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Group pushes for new school

Levy committee out in force to convince residents to vote yes in November

By *LESLIE BIXLER*
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FREMONT -- Members of the Fremont City Schools Levy Steering Committee are saying now is chance to have a new middle school.

In order to create awareness of the importance of a new middle school, members of the steering committee along many volunteers will be out in the community until Nov. 4 talking to people about the levy.

The committees will attend PTO meetings, which will be held at the middle school during the month of October.

"It's just building awareness," said Fremont Superintendent Traci McCaudy.

Certain subcommittees will also be attending township meetings and athletic events as well as different organization events.

"We're asking them to vote yes when we get out there and meet with people," said Hal Hawk, a member of the steering committee and president and chief executive officer of Crown Battery.

The steering committee meets every week and discusses ways to pass the levy in November.

Fanning Howey Associates, of Celina, the design firm for the middle school, is also assisting with the campaign. In November, voters will see a 2.1 mill bond issue and a 1.35 mill permanent improvement levy on the ballot.

The district is renewing, yet reducing the current permanent improvement levy which was passed in March 2004 from 2 mills to 1.35 mills. The permanent improvement levy money will continue to be used for technology upgrades and repairs for the district's current buildings. However, by adding the bond issue, there will be a net increase of 1.45 mills. The bond will be paid with a 5 percent interest rate per year over the next 28 years.

The bond issue and permanent improvement levy come from the need to construct a new middle school with the State of Ohio Exceptional Needs Program. The project is estimated to cost \$27.5 million. The ENP award, valued at \$8.8 million, is earmarked to replace the existing middle school which was built in 1891. The city's middle school was ranked first on a list of buildings most in need. At a June school board meeting, McCaudy said the district has one year to raise local funds, which is estimated to be about \$18.7 million. The state will pay 32 percent of the total cost and the community must contribute 68 percent.

The middle school's chimney is disintegrating and classrooms do not have proper electricity for technology upgrades and science laboratories. Although permanent improvement monies have been spent on repairs, carpet and paint, major problems still exist.

Hawk said many people ask about renovating instead of building, but there is no money for

renovation with the ENP.

"The benefits for a new building are endless," McCaudy said. "If I see a grant and it's a need for our district, I'm going to write and apply for it."

Fremont is one of the only districts in the area that hasn't gone through changes with the OSFC.

Hawk said if this levy is not passed in November, it could be several years before they have another chance for funding and it would be less than the \$8.8 million.

The new middle school would be constructed next to Ross High School, and the middle school would house grades six through eight.

The current school building, located on Croghan Street, can be sold by the district or used, but if it's not sold or used, the district must demolish the building as mandated by the OSFC.

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