

Persistence Could Pay Off For School District Vote



By Michael Stein

The 2017 edition of Streetlight heralded the news that the Barnesville School Board would bring its plan for renovation and additions to the voters in the 2017 election.

That didn't happen.

The 2018 edition of Streetlight trumpeted hope that another referendum would be carved out and passed by district voters.

That didn't happen either.

It was a much closer race than the 2016 Barnesville School District bond referendum, but the final came out in favor of those opposed to the \$26 million school improvement

proposal that went before the voters on Tuesday, November 6.

When the dust settled, the rural district voters tipped the balance in the final outcome: 1,037, or 46.82 percent, said yes to school improvements; 1,178, or 53.18 percent, said no. There were 33 ballots in which the voter either chose not to vote on the question or missed seeing it on the ballot.

City-wide, the yes votes were a substantial majority in all three wards. In the rest of District 146, the majority said no in all townships reporting votes.

Factors that possibly affected

voting results included early voting before accurate information was disseminated, and ballots that were mailed to rural precincts that may have been overlooked by the recipients.

The November 2018 vote on a \$26 million bond referendum showed a pretty clear dichotomy between city and rural voters. A divided board on the referendum didn't help matters any.

So, here it is, 2019 and school board members have picked up where they left off, shaken off the voter rejection and are forging ahead with the goal of presenting a bond question to voters again in August.

Several work sessions have been held so far in 2019. Each has attracted large audiences of district voters interested in learning more and voicing their opinions.

Reaching a consensus on a bond amount to present to voters has been an even greater challenge this year because of construction cost increases over the past several months.

Board members are also faced with the cold fact that they cannot expect to pass a referendum without being unified on a plan and a dollar amount.

At this point in 2019, it does appear there are components to a

building plan that should remain intact: new classrooms at Atkinson Elementary, upgraded special education space, addition of a middle block between the schools that would include a performance auditorium and gym, and upgraded commons areas.

Other topics of discussion have included expanded space for shop and ag classes and an elevated track in the proposed new gym.

The Barnesville School District will also open the 2019-2020 year with a new superintendent in place.

Scott Loeslie, who has served as superintendent since July 1, 2008,

announced his intention to step down and retire effective June 30, 2019.

"After a considerable investment of time and self-reflection," Loeslie said, "I have arrived at a difficult but reasonable professional decision. That decision is to submit my letter of resignation/retirement as superintendent of schools in Barnesville effective June 30, 2019. I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation for the opportunity to serve ISD 146 since July 1, 2008."

Board members dived into the search process, contracting with the Minnesota School Boards Association to assist with the process.

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