

District begins talks on millage increase for bond

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By Thomas Franz 

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(Photo by Thomas Franz)

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — The Chippewa Valley School District has begun reviewing potential options for school improvement projects over the next six years.

In order to fund those projects, the district is going over the possibility of asking voters to support a millage increase to levy a bond which could fund up to \$117 million worth of work.

The district would have to go before the Michigan treasury department in January in order to get an item on the ballot for this upcoming May election.

“No one likes more taxes, so we’re trying to be really careful in how we look at this because we want to go into it feeling confident that this community will support it,” Chippewa Valley Superintendent Ron Roberts said. “We don’t want to go into it blindly and just hope they go with it.”

The proposal was discussed during a workshop portion of the district’s Board of Education meeting Sept. 19.

Scott Sederlund, assistant superintendent for business and operations, presented three bond options to the board during the workshop.

Sederlund’s presentation showed that the full scope of the program would cost \$116,791,474 and would require an additional 1 mill increase. That equates to an increase of \$100 annually in taxes for a home that is valued at \$200,000.

More than \$72 million of that work is in the area of construction costs. Roofing work costs are estimated to be nearly \$28 million, and site work would cost just more than \$20 million. Architectural, mechanical and electrical work make up the remaining costs of the \$72 million.

In the area of technology, the district expects to spend \$12 million for network infrastructure and \$22.5 million for instructional equipment. Roughly \$10 million is to be spent on devices for each high school student.

The district also expects to spend \$9.5 million for furniture and busing needs.

“When you’re looking at a bond, you want to try to meet as many needs as you have. On the other hand, you don’t want to increase taxes where it creates a hardship on our community, so you have to weigh both of those together, and that’s what I wanted to get across to the board,” Sederlund said.

Under the first bond option to reduce costs, the district would choose to extend the warranty of several roofs on district buildings. In doing so, the district would pay \$200,000 out of its general fund to extend roof warranties into the early 2030s, and would save roughly \$17.3 million from the bond estimate by not replacing roofs in that time.

Buildings that would be under those extended warranties include Dakota High School, the 2007 addition to Chippewa Valley High School and the Dakota Ninth Grade Center.

That plan reduces the total bond cost to \$98.9 million, and an increase of 0.67 mills.

In addition to reducing roofing costs, Sederlund also showed a plan that by reducing costs spent on replacing mechanical equipment expected to last beyond its minimum life expectancy, and by reducing the amount of asphalt paving replacement, the district could save an additional \$9.5 million, or 0.17 mills.

Sederlund's last major deduction from the full scope plan showed that if the district does not move forward with its 1-to-1 technology device initiative for high school students, it would save \$9.4 million.

By combining those three deductions, the district would then bond for a total of \$79.9 million and ask for voters to approve a 0.34 millage rate increase, which amounts to a \$34 tax increase for a \$200,000 home.

"It's almost like a wish list," Sederlund said. "If we can do it with no limits, here's what we replace. From that point, we start building what are our true needs rather than really what our wish list or our wants are."

The district is just about through spending all of its funds from a 2010 bond worth \$90 million. Sederlund said a good portion of the remaining funds from that bond will go toward busing needs. The district also levied a bond in 2004.

"We levy bonds to do capital improvements. To pay off those bonds, we levy a debt millage, similar to what a mortgage is," Sederlund said. "When we sell those bonds, we agree to pay it back in about a 25-year time frame. We levy debt payments to pay them off. If we go for another bond, that's obviously going to extend our debt and also potentially increase the number of debt mills we levy."

An Oct. 3 workshop is scheduled for that night's board meeting to discuss the technology initiative that is part of the bond options. The district's strategic plan that was approved over the summer showed a desire to provide each student with an internet-enabled device to facilitate learning.

Under the bond plan, the district would begin that process with high school students.

"In this process, we're trying to answer a lot of questions," Roberts said. "The first is just our infrastructure needs, both technology and sites, but also, we're looking at 1-to-1 in high school, so we're trying to determine how important that is to our community. Is it not only something we want to do, but is it something our community will support?"



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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