LPS has two important ballot proposals on August 6

The Livonia Public Schools Board of Education voted unanimously, on March 25, to place two funding proposals on the August 6 ballot.

The first is a renewal of the Non-Homestead Operating Millage, which is an 18-mill levy on all non-homestead properties (businesses, second homes, properties that are not a primary residence). This millage does not affect owners of primary residences.

By law, public school districts are required to request this non-homestead millage in order to receive funding from the State of Michigan. This millage is a primary source of revenue for the operations of the school district and generates approximately $24 million per year. If this millage is not levied, the state would not replace the funding and the district would lose $24 million, forcing reductions in offerings and program cuts.

The Non-Homestead Operating Millage is not a new tax. The levy was first approved by voters in 1994, upon enactment of Proposal A, and was last approved in August 2014. The district's current levy is set to expire at the end of year in 2020.

The second proposal is the Sinking Fund replacement.

The Sinking Fund is levied on all properties and has been in place since 1995. This fund is used to support the district's long-term facility plan and covers expenses related to the maintenance and renovation of the district's school buildings, facilities, parking lots, playgrounds, plumbing and water main repairs and much more.

The district maintains 700 acres of property and nearly 3 million square feet of facilities. The 2013 bond issue covered the most critical needs and the Sinking Fund helps pay for additional facility maintenance identified in the district's long-term facilities plan.

The district has established a detailed 10-Year facility plan for every school and building and that plan is reviewed and updated regularly. Over the next 10 years, approximately $210 million in improvements are needed, but the district narrowed down the most critical needs to three main areas: roofs, boilers and parking lots. The three areas reflect $67 million in needs, over 10 years. The Sinking Fund would help cover these expenditures to upgrade the three areas of concern, as well as other needs that exist throughout our district.

The current Sinking Fund levy is 1.1142 mills and generates approximately $5 million per year.

A change in state law now allows districts to use Sinking Fund dollars for security improvements and instructional technology. Sinking Funds cannot be used for salaries, textbooks, operations costs (except facilities) or school buses.

The 2013 bond enabled the district to make a $28 million investment in technology – both districtwide technology infrastructure and equipment and classroom technology. The Sinking Fund could help support the district's technology replacement program, which is estimated to be $19 million on a 7-10 year replacement cycle.

The bond also provided significant security enhancements throughout the district, including the addition of secured buzzer-entry vestibules, additional cameras, improved phone systems, cameras on most buses and more. Sinking Funds may now be used to protect these investments.

With the allowable uses for the Sinking Fund expanded by the state, the district proposes to increase the request from 1.1142 mills to 1.6 mills to accommodate the addition of technology and security.

A 1.6 mill levy would generate approximately $7 million per year and would cost the average homeowner $160 per year, an increase of approximately $50 per year, or about $4 per month. The request is for a 10-year period, which would allow for long-term planning for Sinking Fund projects.

Financial stewardship

The district has been cited, consistently, for being exceptional stewards of tax dollars, earning the highest rating by external auditors of district budgets and of the bond funds, year after year. Most recently, the district received accolades from AdvancEd, an external accreditation agency, for its strong fiscal management and has recently been upgraded by Moody's Investments.

Voters have approved the Sinking Fund at each request since 1995 with the most recent approval occurring in 2014 by a 3-1 margin.