wall school vote pitch

Superintendent also stresses need for other building improvements as Dec. 13 referendum approaches

BY HAYLEY LOHMANN
 THE COAST STAR

WALL TOWNSHIP — With winter approaching, Wall Township School Superintendent Tracy Handerhan is calling attention to repairs of heating systems and structural improvements included in a bond issue that will go to voters in a Dec. 13 referendum.

In a news release issued by the school district on the two ballot questions, Superintendent Handerhan stated, "The district has needs now, from inefficient boilers to roofs that are past the time frame that they were expected to last."

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Wall school district presses for Dec. 13 referendum

WALL
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According to the release, "One question proposes \$53 million for widespread roof and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning [HVAC] repairs, electrical and mechanical system upgrades, and restroom modernizations."

It also includes renovations to several instructional classrooms and the Wall High School auditorium.

The second ballot question proposes \$13.5 million for more specifically located HVAC, electrical and site upgrades; window replacements; art room renovations; and important upgrades to expand use of Wall High School's athletic facilities.

Ms. Handerhan called the HVAC system repairs one of two main "drivers" for the referendum. The second, she said, is that "these proposals are timed with the pay-off of other debt from the 1998 referendum."

If the project is approved by voters, \$20 million in state

aid will be contributed to the improvements, reducing the local burden.

Ms. Handerhan said that "state aid makes this a great financial opportunity for improvements that will directly benefit the students."

\$20M STATE AID CONTINGENT ON 'YES' VOTES TO BOTH QUESTIONS

If voters reject either or both referendum questions, schools would lose the offered state aid, as it is only provided for voter-approved bond referendums.

Question 1 must pass for Question 2 to pass. If voters reject Question 1 but approve Question 2, neither proposal would pass, according to the district.

Wall Township Public Schools last used a referendum in 1998, adding space to multiple schools that serve students to this day.

As the debt from that authorized decision expires, the new release states that "renewing the current level of debt payments for 25 years would continue the cycle of repairing, replacing, and

renovating that keeps Wall's schools maintained and Wall's tax rate steady."

"Without it, 100% of the costs of these must-do items would come from the district's regular budget," the release adds.

Projected tax impact has been calculated based on the older debt being paid off and the contribution of state aid toward future debt payments.

"On a home assessed at the average [\$483,357], voter approval of the first question would result in no increase to the current tax rate; payments would be made within the existing tax rate. Voter approval of the second question would result in a tax increase of \$5 a month," reads the press release.

District administrators and Board of Education members have been sharing information on the referendum so voters can be informed before making their choice.

Previously they have offered presentations at the Wall Board of Education

meeting and a virtual information session.

FRIDAY INFORMATION SESSION AT WALL LIBRARY

Their next effort will be from 2:30 to 4 p.m. on Dec. 9, when the district will use public meeting space at the Wall Branch Library, 2700 Alaire Road, to "present facts and figures."

The Friday session is particularly meant to cater to senior citizens of the Wall community, to whom the district extends a special invitation.

The district also has mailed to residents a brochure titled "One Vision, Our Future," describing the referendum and how it would affect schools and taxpayers.

The news release offers a website address meant specifically to inform voters, at WallPublicSchools.org/VISION.

The district outlines a few features on the website: "It includes a link that anyone can use to check the assessed value of their property and the mathematical formula necessary to calculate the specific tax impact for that property. It also includes details of the proposed projects.

"It includes the recording of a Virtual Forum Thursday, Dec. 1, so residents could conveniently hear from — and ask questions of — architects, financial advisers, school district staff members and Board of Education members.

"The website also includes poll locations and a link that registered voters can use to search for the poll to which they are assigned."

Polls will be open on Tuesday, Dec. 13 from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.

The District concludes, "This referendum is a community-wide, community-focused proposal that balances necessary facility repairs/upgrades and instructional program needs with the financial impact on taxpayers. It also recognizes that school quality and community pride go hand in hand. The WTPS Board has used numerous ways to inform the community and now encourages everyone to make their voices heard by voting."

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