

Hartford Jt. 1 seeks nearly \$5.5M for school expansions

Referendum would fund additions at Rossman, Lincoln elementary schools

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HARTFORD — Voters in the Hartford Joint 1 School District will cast their ballots in the Nov. 6 local elections on a referendum question that asks them to allow the district to borrow Nearly \$5.5 million to add four new classrooms at both district elementary schools — Lincoln and Rossman.

School District Administrator Mark Smits has termed the question on the November ballot a “no frills referendum.”

“We don’t have any extras in this. We’re building classrooms and we’re building classrooms for elementary kids and with elementary kids you build bathroom facilities between the primary rooms,” Smits said. “So in the referendum we would be building classrooms, bathrooms and storage. We’re not asking for anything special.”

“The nice thing about this referendum is that this is not about a sense of urgency. It’s not like I need the building today — which is the worst way to pass referendums — when you need it,” Smits said. “This is looking at building capacity for the future.”

Smits said growth projections for the city of Hartford from various sources predict continued strong growth which means a higher population. During the 1990s and 2000s Hartford experienced a rapid increase in population.

“During that time Hartford has been the fifth fastest growing community with a population over



10,000 in Wisconsin,” Smits said. “I have to look at that data and say ‘how is that going to impact me and the school district.’”

Smits said he and other district officials think that going to build a new school now is too much, so what they’re recommending is to add four classrooms at both elementary schools.

“This is a stop gap measure so we can breathe a little bit before all the things that could happen,” Smits said.

Smits and District Business Manager John Stellmacher said the district for many years has been very conservative. The district has lowering taxes for the last eight years.

“A big piece of this is that (John) has been able to restructure our debt so we can pay off some debt sooner. With the way it’s been structured we do have

the ability to do this without having a tax increase because we are going to retire some debt and retire some debt early,” Smits said. “The good time to do something is when the cost impact will not be there because of how we are restructuring and retiring debt.”

Stellmacher said the district believes they “have some ideas what the community will need in 2020 and 2025, but we’re not positive.”

“We are taking on a much smaller debt and if everything goes right we could have the entire debt retired by 2025,” Stellmacher said. “So if the population goes up by 2025 by 14-18 percent as is expected we will have debt dropping off by then so there is another opportunity to give us the flexibility six or seven years down the road to pay for

further expansion without raising the tax rate. If the city’s growth predictions don’t materialize at that time, then we will have not overbuilt.”

Stellmacher said the district through the November referendum is not asking for more, we’re asking to continue the level of resources we have and use new debt to replace old debt.”

Smits said when determining future district growth and space needs officials need to look at several different numbers that could include how many kids are residents, how many that come here are non-residents, how many should have seats,” Smits said. But, right now we have 2,000 kids that could be considered resident kids. We do have some of the kids open-enrolling out, but the problem with that gets to be is that if they ever come back, which they

Hartford Jt. 1 School District Superintendent Mark Smits talks about the upcoming proposed referendum Wednesday night at a PTO meeting at Rossman Elementary School in Hartford.

John Ehike/Daily News

can, we have to make sure we have room for them. We still need to have capacity for them all the time.”

Stellmacher said the district has been planning the expansion for years.

“When we did the last addition to Rossman school in 2000, there were certain things that were put in the design structure to make it easier to construct an addition. That area of the building was ‘stubbed in’ and prepped to be ready for the addition,” Stellmacher said. “Some of the preparations were done then at a lower cost than it would be now. In addition when we did the heating and ventilation remodeling at Lincoln and Rossman recently we anticipated that at some time we would be adding on so we built-in capacity for the major heating/ventilation system. There won’t be any additional major cost for that.”

Stellmacher said those earlier preparations might be a major reason why the project would be about a \$5.5 million project rather than a \$10 million one. Smits said earlier that if voters give the approval it is hoped ground could be broken next summer.

“My understanding is the rooms could be prepared to be used by Sept. 1, 2019. It would be a summer project. It’s not a lot of work,” Smits said. “But there’s a lot of concerns with interest rates going up and we have concerns about tariffs and what tariffs can do for the metal industry.”