

## **Stow school board moves closer to \$238M bond issue**

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### **April Helms**

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The Stow-Munroe Falls Board of Education is moving to place a \$238 million, 35-year bond issue on the Nov. 5 general election ballot. If approved by voters, the funds generated would pay to replace the district's elementary schools, intermediate school and middle school with four new elementary schools and a new middle school.

The board took the first step at its Monday meeting, voting 4-1 to send the proposed issue to the Summit County Fiscal Office to calculate the millage needed. Once the figure is determined, the school board will take its next step: a vote to send the ballot language to the Summit County Board of Elections.

### **How much will this cost property owners?**

If the bond issue passes, it would cost owners of a home valued at \$200,000 nearly \$622 annually.

Patrick Goclano, the district's treasurer, said the median home value in the Stow-Munroe Falls school district is \$224,500.

"That's \$697.75 per year, \$58 a month," Goclano said.

The district will receive a financial boost by working with the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission, said Interim Superintendent Kristen Prough. By working through this program, the Stow-Munroe Falls schools can receive a 27% reimbursement for costs covered under the state's regulations.

"There would be a lot of oversight," Prough said. "You have to follow the plan and with the state guidance as well, you can't deviate significantly from that; 27%, though, is a pretty nice chunk of change to get back from the state.

"There are additional responsibilities and obligations when you work with OFCC. The master facilities committee decided that the drawbacks were worth the benefits."

This bond issue does not address the high school, Prough said.

### **What is planned if the bond issue passes?**

If voters approve of the bond issue, school district officials want to:

- Construct four new schools for kindergarten through fifth grade.
- Build a new middle school for the district's sixth- through eighth-grade students. h Demolish Echo Hills Elementary, Fishcreek Elementary, Highland Elementary, Indian Trail Elementary, Riverview Elementary, Lakeview Intermediate and Kimpton Middle schools.
- Make the current Woodland Elementary School the new administrative building.

- Sell the current administrative building on Allen Road.

Laura E. Forchione, director of technology integration and public relations, said that Woodland, on Graham Road, is more central for the district than the current location, which is in an industrial area.

The new middle school will be constructed along Graham Road, where Highland Elementary and Lakeview Intermediate schools are now, said Nancy Binzel, school board president. New elementary schools would be built at the current Kimpton, Fishcreek and Indian Trail sites as well as on district-owned property on Housley Road.

“It’s important to note that all of our buildings will remain open during construction,” Binzel said. “We do not need to use any swing spaces in order to accommodate students.”

### **Why are new school buildings sought?**

Kari Suhadolnik, a member of the school board, said the district needs to consider the generational impact that aging facilities can have on students.

“When we don’t protect our education and our district, our property values will tank,” Suhadolnik said. “Our buildings are crumbling. Yes, this number, this \$250 million, it sounds terrifying — but \$58 a month is certainly not. It’s for the future of our students and our community.”

Pamela Wind, school board vice president, said most of the district’s buildings are beyond renovation.

“Our existing buildings are well past the end of the life that they had anticipated when they were built,” Wind said. “This isn’t an ask that has been undertaken lightly. We are at the end of life. I think I remember one of the numbers that they gave us was from OFCC was 66%; if you hit that threshold, then it’s more cost effective and fiscally responsible to actually replace. I think Echo Hills is at like 90%. We’re not just over, it’s way over.”

One example of a recent maintenance cost was at the high school, Wind said.

“We’ve paid our heating and air conditioning company probably almost \$200,000 at this point just based off of the fact that the high school chiller went down this week,” Wind said. “We’ve already replaced one; it’s the original chiller, and we know that it needs some additional maintenance because of its age.”

### **What are some concerns voiced?**

Mike Sheehan, who cast the board’s lone dissenting vote, questioned the size of the bond issue in light of rising costs.

“This is tough,” Sheehan said. “But since February of 2020, we’ve had a 20% increase in cost of living. You’re having issues with folks being able to stay in their homes, and even more so you have people that own commercial properties who get hit even harder. There’s no winning either way on this, unfortunately. You’ve got to look at this commercial property owner who now has to raise the rent on his customer, his tenant — and that tenant may have to raise prices or have to maybe close that business.”

Marty Simpkins, a district resident, said the bond issue could prove to be a hardship for Stow residents. She mentioned Bulldog Bags, which provides bags of food to students who need assistance.

“There are food problems and issues with families and things like that,” Simpkins said. “Adding a \$238 million bond issue to this, how do you feel about maybe putting these people out of their homes in Stow? If they are in trouble buying food, how are they going to pay property taxes? Even if they don’t own a home, their rent’s going to be impacted on this.