

From the Desk of District Administrator – Terry Reynolds

On Tuesday, January 10, 2017, the Tomahawk School Board adopted a resolution authorizing a vote on the following question to appear on the ballot for the April 4, 2017, election:

“Shall the School District of Tomahawk, Lincoln and Oneida Counties, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by \$3,000,000 per year beginning with the 2017-2018 school year and ending with the 2020-2021 school year, for non-recurring purposes consisting of ongoing educational and facility needs and payment of debt service?”

Q. Why do we need to have an operational referendum?

- Wisconsin Act 16 implemented revenue limits beginning with the 1993-94 school year. The average annual increase in the Tomahawk’s District revenues has been an average of 2 percent. Expenses such as personnel costs, bussing, energy and utilities, and maintenance projects on the other hand have easily outpaced revenue increases (4%), which in turn have forced the district to make reductions in staffing, programs, and maintenance expenditures. Declining student enrollment and an increased in equalized property valuations during the last ten years have compounded the problem, as state aid formulas and revenue limit calculations are based on both of these factors which has resulted in less revenues coming into the district.
- School districts must seek permission from local residents in order to raise additional revenue for the district’s operating budget beyond the revenue limits imposed by state statute.

Q. How will a successful referendum affect my property taxes?

- Approval of the referendum to exceed the revenue limit would add an additional \$3,000,000 in revenues for each of the next four years (2017-18 through 2020-2021). The impact from a successful referendum would have the following average property owner’s financial impact on a home value of \$100,000:

<u>Annual Impact</u>	<u>Monthly Impact</u>
\$140	\$11.67

Q. How do our current mill rates compare with other area public schools ?

- According to the 2015-16 Wisconsin DPI statistics, Tomahawk ranks 13 among the 14 area schools. Area schools and their mill levy rates for 2015-16 were: Wausau – \$11.46, Prentice – \$11.33, Rhinelander - \$10.99, Edgar - \$10.98, DC Everest - \$10.97, Rib Lake - \$10.87, Marathon - \$10.62, Merrill – \$9.67, Phillips – \$9.61, Mosinee – \$9.57, Antigo – \$8.63, Medford - \$8.44, **Tomahawk - \$8.00**, Northland Pines - \$5.97
- With the passage of the referendum, the Tomahawk mill rate would raise **\$1.40**. The Tomahawk rank would move from 13 to 11, according to the above rates.

Q. How would the district use the referendum funds?

- The funds are necessary to maintain current student educational programming and provide students with updated technology as needed.
- The funds would also be used to continue to maintain the PK-12 facility to the same high level that everyone expects and has experienced in the past.

Q. Do other districts face similar financial challenges?

- More than half of Wisconsin's 426 school districts have held similar referenda to exceed the revenue controls. The School Districts of Rhinelander, and Northland Pines just recently passed \$3,500,000-\$5,000,000 per year operational referendums this past fall. Merrill is considering a referendum in 2018.

Q. What will happen if the referendum is defeated?

- The School Board will need to make some very difficult decisions regarding cuts in staffing, student educational programming, and building maintenance for the next four school years. All areas will be on the table for consideration, since we can no longer afford to continue to dip into the District fund balance to cover the costs for the current educational programming and building maintenance expenses.
- It is very likely that there will be future attempts to passing a referendum to avoid further cuts in academic and co-curricular programming.

Q. How can I get informed?

During the month of March, the district will be hosting three community forums to provide residents with an opportunity to gather more information on the referendum. The dates and times are as follows:

Tuesday, March 7, 2017 located in the Tomahawk HS Auditorium beginning at 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 15, 2017 located in the Tomahawk HS Auditorium beginning at 6:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 23, 2017 located in the Tomahawk HS Auditorium beginning at 6:30 p.m.