

FCS bond election — February 23, 2010

(Submitted by Fruitport Community Schools)

On February 23, 2010, the Fruitport Community Schools will ask district residents to vote on an \$8.6 million bond issue. If successful, bond proceeds would be used for technology and facility renovations and updates.

Because of the increase to district property values, the millage rate collected to pay off school facility debt could fall between 0.4 and 0.8 mills. Should that happen, a savings of approximately \$5.00 per month would be generated for the average homeowner. If residents vote to maintain the existing millage rate, \$8.6 million would be generated for improvements to school facilities. In addition, through restructuring the debt, the payoff for this millage would be the same as the current millage payoff dates of 2022 for the 2003 bond issue and 2028 for the 1987 bond issue.

The district has applied for additional bond funds through President Obama's federal stimulus program, designed to improve the infrastructure of our nation's schools. Because stimulus funds are issued on a first come, first served basis, it was important to seek bond approval at the earliest possible date: February 23, 2010. Should we receive this money, an additional \$2.6 million would be generated for district renovations and upgrades. The district's application is currently on the waiting list.

With a successful election, bond money would be spread among four main areas, as follows:

Technology. Many computers our students are using are

in excess of 7 years old. Bond proceeds would be used to update all district technology to ensure our students have access to technology they will need to be successful beyond high school.

Infrastructure. Fruitport Middle School, which opened to students in 1969, is our youngest district building. It was built 15 years prior to computers appearing in the classroom. Older buildings were not built to accommodate electrical infrastructure needed to support modern classroom technology. Bond funds would allow electrical upgrades to all buildings so that each classroom could support the technology needed to give students the tools they will need to be successful beyond high school.

Safety. Improvements would be made to the Shettler School parking lot to enhance student safety while entering the building from school buses and parent vehicles. A district-wide keyless lock system would also be installed that would allow us to remotely lock any exterior door in the district in the event of a lock-down.

Energy Efficiency. When our buildings were built, energy was cheap and little consideration was given to energy efficiency in the building design. For example, the boiler in the middle school far exceeds the necessary output to keep the building at a moderate temperature. A new boiler designed to fit the actual needs of the middle school could pay for itself in three years through a reduction of energy consumption. In addition, our buildings were designed so that when the heat is on, the entire building is heated without the ability to control zones within the building. This bond issue would allow us to create zones so that we can control the use of heat

to only those areas in use within the building. For example, on weekends our gymnasiums are frequently used. Currently, we have to heat the entire building just to keep heat in the gym. Improvements to the heating system would create zones so that we could be more strategic and efficient in the areas we heat.

Other improvements to our facilities include door and window replacements, some roofing, old high school gym floor replacement, and resurfacing of the track and tennis courts. In addition, bond proceeds would be used to purchase buses. Not only would this keep our fleet up-to-date, but also allows us to put general fund money, budgeted for the purchase of buses, back into the classroom.

This bond issue addresses prioritized needs of the district with a **zero millage increase** and **no extension of the debt**. The possibility of additional money from the federal government, pending the outcome of the election, is another attractive feature that inspired the district to go before voters at this time.

Additional bond information is available at the district website, www.fruitportschools.net, the upcoming *Focus* newsletter, and/or by calling Superintendent Bob Szymoniak at 865-4001.

Please remember to cast your vote on February 23, 2010. •

It just makes sense Letter to the Editor:

As a parent of children in the Fruitport school system, I urge all voters to show their support on February 23 for upgrades to the Fruitport Community Schools. Providing improved technology, infrastructure, and safety for our children, **with no tax increase**, just makes sense.

New educational technology for our staff and students provides them the opportunity to teach and train for tomorrow's technical job market. It is difficult to keep up with rapidly changing technology. However, the opportunity to provide new computer workstations for every classroom in the district, **with no tax increase**, just makes sense.

The safety and well-being of our children is top priority. Providing enhanced building safety measures through improved parking lots, access control to exterior doors, and improved lighting in the pool area, **with no tax increase**, just makes sense.

And providing energy efficient buildings by upgrading heating controls, boilers, roofs, windows and doors, **with no tax increase**, just makes sense. Money saved from cost efficiencies will be put back into the classroom.

Given these tough economic times, I applaud the Board of Education and the Facilities Study Committee for taking a conservative and sensible approach to addressing critical needs of the Fruitport Community Schools. Their commitment and foresight to provide our students with safe, energy efficient buildings with progressive technology, at **no tax increase**, is very much appreciated.

Please join me and vote Yes on February 23.

Heidi Fairfield
2414 Briar Avenue

Regarding Max Riekse's vote no on Fruitport Schools bond request

Letter to the Editor:

Like Mr. Riekse, I, too, can not hold back any longer. Mr. Riekse stated (in a letter to the editor printed recently in the *Muskegon Chronicle*) that he has chosen to vote no on Fruitport's upcoming bond request. While this is certainly his right, I found his statements to be rather misleading and uninformed.

He refers to the Facilities Study Committee as being an exclusive, mysterious, secret and elitist organization. I am part of this group. I got involved, not because I knew the mysterious password or secret handshake, but by accepting the *public* invitation to be a part. What was discussed, as Mr. Riekse (or anyone else) would have known if they chose to be involved, was the reason for the bond roll back request. The current 3-mill local school debt retirement millage rate is set to roll back.

By voting "yes," Fruitport voters would agree to maintain the current millage rate. This would generate approximately \$8.6 million for the district with *no tax increase*. Taxpayers would continue paying what they are paying right now. The monies generated from this roll back by law must be spent on pre-identified building projects. No funds raised can be used for salaries, district personnel, operating expenses, textbooks, or paying the light bill. The monies raised are allowed to be used for building updates and improvements.

I learned that the average student's/teacher's computer is nearly eight years old. When I put that in terms of my personal

life, eight years ago I was using a bag-phone instead of a BlackBerry. I don't think you need to be a member of the "secret club" to see how old our district's buildings are. Walk through and take a look at the ceiling tiles to see where the roof leaks (after checking in with the office, of course). Ask the principal at Edgewood, where Mr. Riekse's child attends, how often she has to flip circuit breakers because the electrical system is maxed out.

Mr. Riekse referred to the stressed-out economy and the thousands of people out of work in Muskegon County. Reducing the funding for our children's education will not help the economy or help prepare our children for future success. Mr. Riekse questioned how many members of the facilities committee actually live in Fruitport. With the exception of one or two members, we all live in Fruitport, which is why we care about the school district. My wife and I met while attending Fruitport High School, and now my two sons attend Fruitport. I am not an elite white-collar executive; I am self-employed. As far as showing Mr. Riekse where every nickel and dime goes, it is all a matter of public record. Nobody plans to build hot tubs in the teachers' lounge; they are just trying to patch up the existing buildings for a few more years.

In closing, I would like to thank Mr. Riekse for inspiring me to write my first letter to the editor.

Kurt Hazard
3274 George

Bond issue deserves a yes vote

Letter to the Editor:

I would like to take a moment and respond to Mr. Riekse's opinion that was published on January 25, 2010 in the *Muskegon Chronicle*. In such he offers his thoughts on the upcoming Fruitport school bond election.

First, it's important to point out that Mr. Riekse and I agree on the broad issues of school finance. I agree when he "strongly supports giving Fruitport Schools the money it needs to upgrade dated classrooms with the newest technological upgrades and improvement that are available." We also agree we need to "reduce class sizes and hire more qualified teachers." We are very fortunate to have qualified teachers at Fruitport Community Schools and could use more of them to reduce class sizes in order to better address the educational needs of our children.

Unfortunately, our political leaders have given us a school finance system that only meets the short-term needs of the politicians and not our children. They have forbidden Mr. Riekse and me of the ability to provide the necessary operating funds to our school district while they continue to reduce the same. I challenge them to either provide the school district what it needs or reduce our taxes and let us provide it (i.e. "put up or shut up"). I realize those in office may have not created the problem; however, since they claimed to have the answers before the election they now have an obligation to Mr. Riekse's children, my children, and the taxpayers to follow through.

Aside from the broader issues of school finance, Mr. Riekse brings up legitimate concerns that he and the taxpayers of the district deserve accurate and factual answers to. As a member of the facilities committee, I offer everyone the following:

•The facilities committee was not chosen by anyone. All district residents who responded to articles in the *Muskegon Chronicle*, the district's website, or the *Focus* were invited to be part of the facilities committee at their own will. Some members of this committee did not support the last bond proposal, which would have constructed a new high school. The chairperson of the Fruitport Citizens for Kids Committee, which is promoting this proposal, was on a committee that was against the preceding bond proposal. The point is

that all district residents were given the equal opportunity to be part of this facilities committee, which has many new faces, mine included. All participants of the facilities committee are taxpayers or live in the district.

There were some prospective special interests who endeavored to become part of this committee (engineers, architects, and construction managers), but they were asked to leave. They could not be forced to leave, as these meetings were subject to the mandates of the Open Meetings Act. Influence from special interests should have no part in the decision-making process. We are merely a group of concerned citizens doing the best we can for our children with the limited resources available. The facilities committee meets openly at Edgewood School, not on the "grassy knoll."

•Mr. Riekse states, "I want to know where every nickel, dime, and dollar goes." I also want to know where our district officials are spending the money they are given. The district is required to have its financial statements ("the books") audited by independent auditors on an annual basis. The findings of these independent auditors are reported to the State Department of Treasury. These same audited financial statements, along with opinions issued by the independent auditors, are available for anyone to examine at www.fruitportschools.net. These audited financial statements account for every nickel, dime, dollar and penny the district receives and spends.

•It has been suggested the timing for this vote was scheduled so the "snow birds," who typically move south for the winter months, would not be afforded their Constitutional right to vote. All absentee voters will be sent an absentee ballot from the township, wherever they may be, and will have the opportunity to vote from afar; therefore, the district is not trying to deprive anyone of their Constitutional rights. The reason for the timing is, if the proposal passes on February 23, 2010, the district will be eligible for an additional \$2,000,000 from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (a.k.a. "The Stimulus Bill"). If this proposal does not pass on February 23, 2010, the district will have no chance at this additional money. That \$2,000,000 is a significant amount of money that will directly benefit our children, and is a good reason to act now in a decisive manner. Acting any other way would be careless, negligent and irresponsible.

•I agree that we could all use a tax break. I have a son in

college, home mortgage, car payment, and wouldn't mind a break in my taxes, given how much of these taxes go to programs I either don't support or do not benefit our community. This bond proposal does both. Even though this proposal will **not** increase my taxes; if it fails it will only save the average district taxpayer up to \$3.60 per month! This amount is incidental to the previous millage request. Investing \$8.6 million to preserve and upgrade existing district facilities is worth not only reducing my current tax obligation by \$3.60 a month.

District voters rejected the last bond proposal that would have built a new high school. This bond proposal will preserve and upgrade the district's existing facilities and will not increase the amount of taxes you already pay. The district's debt will be retired in the same year, regardless if this proposal passes or not. We have an opportunity to invest \$8.6 million in our existing facilities while not increasing what we currently pay or extending the term of the district's debt! I'm initially inclined to define this proposal as a "no-brainer," but out of deference to the opinions of others, I will not.

Mr. Riekse and I may be on different ends of the political continuum. Political views aside, we share many similarities; we are both military veterans, parents of children in the district, love our country, and "want good, quality classroom facilities with the latest technology to educate our young people for the future." This is not a shot at Mr. Riekse, but an effort to lay bare how two people defined by converse political doctrines can share common ground and common interest. I defy district voters to identify our commonalities and join the Fruitport Citizens for Kids Committee in this "march to Baghdad."

We now have occasion to put our money where our mouth is. The electorate sent the district back to the drawing board after the last proposal. Recognizing the need for upgrading and improving existing facilities did not go away by means of electoral refutation, the school board reconvened a new facilities committee that presented us with a new plan that will invest \$8.6 million to upgrade and preserve existing facilities without increasing our current taxes! What more can we expect? I'm voting "Yes."

Matthew Farrar
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