

OPEN FORUM

Walled Lake's school bond issue looks like a real bargain

Walled Lake school officials are acting intelligently in letting district residents take the lead in suggesting improvements for the district. District voters overwhelmingly approved a renewal of a building and site sinking fund tax last year. They now recognize that things have changed even since then.

A little more than a month after voters approved the sinking fund, on Dec. 14, 2012, 20-year-old Adam Lanza fatally shot 20 children and six adult staff members in a mass murder at Sandy Hook Elementary School in the village of Sandy Hook in Newtown, Conn. It was the deadliest school mass murder since one in 1927 in Bath, Mich.

The killings galvanized school communities across the nation to review their security situations. Walled Lake district residents decided they needed improvements.

That is the genesis of the 30-year \$67.5 million Safety, Security and Technology Bond. Walled Lake district voters are asked to decide on Nov. 5. The millage necessary to cover the debt payments for the bonds will average .99 mills, with the first year requiring .78 mills.

The first year it would cost a home owner \$78 per year for a \$200,000 home. The average millage over the life of the bonds is expected to be .99, which would mean a cost of \$99 per year for a \$200,000 home, according to school officials. The bonds will pay for:

- Comprehensive video surveillance systems.
- Security entrance and office modifications in all the schools.
- Keyless entry throughout the district.
- Upgraded security alarms, fire alarms and mass notification systems.
- Emergency backup generators, lighting upgrades and responder signage.
- Replacement of the district phone and master clock systems.

The bond issue also includes \$6 million to replace 70 buses over the next four to five years.

"Historically, districts have maintained a 10-year replacement schedule but due to funding difficulties, we have stretched that out to 12 years and beyond in some cases," said Bill Chatfield, director of operations for the district.

"We transport about 12,000 students every day. We have an obligation to make sure we transport them on buses that are in good condition and have the most up to date safety features. Keeping buses until they are no longer serviceable is not a good approach to providing the safest transportation possible," Chatfield said.

The issue also includes \$7.2 million for technology upgrades, with interactive digital video projectors and document cameras for all 630 classrooms in the district's 19 schools.

No one can presume to tell someone else what they can or cannot afford, but the Walled Lake school bond issue looks like a bargain. Voters should seriously consider approving it when they vote Nov. 5.

**Our
Opinion**