



HEART OF THE VALLEY

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## Little Chute Area School District referendum detailed for village board

By Tom Collins  
Reporter

For approximately 40 minutes of their March 8 meeting, Little Chute's elected and administrative personnel went back to school to learn more about the April 4 referendum questions.

District superintendent Dave Botz and business manager Karen Moore shared portions of the presentation that detailed the reasons behind the two questions on the spring election ballot.

The first referendum question deals with technology and asks to exceed the revenue limit by \$275,000 per year between 2017 and 2022 for technology hardware, software and related infrastructure. The total on that referendum question is a cumulative \$1,375,000 spread over the five school years.

The second question is an ambitious plan seeking to improve and upgrade the current middle and high school facilities working within much of the current building footprint. Important security, office and library consolidation and space needs are all addressed in the request along with some important electrical and HVAC needs. The total for that portion asks for an amount not to exceed \$17,700,000.

Botz walked trustees through the background of the referendum questions. It began with a diverse group of residents and evolved into a facilities task force during 2016. Information was gathered from a community survey that yielded 830 responses.

Key findings revealed an 86 percent satisfaction level with the school district while 74 percent of respondents supported an opera-

tional referendum for technology. In addition, some 55 percent of those responding supported the potential facilities improvement referendum.

Those responses led to the current official questions being placed on the April 4 ballot.

Botz said the technology question continues the district's goal to maintain a high level of technical excellence. A central focus in that effort eyes one to one computing opportunities for students in grades 5-12.

"That continues to build on our technology plan," Botz said. "It continues to invest dollars similar to 2007 and 2012 and maintain our high level of technology and technical excellence."

The impacts of the second referendum question are more sweeping for the current middle and high school facilities. Botz offered the best summary of question two when he said it offers a chance for the district to look at where they are and where they are going.

He explained the middle school and high school have become a single campus. But there are several needs within that campus structure to offer a better environment for students as well as for functionality and efficiency.

Key areas include streamlining campus safety and security, renovating the science, technology, engineering and math sections, consolidating the current two libraries into one facility and providing more space for the successful Flex Academy.

The attention to the Flex Academy is important because of its continued growth and success. The program has outgrown space rented from the village at the Gerard Van



Tom Collins photo

**Little Chute Area School Superintendent Dave Botz explained a number of needs involved in the April 4 referendum. Included in the two questions are continued upgrades for technology in the district and improving and upgrading the middle school facilities, with that portion not to exceed \$17,700,000.**

Hoof Civic Center in just three years. The district would like to bring in more students applying for Flex Academy and include them in their current middle and high school facility.

Botz said the district has turned away approximately 250 students over that period. With the potential improvements, more of those students could enter the Flex Academy program.

Growing the Flex Academy, which

includes a majority of non-district students, allows the district to continue to grow overall and offer programming that might otherwise not be available. He emphasized the increased trend of students and parents as educational consumers.

"Today, they have multiple opportunities," Botz said. "It's going to continue to get broader."

Among other facility needs are improving the commons and kitchen area. Botz said the current kitchen

was designed in the late 1990s to fit a different need, especially when most students left campus for lunches.

"It has become a full-fledged kitchen and there are a lot of inefficiencies in the setting up and taking down process rather than serving the needs of students," he explained. "We want to put in more of a cafe/cafeteria area."

In turn, that means changes to  
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## Referendum

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the commons and multipurpose areas, something akin to moving pieces on a chess or checkerboard.

The plan calls for moving the successful dance and multipurpose area from the former commons into an improved multipurpose area. That also means moving the currently enclosed wrestling and weight room back down to what Botz called the old commons area.

In addition to combining the two libraries into one modern library-media center location, the plan calls for consolidating the student services and guidance offices into a single setting.

He said approximately \$5 million of the requested \$17,700,000 is intended for infrastructure. One important change in mind with that improvement is replacing a 50-year-old electric generating system.

Little Chute is one of just two of 456 state school districts that still have the older system and Botz said it is getting impossible to find replacement parts for it. The referendum also addresses from roofing needs.

A portion of the referendum also focuses on a parking lot redesign in an area not intended originally as a dropoff zone. That improvement is intended to provide a much safer and more functional area.

Moore and Botz also addressed one of the Little Chute Area School District's ongoing situations. That is its landlocked status. Unlike many area school districts and most in Wisconsin, Little Chute has difficulty growing in terms of what is called its membership, what also could be called its resident student population.

Using the basic state formulas, which do not add in various grants and donations, the school district spent \$9,209.87 per student in the 2015-16 school year.

Moore added during the current year, the potential membership has decreased while school expenses have remained the same. That can offer the illusion the district is spending more per pupil when it is really an artificial inflation that needs a closer look.

Basic per pupil costs continue to be the same or grow when the population drops.

"Our total revenue limit went down," she explained. "The amount of money we are allowed to raise between taxes and state equalization went down."

"Sometimes I hear we are spending a lot of money," she added. "I hope it is clear we are really frugal with our money."

One area where current state formulas hurt Little Chute is they are not allowed to factor in their very successful open enrollment popula-

tion, including the Flex Academy.

Botz said Little Chute is second only to Kimberly's school district in terms of that growth. Ironically, when those numbers are added in, Little Chute's overall enrollment is at a 10-year high, he added.

The current state formulas divide the money the local district receives with the district where the open enrollment student lives. He also said the voucher system offers an unequal allocation of dollars. Botz said he believes the same formula should be applied for vouchers that is used for public to public open enrollments.

That is roughly one third to the district where the student resides and two thirds where the student has gone for open enrollment. The voucher offers a higher amount to the school of choice. The home school district can tax residents for what they have lost for the voucher program.

"We have a dual system going on," Botz told Little Chute trustees and administrative officials. "I don't think people understand that."

The presentation included a series of Power Point and printed material to help support what Botz and Moore were saying. One helpful piece was a map key which detailed a dozen numbers used to point out key areas of potential changes for the middle and high school campus floor plans.

Trustees asked a number of varied questions which either Botz or Moore attempted to answer. Trustee James Hietpas asked about the St. John Catholic School students and what might happen if the school theoretically closed.

Moore said the St. John students, like any other potential private school students, are not factored into the current school district membership numbers. If the school closed, those pupils would be included in the membership formula.

Public Works Director Jeff Elrick how many students leave the Little Chute district for other communities in open enrollment. That answer is approximately 125 students. Botz said some of them return to an area school where their family formerly lived. Others attend school where their parents work.

Trustee Skip Smith wondered about energy efficient projects in terms of the referendum. Botz said the school district already has completed a number of energy efficient projects periodically over the years including installation of LED lighting and various fluorescent lighting systems.

Trustee Larry Van Lankvelt offered some information based on his research that showed the average each state spends per pupil. He also referred to a regional newspaper story that seemed to show Little Chute spending more per pupil than the amounts Moore and Botz discussed in their presentation.

Both Botz and Moore referred to money that must be reported as revenue is slotted for other uses. He specifically noted grant money. He gestured that the funding becomes something of a roller coaster with those amounts temporarily factored into the revenue side.

Moore once again referred to various calculations that might mask the true dollars available per student.

"You have to look at the details," she said.

Trustee Dave Peterson wondered why some school fields are locked while village parks are often open to the public. He suggested both are paid for by tax dollars.

Botz said the school district does

allow facilities like fields to be used but school officials want to know when people are using them, especially for liability concerns. He used the example of an annual Thanksgiving Day football game played between 9 and 11 a.m. The field is opened for that use, then locked again.

"As long as we know you are there," Botz said regarding potential facility users. "In summer, the fields are open until dark. Very rarely are the facilities empty."

He also mentioned properly maintaining and irrigating the high school football field as a reason to lock facilities at certain times.

Trustee John Elrick, who said he was also a "dance dad," wondered about the potential shift from the current commons to a new multipurpose area in terms of space. Botz said measurements were taken by the dance advisor and much of the space is the same dimensions as the current commons area used for dance practices.

The school district scheduled a pair of public meetings including the first one, held last night and one planned for Wednesday, March 22, from 7-8 p.m. at the high school commons area.

Interested residents also can call 788-7605 with questions, can send an email to referendum@littlechute.k12.wi.us or visit the littlechute.k12.wi.us online site.

If approved, the referendum questions each have estimated impacts on taxpayers based on their properties. The technology question ranges from \$5 to \$10 per year over a projected five year span, with property values ranging from \$100,000 to \$200,000.

The school improvement question offers a two-part impact on properties with those same values. For the first two school years, or 2017 through 2019, the impact would range from \$129 to \$258 per year. Beginning in the 2019-20 school year, that impact would decrease to a range of \$93 to \$186 per year through the 2036-37 school year.

Little Chute Area School District residents are reminded to vote on the two referendum questions Tuesday, April 4.

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