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Residents say a loud 'no' to bond



The LVCS Board of Education.

COURTESY OF LVCS

By Laura Lane

An overwhelming majority of residents of the Locust Valley School District voted “no” on Dec. 20 on a \$30 million dollar bond being floated by the district. The final count was 821 against and 484 for the bond.

The board and Superintendent Dr. Anna Hunderfund had said the timing of the bond, which would include funding for infrastructure improvements and the addition of artificial-turf playing fields, was optimal. “We have the highest credit rating, and because of this the prediction is our interest rate will be close to 2 percent,” Hunderfund said prior to the vote. “For the past years we have not had to borrow.”

Additionally, the district encouraged residents to vote in favor of the bond because interest rates are at historically low levels and another bond, for \$26 million, was due to be paid off in 2019-20.

Board President Erika Bruno said she was surprised by the defeat. “Most people I saw were for the bond,” she said. “We went to several meetings in the community, and everyone gave us a positive response.”

John Taylor, a Village of Bayville trustee and a parent of three grown children who attended Locust Valley schools, voted against the bond.

“I thought it was rushed, and needed further study on what to do with the money,” he said. “I was torn, because the feds are raising the rates and bonds will be more expensive, but I wasn’t sure the expenditures were warranted.”

Taylor said he could understand why the school district tried to pass the bond. In the village there have been unforeseen events that led to unexpected, and expensive, repairs. So he could commiserate with the district.

“But I think all of what they wanted should have come out of the annual budget,” Taylor added.

One of the propositions, for two turf fields for girls’ and boys’ sports for \$3,484,800, caused ire among some residents before the vote. Sarah Henris, of Bayville, was worried that the turf might be unsafe for children. “From what I’ve been able to read and in speaking to Grassroots Environmental Education, a non-profit group, the fill is made of a rubber compound, and when it breaks down, it releases these carcinogen[ic] compounds,” Henris said. Some residents may have agreed with her caution — 877 voted against it, with 418 voting for the turf fields.

Hunderfund said the district was just trying to benefit the students. She said she knew that some parents didn’t vote for the turf fields because their children were not involved in athletics.

“We are a comprehensive high school, addressing needs of all of the children depending on their interests and talents,” Hunderfund said. “For some it might be easier to say the turf is not an area of interest for their child, but if it’s for others, our philosophy has been to address the talents and interests of all of our students.”

Prior to the vote, Hunderfund also said that the district has always been concerned about chemicals, and that it does not use pesticides.

Trustee Keri Carlstrom said she was disappointed. “It was all for the students and staff, what we wanted,” she said. “They will be the ones who will lose out.”

Doug Johnson, a district trustee, was disappointed but also surprised that the bond was defeated. “I initially thought that if anything, the first would go through and the second proposition [for the turf fields] would not,” he said. “I’m surprised that they both went down by a large margin. I don’t think people understood it.”

Some projects will still need to be addressed under the current budget, but Johnson said there is not much leeway. Reprioritizing will have to be done.

“What crushes every district is the tax cap,” Johnson explained. “We don’t want to pierce it. We are kind of handcuffed with what we can do. With the bond, we could have gotten everything done.”

But will the district try again? To do so before the other bond is paid off would be nearly impossible, since there are procedures that need to be followed, which takes time.

“I think they need to go back to the drawing board,” Taylor said. “Maybe if they study it more, they won’t need to borrow as much. They have a much bigger budget to deal with than we do in the village.”

Bruno said the board did everything it could do in its presentation of the bond with more than 15 public meetings.

“We have lost the tax offset, interest rates are going up, and there’s a possibility this will affect the district’s credit rating,” Bruno said. “We have in our district over 80 percent participation in scholastic sports, and more than half in the arts. Isn’t that great [that we can help] to keep the kids off the street?”