

For Immediate Release

June 25, 2018

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Building Referendum Question Approved by Wisconsin Dells School Board

Wisconsin Dells, Wis - A building referendum question representing a “once-in-a-generation” opportunity for the Wisconsin Dells School District will appear on the November ballot following approval Monday night by the school district’s board of education.

By unanimous vote, the board approved the yes-or-no question to issue general obligation bonds in an amount not to exceed \$33,685,000 to construct and equip a new high school, and to convert the existing high school building into a middle school serving grades six through eight. The referendum question will appear on ballots during the November 6, 2018 general election, at polling places within the five counties and 11 municipalities that make up the District.

If approved, this building referendum would allow the District to accomplish three goals. One, it would allow for the construction of a flexible high school to prepare students for the increasing competition of attending competitive, four-year colleges, and a demanding and changing job market. Second it would repurpose the existing high school into a middle school serving grades six through eight, and third it would preserve three much-loved elementary schools, Lake Delton, Neenah Creek and Spring Hill. This will also simultaneously provide relief to the over-crowding at Spring Hill Elementary.

The long-sought improvements would come at a considerably reduced cost, noted District Superintendent Terry Slack, thanks to an estimated \$27.2 million in contributions toward the proposed new high school, pledged during the past year by community leaders, the City of Wisconsin Dells and the Village of Lake Delton.

“These generous contributions, combined with the referendum, offer a once-in-a-generation opportunity to provide first-class educational facilities to our students, staff and community members,” Slack said. “The need is real and urgent, the plan benefits the entire community and the timing is perfect considering the financial assistance and donations to reduce the overall cost of this proposed project by roughly 45 percent. The district has the second lowest mill rate in the entire South Central Wisconsin area, and with the passage of this referendum, it would remain second lowest. It is estimated, the mill rate would remain \$1.43 below the state average.”

“If passed, the referendum would result in an increase of \$0.86 cents to the local mill rate for property owners within the district. That rate, which represents the taxpayer amount per \$1,000 of a home’s assessed value going toward school taxes and for 2017-2018 is \$7.50, and is targeted at \$8.36 still well below the state average of \$9.79,” Slack said.

The scale and quality of the proposed facilities improvements and their potential positive impact on the quality of an education for area students “would surely allow the district to be better positioned to become a district of choice,” Slack predicted.

“Education has changed dramatically over the past 20 years since the high school’s last major facilities improvement project, and modern school environments have been shown to have a positive impact on teaching, student achievement and, most importantly, teacher and student engagement,” he said.

The referendum’s approval caps a three-year effort by the district to garner community input and, ultimately support, in how best to upgrade its aging buildings. That effort received a dramatic boost last August when Dells business and community leaders Todd and Shari Nelson, 1979 graduates of Wisconsin Dells High School, pledged 80 acres of the Brew Farm north of downtown Wisconsin Dells toward a new high school building complex.

“A new school will not only improve the educational opportunities and achievements of its students, but will become a flagship of modern progress for the Wisconsin Dells community,” he said. “Shari and I are committed to bringing this dream to reality and look forward to walking the halls of a brand new High-School in the not too distant future.”

“On behalf of the Board of Education, we are confident we will get all the information to the public, so community members can make an informed decision. That’s our job, said Kathy Anderson, Board President. Our job is not to tell the community to vote yes or no. Our job is to make sure they have every piece of information to be an informed voter when they go to the ballot box.”

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