



## **Benzie County Central Schools**

### **FAQ's – November 5th 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.

#### **Why are we voting on this again? What has changed from the May Proposal?**

- The bond proposal voted on May 5<sup>th</sup> was narrowly defeated by just over 100 votes out of over 2500 votes cast. The needs of the district have not gone away, and it was quickly established that we needed to go back to voters with a revised proposal following examination of voter feedback. The proposal has been altered to include a shorter term (26 years as opposed to 30 years on the previous proposal) and to include preschool classrooms at Lake Ann Elementary School. These changes were both direct responses to concerns voiced by voters during and following the last campaign.

#### **Why didn't we "scale down" the proposal?**

- The bond proposal is specifically designed to address needs at ALL buildings to ensure sustainability for the life of the bond. Reducing costs would require a reduction in scope of projects, which could result in the district needing to go back to voters for more money in the midst of paying back these bonds. We are committed to making this a responsible, generational solution.

#### **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. We are adding two additional classrooms to Lake Ann Elementary specifically to serve our growing early childhood programs. 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

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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 net increase of **less than ½ of a 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 \$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 12<sup>th</sup>. Should the voters approve the 0.5 mill increase, our revised ranking would be 10<sup>th</sup>. Statewide, the average millage rate for school districts is approximately 5.4 mills, making our 2.98 mill proposal **over 40% lower than the statewide average**.

### 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?

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- Both of these older buildings had major long term issues and maintenance needs 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 less than a half mill additional, for a grand total of 2.98 mills over the next 26 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. 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

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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.

### **Doesn't the State of MI provide money for capital projects? Why are we paying extra?**

- The state of Michigan is one of few states that does NOT provide specific dollar allocations for capital projects and site improvements. It is left to the local district to provide ongoing construction, remodeling, and other major upkeep through locally voted millages. State monies are set aside for operational expenses and there simply aren't enough resources to set aside the amount of monies that would be necessary for such major projects.