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WEDNESDAY, MAY 09, 2007

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Mattawan voters asked to support funding in Tuesday's school elections

By: Paul Garrod
05/07/2007

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MATTAWAN - Voters in the Mattawan School District will go to the polls May 8 to decide the fate of a short-term bond issue. The bond issue would not create a millage rate increase.

Since the first of the year, the Mattawan Board of Education and school administrators have discussed possible alternate funding sources.

The two groups are concerned that funding will be cut up to \$125 per student starting June 1. Schools were expecting to get at least \$7,108 per student from the state this year.

In recent years, local school districts have become frustrated that the state has not been able to keep its commitment under Proposal A to adequately fund schools. Local districts receive 92 percent of their operational funding through the state.

The short-term limited bond issue would be used in three ways:

- *Acquiring school buses.
- *Partially re-equipping and refurbishing some district facilities.
- *Installing educational technology updates and improvements.

Under state law, expenditures of bond issues must be audited, and proceeds cannot be used for repair or maintenance costs, employee salaries or other expenses.

According to an information sheet supplied by the school district, the district's State Equalized Valuation (SEV) has risen more quickly than anticipated when the existing bonds were issued. In turn, the existing bonds are being paid off faster than the schedule of repayment anticipated.

It is because of this that the district is able to maintain the same tax rate as is currently levied - 4.67 mills.

Over the next seven years, approximately \$6.6 million would be used toward purchases to help offset income restrictions and losses currently experienced by the district.

The proposal includes:

- *Computer network infrastructure - The current network design is seven years old and was not designed to support the integrated manageability and Quality of Service (QoS) that is currently required by the district.

Services such as video streaming, VoIP (Voice over IP) telephony, secured access and remote connectivity were not built into the plan.



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*Direct telephone system - The district's decade-old telephone system would be replaced, citing spare parts are becoming harder to find.

With updates, the district would be temporarily able to integrate the new voice mail system with the old phone (PBX) system.

Updates for district 911 calls would also be made.

Currently, when a 911 call is placed from anywhere in the district, responders would go directly to the Central Office, instead of where the call originated.

*Wireless LAN - A wireless LAN would be established across the campus.

*Network security and access control - Technology would be purchased to assist in network monitoring, intrusion detection, scanning for malicious technology, as well as securing network access.

*School buses - Three new school buses would be purchased each year at a cost of \$250,000.

*Capital outlay - Items that fall into this category would be date equipment and furniture.

On average, a person owning property that has a market value of \$200,000, with an SEV of \$100,000, would not realize a tax reduction of \$42 per year.

If passed, the new bond issue would supply funds from July 2007 through June 30, 2013, in the following increments: 2007 - \$1,525,000; 2009 - \$1,600,000; 2011 - \$1,700,000; and 2013 - \$1,800,000.

Voters will also select candidates for board seats.

Incumbents Alan Koenig, of Schoolcraft, and Elizabeth "Heidi" Pfannes, of Mattawan, along with challenger Erik Van Allen, of Kalamazoo, will vie for two, 4-year terms on the board. Jeffrey Dufon and Kristine Kounelis, both of Mattawan, are running for one, 3-year term.

Koenig, of 12937 S. 1st St., was appointed to fill a vacancy on the board in March of 2006.

Koenig received a master of arts degree from Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo and a juris doctorate from the University of Detroit. He has also completed post-graduate work at Wayne State University Law School.

Prior to starting his own law practice, Koenig worked as an attorney at the United States District Court in Detroit, at the Michigan Court of Appeals, and at one of Michigan's largest law firms.

Koenig and his wife, Denise, have been residents of the district for the past six years and have a son and daughter attending Mattawan Later Elementary School, and a daughter in Mattawan Early Elementary School.

He has served as Guardian Ad Litem for children in Kalamazoo County Family Court, and has volunteered with the Hispanic American Council immigration law clinic. He also served on the Prairie Ronde Township Zoning Board, and on the Prairie Ronde Township Road Committee.

In seeking re-election, Koenig said, " I want to share my passion for education and learning. I am a strong advocate for reading, writing and continuing education....I believe that with my background, experience and philosophy of education that I can continue to make a meaningful contribution as a school board member."

Pfannes, of 27428 60th Ave., Mattawan, was appointed to fill a vacancy on the board in June of 2006.

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Gobles Boys Basketball
 Photo Gallery 2006-2007

She is employed by Kingscott as a business development representative.

She has three children, one a 2006 graduate of Mattawan High School, one in first grade, and one a senior at MHS.

Pfannes said, "I have an understanding and a vested interest in making sure Mattawan Consolidated School continues in a positive direction and builds on our excellent reputation."

In seeking re-election, she said, "Michigan's educational system is in for challenges in the next few years. I want to make sure we continue to be creative and stretch ourselves to make the most of what we have. Doing more with less is always a challenge, but with creativity we can do amazing things."

She has served as a 4-H Club leader, the Mattawan lacrosse board, and has been involved with Mattawan school athletics, Cub Scouts, AYSO Soccer and Mattawan Little League.

Van Allen, of 5556 Farallon St., Kalamazoo, received an MBA from Michigan State University. He is currently employed by Getman Corporation.

He has two children attending Mattawan.

In seeking election, Van Allen said, "I know that Mattawan, like all schools in Michigan, will face problems like unreliable state funding, aging facilities, and an increasing student population. I want to contribute my experience, ability and energy to face those challenges and continue the tradition of providing a quality education in a healthy leaning environment."

Van Allen is a member of the Mattawan Later Elementary Association of Parents. He also serves as an assistant coach on his daughter's soccer team.

Dufon, of 25788 Orchard Drive, Mattawan, has his own private law practice.

Dufon and his wife, Susan, have been married for 25 years and have three adult children, all graduates of Mattawan High School.

With the recent graduation of their youngest son, Dufon says he now has time to be a dedicated member of the Mattawan Board of Education.

"There are going to be many tough issues facing our schools over the next several years, the most serious of which will be the need to deal with large state funding cuts. I will be a visible member of the board and vow to listen to my friends and neighbors as critical decisions have to be made."

Dufon has served as a volunteer in Mattawan Elementary School and middle school field trips. He has also served as a volunteer for the Mattawan Band Boosters.

Kounelis, of 22516 Vineyard Circle, received a bachelor's degree from WMU.

She and her family have been residents of the Mattawan School District since 1996. She has been employed by an area college, and also a credit union.

Kounelis and her husband have two daughters attending Mattawan Middle School.

In seeking election, Kounelis said, "The district must maintain a healthy budget for running successfully. Mattawan Consolidated School is well-known for the quality of academics and the building of relationships. Both are necessary to take the district into the future with continued success stories for our students."

She has been involved with Girl Scouts, an AYSO volunteer, Mattawan Little League, a Kiwanis Club volunteer, and a mentor.

The board will also seek an 18-mill renewal for non-homestead property.



Paw Paw Boys Basketball
Photo Gallery 2006-2007



Gobles Volleyball
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If approved, it is expected to generate \$1.7 million in state aid for 2007-2008.

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