

► **TO THE POINT** Monroe News 5-9-14

Bedford Public Schools now has time to review and rethink its bond proposal.

Bedford's 'vision' requires revision

On Tuesday, voters in Bedford Township overwhelmingly rejected a bond proposal that would have changed the look of the district's buildings.

The \$70.35 million bond failed by more than 2,000 votes.

Before administrators and the school board place a similar proposal on an upcoming ballot, they should consider a few areas.

First, voters want to be able to see details of how their money will be used. Lists of projects are helpful, but when new construction is involved, architectural renderings are a must. The board of education hosted building tours to show voters what the buildings look like now but did not provide models or images of the new buildings and building improvements.

The timing of the proposal is another matter for further consideration. Bedford has been struggling with budgeting for years and had been nearly \$1.5 million in debt fairly recently.

The district filed a deficit-elimination plan with the Michigan Department of Education to show ways to come out of debt.

Two elementary schools — Smith Road and Temperance Road — were shuttered due to declining enrollment and the budget strain.

In the last 10 years, programs have been cut and teachers have been laid off. Community members and many associated with the schools have been hurt by past decisions, including closing two schools.

Placing the bond on the May ballot seemed rushed.

The amount of the request also concerned many voters, along with the length of the proposal. Asking taxpayers for \$70.35 million over 30 years seems overwhelming, particularly when Monroe

Road Elementary School was built less than 14 years ago and was on the list to be upgraded. Voters want to trust that a "reinvention" of district buildings will last more than two decades.

In 2011, Airport Community Schools passed an \$11.5 million bond for repairs and upgrades. The district has been able to do many upgrades to facilities for the money.

Voters in Jefferson Schools on Tuesday approved the district's first-ever sinking fund, which will generate more than \$865,000 in the first year. The plan is for nine years, and administrators have a list of projects to accomplish but have prioritized and put security concerns first.

Bedford appeared to lump everything together, asking for significant improvements all at once, some of which are cosmetic in nature rather than immediately needed.

The district has a sinking fund to care for buildings, and some voters questioned whether upgrades to the buildings should have taken place — a good question that deserved more detail than just saying the need is attributed to age.

Investing in education and the future of children is certainly a worthy plan. Bedford's board and core group of supporters also are passionate about the reinvention and what first-rate facilities could mean for the district's future.

Indeed, upgrades and improvements to Bedford's facilities are needed.

As the dust settles after this election, district officials can take time to prioritize immediate needs versus long-term wants before returning to the voters with another request. The plan has lots of room for adjustments and re-envisioning tomorrow.