Article for June 20, 2018

Some of you may be wondering why the school district has a levy issue on the upcoming August ballot after just having a bond issue on the April ballot. The two issues are different. A district runs a bond issue when needing to make capital improvements whereas it runs a tax levy to fund operating expenses like salaries, utilities, and textbooks.

The district has run ‘no tax increase’ bond issues as follows:

April 2018 - $1,000,000 Bond – consolidated two leases and completed a few district upgrades.

April 2013 – $3,500,000 Bond – built 2 new classrooms & central office, renovated D/C office & kitchen, leveled the floor and added new roof on portion of D/C, and upgraded HVAC & technology.

April 2012 - $2,085,000 Bond – refinanced and combined 2008 & 2005 bonds for lower interest rates. Those bonds funded the high school locker room addition and several smaller upgrades.

The only levy increase requested was in August 1999 for $0.32 for operating expenses.

The Board annually sets the operating levy at the ceiling, which is the highest amount allowed by the state auditor. If more revenue is needed, it takes a simple majority vote of the community to increase the levy above the ceiling.

Because the district faces a revenue shortfall due to increasing expenses, but decreasing state and federal revenue, decreasing enrollment, and absorbing a deficit created from underfunded mandatory programs, this levy increase is being requested.

The district obtained two leases, one in 2015 for the bus barn project and one in 2017 for ADA compliant bathroom upgrades at the entrance of the Ag building and a new awning.

A new storage building was part of the 2013 bond issue. Due to a wind storm that damaged the bus barn beyond repair in November 2014, plans changed. Now a bus barn, in addition to a new storage building, was needed. It made sense to combine the insurance money received for the damaged bus barn with the funds allocated for the storage building and address the whole facility. With no doors on the bus barn, the winds blew the roof up, the back wall out, and the poles completely out of the ground. There were ongoing safety and security issues as well since drivers arrive before sun up and often return after dark to an open bus barn. The bus barn was attached to the shop which was attached to the storage building. Both the shop and storage building flooded with every rain due to drainage issues behind the building. The shop had two different roof heights making it impossible to jack a bus up for repair. The placement of the overhead shop doors meant pulling a bus in brought it about one foot from the wall so only one side of the bus was accessible at a time. The ground of the storage building was wearing away in one section making it difficult to use that portion of the building.

A bus is nearly an $80,000 investment that needs to be protected from the elements. The district prides itself in maintaining its facilities in an efficient and economical manner. The bus barn was designed with this in mind. It is structurally sound and will last many years. The community is invited to tour the facility to see what it offers.

A community meeting will be held on June 26 at 6:30 in the FHS Library to share information and answer questions.