

MON COUNTY

BOE still mulling over language for The Renaissance Academy bond call

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It takes a lot of work to get a \$142.6 million school on a ballot for consideration.

Which is why The Renaissance Academy, the proposed stand-alone STEM school that Monongalia County's Board of Education wants to have built by 2027, isn't on its way to the ballot just yet.

At least for the next two weeks.

The academy would be the county's first school devoted solely to science, technology, engineering and math.

Students from Mon's three public high schools would rotate in and out of the facility from its

planned campus overlooking Interstate 79 near Blue Horizon Drive.

Getting it out of the planning stage, though, requires the generosity of county voters in the May 14 primary election.

The above price tag is the amount of bond taxpayers would have to pony up to get it.

Which is why longtime BOE incumbent Nancy Walker worried aloud Tuesday over some of the boilerplate-legalese required by state statute to introduce voters to the bond on their ballot.

The board discussed the bond at length during its first meeting of the new year — and, coincidentally, the first inclement weather day of term, also.

Worries over the possibility of iced-up thoroughfares in the higher elevations prompted district officials to call school earlier that morning.

Later that evening at the board meeting, Walker said she didn't want anything going out to the voters that might make them slip off the road, as it were, on the way to a school that put the district on a new course for generations of students to come.

If a new school is a product, and a bond call is a sales pitch, the board member said she wasn't going to talk up a new school — at the expense of the daily mission of educators in existing buildings.

"I don't want our staffs to feel like we don't appreciate and recognize what they're currently

doing," she said.

With that, the board voted unanimously to table the discussion until its next meeting Jan. 23.

After some wordsmithing over those days, BOE members said they'll be prepared to give a yes vote on the bond call — thus paving its way to the May ballot and the final say from the citizens.

In terms of demographics, voters — on paper, anyway — are in fiscal position to say yes.

There's growth, for one.

While much of the Mountain State is losing population, people are moving to Mon.

In the 20 years from 2004 to 2021, the most recent U.S. census

data, the county's population grew from 82,869 residents to 106,869.

Wallets are a little heftier, also, according to the census: Average per capita income in the county, in 2021, as reported, was \$52,576 — compared to household earnings of \$27,512, from the 17 years' prior.

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