

Key Information on Nov. 7 Ballot Issue for Big Walnut Local Schools

The November 7 ballot issue for our schools is an important one and we want our residents to be informed. Below are some key points about our situation as we approach the November 7 election:

How are we addressing any overcrowding right now?

As overcrowding occurs, we will do one of the following, depending upon the situation:

- Allow class sizes to increase
- Purchase/renovate trailers to use as classrooms
- Bus students around the district to where there is room

Can't we just make the growth work with doing all of that?

No. The growth is here and only continuing at a steady pace. We need a long-term solution to a long-term issue.

In addition, the above solutions present concerning safety issues and stress our operating budget. In fact, with the growth headed our way, we would need approximately 67 classrooms provided by trailers over the next eight years. That's a cost and safety inefficiency that we cannot afford.

What is on the November 7 ballot for our schools?

A combined bond and permanent improvement levy, two issues combined into one vote. The bond will be for 37 years and will appear on the ballot for 6.6 mills, although we anticipate the millage to decrease after this year's reappraisals. The permanent improvement levy will be continuing for 1.25 mills.

What will the bond issue provide?

A new high school and additional elementary school as well as security upgrades to our existing buildings. The remaining grades would be switched once these buildings open according to the following:



What would the permanent improvement funds provide?

The modest permanent improvement issue will establish important and dedicated funding for the regular upkeep and maintenance of our buildings. We currently do not have a dedicated fund for this and must divert funds from our existing operating budget.

Is this the same ballot issue put forth last November?

No. The new building projects are the same as they both are needed right now. The board scaled back the request on the original bond issue funds to care for existing buildings, and has shifted to a smaller permanent improvement levy request to cover some of the needs of those buildings. It's not that there were unnecessary projects from that original request; the decision has been made to postpone some projects based on community feedback regarding the size of the ballot issue.

How has the district planned for growth?

We have a community-based Facility Planning Committee that has looked closely at enrollment projections, current building spaces, and anticipated needs to create a recommendation for the ballot. We work closely with our two villages and six townships, as well as Delaware County, to get housing numbers that drive the enrollment projections from Future Think, Inc.

How are we funding the overcrowding that we have right now?

Funds are being diverted from our daily operating budget. The daily operating budget is intended for day-to-day operations in our schools and classrooms like teachers, utilities and supplies. Until we have dedicated funds for facilities, this is our only solution. We are using operating funds to purchase and renovate trailer spaces for classrooms.

But doesn't that begin to drain our operating budget?

Yes. Overcrowding and having to divert funds for short-term solutions is the biggest threat to our future fiscal stability.

Big Walnut has seen growth like this before, right?

No. We are growing at twice the rate we did five years ago, and new homes are continuing to be built.

Isn't the growth relegated to just one part of the district?

No. The most critical space needs are at the high school and elementary level, but every building in the district requires attention. In the next two years, every building except the middle school will be over capacity and the district is falling behind.

Does the district have land for a new high school?

No. We do not have the funds to purchase the land. That would come as a result of bond issue passage.

Do you know where a new high school would be?

No. That depends on many market factors, such as sewer lines, pricing and willing sellers. Once we have the funds, we can begin pursuing the land that makes the most sense. Luckily, we have the Facilities Planning Committee to help us with this work, and with assessing land purchases.

Is there a design for a new high school?

No. That requires architectural fees and those are funds we do not have at this time. Once a ballot issue is approved, then we will be in a better position to develop a plan. Any plan that is developed will be with community and staff involvement and it will reflect the needs of Big Walnut, not of any other district. The estimated amount for the HS that drove the ballot issue amount is from early planning that we did with an architectural firm and is based on market costs for the size of building that we need to accommodate our number of students. When we arrive at a budget for the building, we will stay within that budget.

Why can't we just add on to our existing HS?

When our Facility Committee looked at the costs to add on to existing buildings-- including replacing undersized common spaces such as cafeterias, auditoriums, and gyms; building bigger music rooms to accommodate our increasing enrollment; and upgrading mechanical systems to support the larger facilities-- it would actually be more expensive to do multiple additions than it would be to use the plan that is on the ballot.

What happens if the ballot issue passes?

Then we can move forward immediately with security renovations on existing buildings and design of new buildings to protect the quality that we expect in our schools.

What happens if the ballot issue fails?

If it fails, then overcrowding worsens and we only further delay a long-term solution. More trailers and short-term fixes only serve to divert funds from the classroom and drain our operating budget.