

Walled Lake school board revisits bond issue

BY TIM SMITH

STAFF WRITER

With nearly 3,400 signatures in support of another bond issue in the bank, the Walled Lake Board of Education took the first step for what could possibly be the second special election of 1994-95.

After representatives of Citizens for Walled Lake Schools — which includes a portion of Farmington Hills — addressed the board on how the petition drive is gaining momentum, a motion to send application paperwork to the state treasury department was unanimously approved Dec. 1.

The action doesn't commit the district to another bond issue, but all indications are that one will take place — sometime between January and June, when the current school year concludes.

In order for a bond issue to be held during that period, it must

officially be called as of Dec. 22, said Superintendent James Geisler.

Board members also decided that, if there is to be another election, voters would decide two big money questions:

■ Included in the \$90.5 million first question would be construction of one new elementary school, two new middle schools, and the addition of high school classes and districtwide technology.

■ The \$25.5 million second part would go towards renovating old schools and various physical education facilities at Central and Western high schools.

Handy Bloom, chairwoman of Citizens for Walled Lake Schools, said the petition drive kicked into full gear when a "groundswell of concern" followed the Sept. 27 defeat of "Project 21."

The \$116 million proposal was intended to take the district into the 21st century — addressing a growing need for additional classroom space and pumping state-of-the-art technology into all buildings.

"Since the defeat of the bond issue, there's been a widespread, tremendous outcry about the failure of citizens to live up to their responsibility to support the growth of our educational system, to provide the space and technology our students need," Bloom told the board and a large audience at the district's Educational Services Center.

The membership roster was developed "for people to concretely demonstrate their own personal support (for a bond issue) signature by signature. . . They know what they were signing, and what the issues are," she added.

Leading attendance areas in collected signatures was Maple Elementary School, with 594, followed by Pleasant Lake and Twin Beach elementary schools, with 380 and 277 respectively.

Although Bloom estimated that 85-90 percent of those who were approached signed the petitions, one resident in the audience said the committee shouldn't assume that signatures would automatically turn into yes votes at the polls.

The petition merely asked signers to support a future bond issue and didn't "speak to specifics," said Cathy Phillips. "I think if the committee feels the signatures are 100 percent that (those) citizens would support any bond that's out there, I don't think that's really," said Phillips.

Meanwhile, Bloom said the committee believes "this matter should be brought back to the

voters. And quickly, this winter. We believe we have 4,200 yes votes."

Based on the September results, more support will be needed to pass another bond issue. With only about a 17 percent voter turnout, the proposal was defeated 4,748-4,208.

Bloom said she is confident signatures will grow to nearly 4,500 by mid-December, when a final decision about an election must be made.

Those who have already signed will try to obtain additional signatures and the campaign will include school functions, such as a pancake supper at Dublin Elementary School Dec. 1.

Superintendent James Geisler, who said the only alternative to another '94-95 election is "letting the pain build" enough for people

to find out growing enrollment and shrinking facilities isn't in their children's best educational interest, applauded the citizens' efforts. A stack of signed petitions were piled in front of Geisler at the board meeting.

"What we have . . . with the citizens campaign going on, is an opportunity for the board to get some guidance," Geisler said. "This is a unique opportunity."

Further guidance will be provided by pollster Ned Hubbell of Michigan State University. Results of his survey about what residents did or didn't like about the last proposal could be presented in the next couple weeks.

Hubbell was hired to do a similar poll following defeat of the district's October 1993 bond issue, a \$135 million proposal also dubbed "Project 21."

SMART bus system ails; area citizens group wails

BY RALPH R. ECHTINAW

STAFF WRITER

Members of a group called Supporters of Regional Transportation are angry because the SMART bus system is hurting.

In a press release, SORT noted that SMART interim general manager Michael Duggan said last August that main bus service would be discontinued after Dec. 31 if more money isn't given to SMART.

"There should be a hue and cry if this is happening because so many people depend on the bus," said SORT member Maggie Tyson. "This would disrupt everything. You'd be surprised at the number of Birmingham, Bloomfield women I've met who don't drive."

Duggan said Monday that he expects SMART to have enough money to continue full operations into 1995.

In the current fiscal year, SMART's revenues are expected to be \$51 million, reports market-

ing director June West. Of that amount, 10.5 percent is a federal subsidy, 60.3 percent is a state subsidy and 29.2 percent comes from fares.

Currently, Duggan said he is negotiating with state Department of Transportation officials to increase SMART funding.

"I have every reason to believe that it's going to work out," he said. But Duggan didn't get specific. "It's all very fluid right now," he said.

Mary Ojala, the director of SORT, is of the opinion that SMART's financial woes stem from a profound penuriousness on the part of those who control the disbursement of public funds and a belief that everyone owns a car. "All they are lacking is dollars that people are too selfish, greedy and stingy to fork over," Ojala said. "I'm in favor of anything that gives (SMART) the money they need to operate."

Oakland County Executive Brooks Patterson says SMART

will get \$4.5 million in new revenue next year if Gov. John Engler and the state Legislature raise the gas tax from 15 cents a gallon to 20 cents a gallon.

Duggan, who ultimately favors a merger of SMART with the Detroit bus system, said last summer that \$60 million in new revenue would be required for such an endeavor.

Patterson said he doesn't believe tri-county area inhabitants will support a subsidy of that size for a bus system.

"I buy into that (need for public transportation). I don't buy that it takes \$60 million to achieve it. If we learned anything (Nov. 8), it's make do with what you've got. Lansing and Oakland County don't ask for more."

However, Patterson said he will support any gas tax increase that Engler wants, and he also supports Oakland Community College's request for an additional mill to its tax levy.

Ann Arbor toy store signs on to Internet with catalog

White Rabbit Toys of Ann Arbor has opened the Internet's first online, full-service toy store.

To reach White Rabbit Toys, one needs to use a World Wide Web browser such as Mosaic.

Once the program is running, one should type in the store's URL (Universal Resource Locator), which is: <http://www.toystore.com/wrt>.

Then one may start shopping. The site looks and works like a standard paper catalog.

One can read descriptions, view pictures and select products in any order.


Viewers can also move back and forth between pages as often as they like, all at the click of a mouse.

To order, just click on a box next to the desired item, type in

payment information and address, choose gift wrap, then hit the "Submit Order" button.


An e-mail confirmation is generated within eight hours of order receipt and products are shipped within 48 hours.

For additional data, call Jo Ann Lillienfeld of White Rabbit at (313) 663-1555, or e-mail her at joanntoystore.com.




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