



Benzie County Central Schools

FAQ's – May 7th Bond Proposal

Why is Benzie Central Schools seeking a bond proposal?

- We have a number of infrastructure concerns, which have been growing over time. Crystal Lake Elementary was built in the 1950's originally. Betsie Valley and the MS/HS were both built in the early 1960's. Even Lake Ann, our "newest" elementary" is over 20 years old and is in need of significant investment in infrastructure to ensure viability over the long term. Our last major investment in our school infrastructure took place over 20 years ago with the building of the auditorium, the Middle School, and construction of Lake Ann Elementary.

What projects are included in the bond proposal?

- The centerpiece project is the construction of a new elementary school on the campus of the current MS/HS building to replace Crystal Lake Elementary. In addition, we seek to do a major remodel and renovation of our High School gymnasium that will include construction of new locker rooms and a community fitness center with indoor walking track. Alongside these major projects, we also plan to construct a new bus garage and have ongoing purchases of new busses over the next decade to upgrade and create a sustainable fleet. Finally, we seek to invest into our other buildings and grounds to replace roofs, upgrade HVAC, mechanical, and electrical systems, repave parking lots, and other upgrades to make our buildings viable, comfortable, and sustainable for the next generations of Benzie Central students.

How much will this proposal raise and what will it cost the taxpayers in Benzie Central Schools?

- We are asking for a modest increase of only 0.5 mill from our current tax rates from taxpayers. For a homeowner with a house worth \$100,000, this proposal would add approximately 24 dollars *per year* to their tax bill, or an effective increase of just over \$2 per month. This modest increase will generate 47,850,000 dollars.

What is our current millage rate and how does it compare to other school districts?

- Benzie Central currently levies 1.6 mills for capital projects and another 0.9 mill for a sinking fund for infrastructure improvements for 2.5 total mills. When compared to the 20 nearest surrounding districts, Benzie Central ranks 12th. Should the voters approve the 0.5 mill increase, our revised ranking would be 10th. Statewide, the average millage rate for school districts is approximately 5.4 mills, making our 3.0 mill proposal **over 40% lower than the statewide average.**



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What about the sinking fund that passed in 2017?

- The district is asking taxpayers to essentially roll the sinking fund millage into this new bond proposal. When calling for the election, the Board of Education committed by resolution in the same meeting not to levy the sinking fund millage in the future if the bond passes. All projects planned to be addressed by the sinking fund will be addressed through the bond proposal.

How did the district arrive at this proposal?

- This final proposal was the result of a great deal of community work and input over the last 2+ years. An ongoing community committee originally formed to examine infrastructure concerns in 2016 has been working on this proposal alongside our Board of Education and school staff to determine the best means of addressing our needs. This proposal is the culmination of that work and represents our best efforts to address significant needs in the district while simultaneously being careful stewards of taxpayer dollars and minimizing burden on the community.

What can bond proposal dollars be used for?

- Bond dollars can by law only be used by schools for capital improvements and cannot be used for any salaries or regular materials or maintenance.

Why not just renovate Platte River or Crystal Lake instead of building a brand new school?

- This is a good question and there are a number of reasons. Remember that a large committee, made up of stakeholders from around our region grappled with these issues before presenting the recommendation to our Board of Ed. What we collectively recognized was that both of these older buildings had major long term issues and would require millions of dollars to renovate. While the renovation costs initially may be lower than new construction, over the long term, the building(s) would continue to need far more ongoing maintenance and be far less efficient than a new building. While these practical reasons are important, we also strongly considered the educational needs of our kids. As anyone can imagine, education (like most things) looked FAR different in the 1950's when these buildings were designed and opened than it does today. A new building will have design considerations to incorporate our growing understanding of how children learn.

It seems like we're always being asked to pay more... Why does the district need this?

- I don't know many people who genuinely enjoy paying taxes. That is why we at Benzie Central believe very strongly in being good stewards of the dollars afforded to us. We want to ensure we are not being extravagant with our spending while still affording our children the world class education they need to be successful in the future. Folks need to know that, overall, Benzie Central is currently levying 2.5 mills for capital projects and expenditures. We are asking residents to commit to 0.5 mill additional, for a grand total of 3.0 mills over the next 30

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years. Statewide - the average millage amount people pay for capital projects in their school district annually is approximately 5.4 mills. **Even with this proposed increase, Benzie Central residents will pay over 40% less than the average Michigan homeowner** for the district's capital needs. Around our region, Benzie is right in the "middle of the pack" related to millage rates and will continue to be there with this modest proposal.

Why should someone who doesn't have kids in the schools care about or support this proposal?

- While I certainly hope that people do care about what happens to the children in their community, there are reasons well beyond this simply being "good for the kids". The relative strength of a community and the economic well-being of a region is intrinsically tied to the quality of the school system there. While schools certainly cannot alone dictate the future of the region, make no mistake, our success and that of our community are bound together. Quality schools attract young families which in turn attract business investment and promote economic growth. Quality schools also are inherently tied to property values as any realtor will surely confirm as well. The community stakeholders involved in this process as well as our Board of Education have set forth in this project with the mindset of "Strong Schools = Strong Communities". This is a primary driving force behind the commitment to the project.

What about our retirees and second-home owners? What benefit will they see from this project?

- As noted above, residents of Benzie County are all in this together and all benefit from the betterment of our community. Whether a resident is part-time or full-time, retired or working, young or old, generational family or recent transplant, we all hold some common value and affection for this region and recognize what a privilege it is to call this amazing area home. Ensuring that the next generations of young people in the county have a quality education is an investment into the future of our county, as we need educated and motivated young people to continue to help invest in the region to keep it thriving. We want ALL Benzie Central residents to be active with our school district.

What is happening with old Benzonia High School?

- Many don't realize that Benzie Central Schools does not own the old Benzonia High School located at Severance Street and US 31 next to our bus garage. It has been in private ownership for decades and has clearly fallen into a state of disrepair. This is one of the many reasons why we are staunchly committed to being good neighbors and community members and finding alternate uses for our Crystal Lake and Platte River facilities that are good for our community.

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Why are we building the new elementary at the high school? Is the site even big enough?

- Our high school / middle school building is actually located on a 150-acre parcel of property that is quite large with lots of possibilities. There are a number of benefits to locating both the new elementary school and the bus garage on the property, including some efficiencies with transportation that will help free up needed resources currently used for extra transportation shuttling students back and forth.

How do we know the school will build a quality building and do the job right?

- The school district is contracting with Kingscott Architecture for our design work and Wolgast Construction for Construction Management. Both agencies are Michigan-based companies, but operate on a large scale statewide and have vast experience in working with new school construction and remodeling. Their reputations are excellent and they have a long history of doing quality work and bringing in projects on time and on / under budget.

Will we work to keep work in the county and have local sub-contractors do work when possible?

- Absolutely. Our board has expressed that this is important to them and our Construction Management Company works to ensure local contractors have ample opportunities and assistance where necessary to engage in the bid process.