

Woodstown mayor supports proposed Woodstown-Pilesgrove School District referendum

By Brittany M. Wehner | South Jersey Times on September 24, 2014 at 6:00 AM

WOODSTOWN — The first official presentation on the upcoming bond referendum was given Tuesday night and the borough's mayor said he is in full support and the aging buildings in the district are in need of renovation.

Just two years after a \$9.9-million bond referendum was approved to fund district needs, Woodstown-Pilesgrove Regional School District administration is preparing to ask voters to say "yes" again to preserve the nearly 100-year-old high school building.

"Woodstown High School is beautiful — a major part of the charm and history in Woodstown. Like all beautiful buildings that age, there comes a time when the roof, windows, and doors need to be replaced," Mayor Don Dietrich said Tuesday night.

Superintendent of Schools Tom Coleman and the business administrator, Frank Rizzo, showed up to the regular borough council meeting to inform elected officials of the opportunity to fund 40 percent of the district's needs through a New Jersey Regular Operating District grant.

However, in order to receive the roughly \$7.9 million from the state, voters must approve the local share of approximately \$11.9 million to pay the difference.

While the ballot question will say \$19.9 million, only part of that will need to be bonded.

"One of Woodstown qualities is historical preservation — people here really do honor historic preservation and could continue to invest," Coleman said.

"If it doesn't happen, like any old building, we are looking at obsolescence and deterioration over time. This restoration equals preservation," the superintendent continued.

The key to doing the work now is the window of opportunity through the ROD grant, according to Coleman.

Work in the high school would include a new HVAC — heating, ventilation, air conditioning — system, electrical upgrades, roof replacement, windows, doors, compliant auditorium seating and necessary restroom renovations.

Board President Chapman Vail also spoke on behalf of the board of education Tuesday night, and said if the building did not have these needs, they would not be asking for approval of the local share.

"We believe the referendum passed two years ago addressed our needs. With this referendum, we are making good on our promise — we would not come forward again until grant money would be available," Vail said, adding that the district is only asking for what they need.

"This referendum that is presented is a culmination of more than a decade of planning. Ten years ago, we went out with a series of referendums. Through those defeats the board learned what we needed to do."

During public session, no one approached council or the board, and turnout was small.

"If Woodstown-Pilesgrove voters take the opportunity to support these renovations now, we will save 40 percent of the cost via state aid that is available for only limited periods of time," Dietrich said.

The only question raised was by Councilman David Layton who asked about the security in the schools.

In response, the school architect Bob Garrison said with the proposed replacement of windows security would be increased.

Also, the superintendent added that areas of the district have been heightened in security through the past two years.

While the mayor was fully on board with the proposed referendum, two council members said they remained impartial — Fran Grenier and Joe Hiles.

"The school district gave a dazzling presentation to borough council. But before I make my decision to support the referendum I would like to hear other residents voice their opinions," Hiles said following the meeting.

The councilman added that he is looking forward to the next informational presentation and needs to review the impact on his family's budget.

The next special presentation will be made at the Pilesgrove Township Committee meeting Oct. 14 at 7 p.m.



Woodstown-Pilesgrove Regional School District Superintendent of Schools Tom Coleman presents the proposal for the upcoming referendum during the regular Woodstown council meeting Tuesday, Sept. 23, 2014 (Brittany M. Wehner | South Jersey Times)