



Borough of Freehold Public Schools

280 Park Avenue
Freehold, New Jersey 07728
(732) 761-2100 - FAX (732) 462-8954

Annette Jordan
Board President

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Superintendent

November 19, 2014

Press Release

School Construction Referendum Ready for 2nd Consideration by Voters

Freehold: The Freehold Borough Public Schools will hold a public information session on the school construction referendum on Thursday, December 4, 2014, at the Park Ave Complex Cafeteria, starting at 7pm. Details of the proposed project will be reviewed and feedback from community members will be heard. A vote on the referendum is scheduled for December 9, 2014 from 2pm – 9pm.

The facts supporting the need for the project are telling. By state standards, Freehold Borough has enough space for 1,148 students. However, the district currently has 1,629 students in district and another 15 students place out of district. The excess 481 students have either been diverted to rented classroom space in one of six rented classrooms in Freehold Township, or have taken over non classroom space in the district (e.g. libraries, tech labs, etc.), or have been distributed into regular classrooms. Over 25% of the district elementary classrooms have more than twenty-five students.

The nature and scope of the December 9th referendum vote is identical to the September 30th referendum vote, which was defeated by voters 273 to 374. The construction plan would increase student capacity from 1,148 to 1,581. While the plan is short of current and future needs, it represents the best compromise between prudence and need. The board has put forward the measure for a second vote because adequate instructional space is a critical need in the district.

In discussion with voters who voted 'no' the September 30th referendum, attention focused on three main reasons. Prime was concern that property taxes were already too high. There were also concerns whether all that was proposed in the project was actually needed. Lastly there were concerns that the overcrowding in the schools was caused by overcrowding in Boro residences. In this second referendum attempt, the Board of Education has endeavored to address these concerns, including the holding of the December 4th public information session.

Discussions with voters who voted for the September 30th referendum focused on three topics. Many were parents and want their children to have the same academic and extracurricular activity opportunities as enjoyed by the surrounding K-8 districts that feed into the Freehold Regional High School District. Other were focused on the value of their homes, knowing that the condition and quality of the school system is a key factor on the real estate market. Others saw the issue of the schools different than other Borough issues and were unwilling to leave the severe overcrowding in place.

The current proposal features a mix of renovations and additions that would address the most critical needs. The proposal before the voters is to approve the issuance of bonds for \$32,902,400. Action now is critical to address the high number of students, but it also makes



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sound business sense as the 30 year bonds would be able to take advantage of historically low interest rates and low construction costs. The entire project is eligible for 38% reimbursement under debt service aid from the state. With 38% covered by the state, it is estimated that an average home appraised at \$255,600 would pay \$278/per annum, or \$109 per \$100,000 of assessed value.

The district has methodically planned and addressed all of the required steps to place a referendum before the public. In the summer of 2013 the district commissioned a demographic study through Whitehall Associates, Inc. to establish the projected student enrollment five years out. The district is already ahead of the projections from that enrollment study. The board then hired an architectural firm, Fraytak, Veisz, Hopkins, Duthie, PC, to prepare three options to address the amount of projected students. Following extensive discussion and public hearings, the board of education approved the project at the current level and submitted plans to the New Jersey Department of Education for approval and establishment of how much of the project would be eligible for debt service aid. Once approval was received, the board of education authorized the referendum for the first available date, September 30th.

For voters who are parents and have children in the schools, approval of the referendum would stave off extremely negative degradations to the educational program. Continued enrollment growth with no expansion of classroom space would force the district to first cut back on its early childhood programs (e.g. revert to half day Kindergarten), and then, if necessary, move to split education sessions for the lower grades. Split education sessions mean that half the students would attend school in the morning and the other half in the afternoon. The amount of daily instruction would be reduced, the operating costs of expanded teaching time would increase, and parents would have major child care headaches to plan for the supervision of their students when not in school. Nobody in the school district wants to do this, but it becomes the only solution if enrollment exceeds classroom capacity.

Such a severe degradation to the educational program would have immediate impact on all homeowners in Freehold Borough, whether they have children in the school or not. Severely overcrowded schools would be a major real estate consideration for potential home buyers, especially those with school-aged children. The resulting loss of value for property owners might quickly exceed any negative effects of paying \$278 more per year in taxes.

New Jersey law specifies that public schools are funded by a combination of state aid and local property taxes. All resident students are eligible to attend school regardless of immigration status. Only the local voters can approve a construction referendum. However, if a referendum is twice defeated, and the district still does not have enough space to carry out a NJ constitutionally-guaranteed thorough and efficient education, then the school district has the option to petition the Commissioner of Education and file court action to override the voters. Such a process is long, expensive and disagreeable. But if the courts take control, then the needed construction would be turned over to the NJ Schools Development Authority and the resulting costs could well exceed the amount before the voters in this referendum.



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The amount of students in the district is an established fact and the responsibility to address their educational needs rests with the Freehold board of education as elected by Freehold Borough residents. The state can provide debt service aid to reduce the costs to taxpayers, but the voters must first approve the referendum to access that aid. The Freehold Borough board of education has placed this measure again before the voters as the consequences of inaction are severe, both to the educational quality of the students, and to the negative impact on the real estate values in the community. Approval of the referendum now will address the needs of the students and avoid an uncertain and problematic financial situation in the future.

All residents who are registered voters are eligible to vote in the referendum. Voters can vote by mail by completing a mail ballot request up until 7 days prior to the referendum, or by applying in person at the county clerk up until 3:00pm on the day of the referendum. Freehold Borough has seven voting districts divided into five polling locations, as listed:

Location

The Brookside (Theatre Room), 93 Manalapan Ave.
Freehold Borough Fire House (Recreation Room), 49 West Main St.
Monmouth County Clerk's Office, 1 Market Yard
Hall of Records Annex, 1 East Main St.
Freehold Learning Center, 30 Dutch Lane Rd.

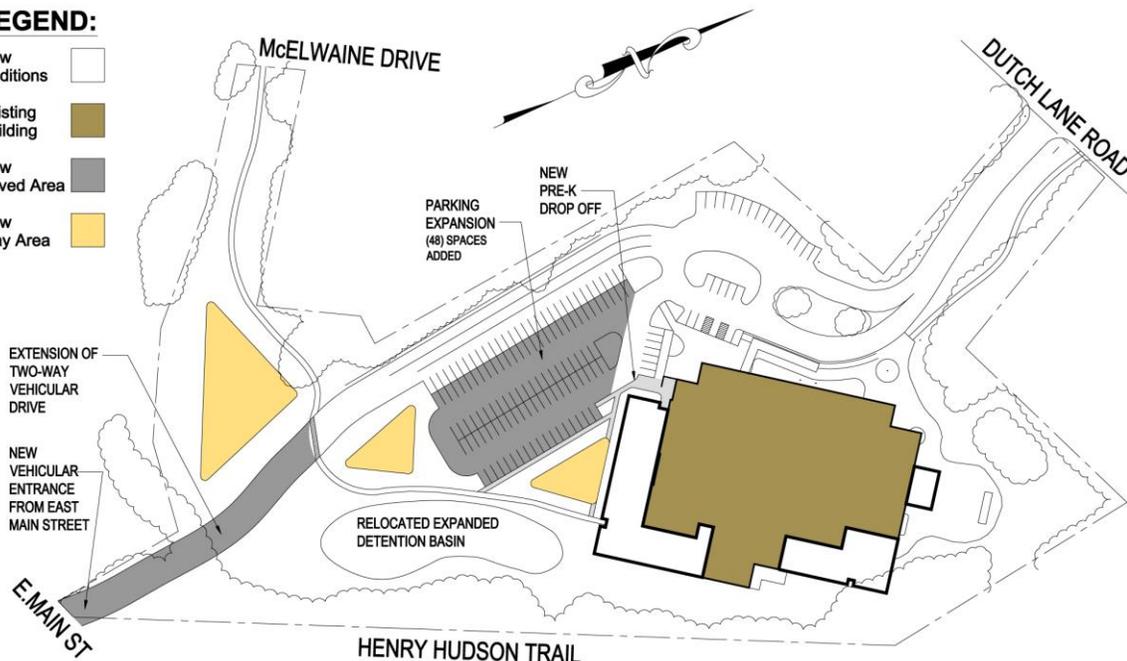
District

#2, #3, #7
#1
#4
#5
#6

-XXX-

LEGEND:

- New Additions
- Existing Building
- New Paved Area
- New Play Area





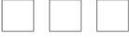
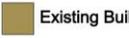
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LEGEND:

-  New Additions
-  Existing Building
-  New Paved Area
-  Existing & New Grass

