

Numbers don't support the need for Bedford Schools' 'reinvention plan'

The Bedford Public Schools Board of Education has notified the voters of Bedford Township it is holding a special election for a \$70 million-plus bond issue to support a school "reinvention plan." The proposed millage for the first year is 4.37 mills, which will be adjusted up or down in future years based on change, if any, in the taxable value of Bedford Township real estate.

The board has stated that of the proposed millage, only about one-half is "new millage money" due to the expiration of current school-related millages. It further argues that a resident would see an approximate \$20 a month increase for each household on the property taxes, on average, currently paid.

I argue the millage request is all "new money," particularly since this millage request is a 30-year obligation.

Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) data, as well as U.S. Census data, clearly demonstrated that in Bedford Township between 2000 and 2010, the population of school-age groups, (i.e., younger than 5 and between 5 and 20 years of age), decreased by nearly 500 individuals, yet a new grade school was constructed in that period. Simple examination of this data, as well as a cross-section of the new household starts during the housing boom, shows why the board recently had to close two grade schools in Bedford. The "build it and they will come" mantra did not happen.

SEMCOG has projected the population growth of the township from today to 2040 will be about 20 percent — 30,000 to 36,000. The group projected to grow the largest is the 65-plus age group (from 4,400 to 9,900 individuals), more than dou-

bling. This age group will comprise most of the anticipated growth. The population of school-age groups will remain essentially the same, or slightly decreasing, from 2010 to 2040. Yet there are remodeling and new construction plans for this age group.

The millage request of 4.37 mills will deliver up to \$4.3 million in the initial year. On the unofficial ballot, the board consultant has estimated the "simple average annual millage anticipated to be required to retire the bond debt is 3.9 mills." Looking at all the data, this project could cost north of \$100 million, including anticipated interest, to support a \$70 million bond issue.

Our children are entitled to the best learning environment we can afford, but is this the best affordable plan?

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