



PRESS RELEASE, January 30, 2020

At the Monday, January 20, 2020 Pine River Area Schools Board of Education meeting, the Board voted unanimously to adopt a resolution calling for a public election to seek voter approval of a May 5, 2020, bond proposal to allow us to bring our elementary, middle, and high schools up-to-grade in some much-needed areas, including a set of new classrooms & Title and Special Needs instructional rooms/offices. The net effect of a successful May 5 bond vote would be a 0.0 millage rate increase for \$3.9 million to effect needed repairs and renovations.

Right now, the time is right for us to take advantage of a chance to extend our existing millage rate at zero dollars and zero cents in order to make our schools better, brighter, and safer for our students. Sometimes when we run a budget at our home or business things just make sense based on timely opportunities. The same is true for our school district and that time is upon us. The last payment on the 2011 bond, which included refinancing the 1996 bond to save taxpayer money, will be paid in full in December of 2020 and so by passing a bond in May of 2020, Pine River would have a chance to maintain the present millage rate for 15 years and 9 months in exchange for \$3.9 million to get some much needed work done at the elementary, middle, and high schools.

How crowded is the elementary school? Do we need to address these concerns now? The elementary is quite full—lots of students and that is a great thing, but there just isn't much room when all the kids are in class which creates an overflow issue. Bottom line, yes, we need to address these concerns, but how to do so while ensuring we add value to the education of our kids?

One of the chief questions we have heard regarding this opportunity is why were these items not addressed in 2016—didn't we just do this? Yes, we did just address pressing issues through a bond proposal (thank you so much for supporting the schools and our kids), but out of respect for folks who work hard and raise children here, we only asked for absolute necessities in 2016. We did not ask for decorative arches or gates or a ton of money, but rather strictly what we needed. Four years have passed and this is an opportunity to address some lingering issues for our schools and our kids and include:

Adding Elementary School Classrooms and Offices; replacing the Elementary Fire Alarm and ventilation system, lockers, kitchen flooring, and gymnasium padding; Middle and High School Locker Room renovations, art and science room renovations, middle school boiler replacement, replacing windows, door locksets, and restroom partitions in all three buildings; fencing around our new track and installing a set of visitor bleachers for track and football; an outdoor, covered Playground Pavilion for the Elementary; addressing Sanitation Pond needs at the middle-high school; renovations and repairs in the Middle School and High School cafeterias and kitchens, and plumbing fixtures; and upgrades to LED lighting throughout.

Our biggest area of concern is lack of instructional rooms in which to teach at our elementary school. We need classroom and office space to teach large and small groups. Currently, we are using hallway space in our elementary building by drawing shower curtains in front of our elevators to gain room enough to meet with students and



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Central Office - 17445 Pine River Rd. - LeRoy MI, 49655

work on Title I reading and math and conduct other services. Because there is nowhere else to be, we have teachers, ISD staff, and students conducting small group work at tables in the foyer and in the hallways. Due to limited space, our music classes all meet in the library or on the stage in the gymnasium, thus limiting possible times of operation. In order to maintain confidentiality and to maximize learning, we would like to add 4,700 square feet of space—three classrooms and three office-size spaces, to ensure better learning for all and return the elementary library back to a full-time library and the gymnasium to a gymnasium, and give our art teacher and art students one room in which to teach and learn.

By addressing our locker rooms at the middle and high schools, we can create a safer situation through the updating of fixtures, addressing sightlines and locker needs, and adding more room for more equipment.

“This is a really exciting time for us at Pine River,” stated superintendent Matt Lukshaitis. “Maintaining quality facilities with better, brighter, and safer classrooms is important to us all. The Board followed a process which included a five-year facilities plan culminating in the original recommendation in May of 2019, architectural and on-site inspections with meetings and building and site walk-throughs, and then the Board of Education spent October, November and December preparing applications and getting approval from the State of Michigan’s Treasury Department to proceed with seeking voter approval via a bond proposal on May 5, 2020. It’s a long, drawn-out process and in the end, should we secure voter approval, we will have a better, brighter, and safer district.”

Pine River Area Schools operates a K-3 elementary school and at a separate site, a 4-7 middle school joined to a sole 8-12 high school. Lukshaitis added, “We are proud of our buildings and grounds, but we must be proactive and take care of the property as good stewards should. The Pine River Board is committed to providing the best possible educational environment for the kids of Pine River Area Schools and are agreed that we need to improve the environment for our students wherever possible. This is a fantastic opportunity to create much-needed classroom space without increasing the millage rate, an opportunity that does not come along often. By adding classrooms and office space for Title and Special Needs staff and students, we can makeover our elementary building into something really special.”

The building and grounds committee spent nearly fifteen months coming to this conclusion. “The ultimate goal here,” added Superintendent Lukshaitis, “is a better school, brighter rooms, and a safer environment for all students. Our community is built on hard work and we believe in our kids.”

Open meetings will be held at the Pine River Elementary School on February 18 and March 3 at 6:00 p.m. in LeRoy. The doors will be unlocked at 5:45 p.m. and the meetings will be conducted in the cafeteria. Parents, community members, and folks interested in finding out more about the May 5 bond proposal are encouraged to attend. Other meetings, to be held at the middle-high school in March and April will be announced at a later date. Information about dates and times will soon be released and placed on the district’s website at www.pineriver.org

For more information or to request a personal or small group meeting with the superintendent to review the proposal, please contact central office at 231-829-3141, option 1.