

2020 School District of Janesville Capital Referendum

Background: The \$22.5 million capital referendum would address maintenance needs and safety and security measures. If approved, the school district would issue general obligation bonds to pay for facility improvements across the district, including the replacement of aging windows, roofs, and boilers. While the district spends over \$1 million annually on facility maintenance, the average Janesville school is 64 years old. This funding would address pressing maintenance needs and ‘big ticket’ items that are too expensive to be covered in the district’s annual budget.

This funding would also be used to modernize school entryways with an emphasis on student safety and security. Several Janesville schools have main entrances that allow visitors to roam the halls before reaching the main office, creating a potentially unsafe situation for students. The referendum would address entryway issues and make the buildings more secure.

Tax Impact: Passage of the capital referendum would cost taxpayers \$5 per \$100,000 of assessed home value. This increase would stay in place until the debt is paid off. School district chief financial officer Dan McCrea estimates that the debt will be paid off in 20 years.

Our Concerns: According to the school district’s website, *“In 2016, the district commissioned a facilities study that focused on its envelope and mechanical systems. The study included a review of the district’s mechanical systems, such as boilers, air handlers, electrical systems, windows, and roofs. The report indicated that if all the needed work was done at one time, the estimated cost would be \$111.1 million.*

It is important to note that the report only addressed fixing existing mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, and not making existing space more conducive to modern learning or making schools more safe/secure.”

Since the 2020 capital referendum only addresses the district’s most pressing maintenance needs, we are concerned that the district will need to consider additional capital referendums to cover the needs identified in the 2016 facilities study. We plan to lead a community conversation with district leaders on how they plan to address the needs not addressed by the 2020 capital referendum.

Our Position: With the concerns listed above in mind, Forward Janesville endorses the school district’s 2020 capital referendum.

One of Forward Janesville’s missions as an organization is to promote local education, and Janesville’s great schools great make Rock County and southern Wisconsin more attractive place to live and work. We support investment in school infrastructure, as strong schools are a complement to our organization’s economic development efforts. Upgrading Janesville’s school infrastructure will be another arrow in Rock County’s economic development quiver.

Making this strategic investment now will save money in the long run, as deferred and delayed maintenance costs will continue to add up. Forward Janesville believes that this referendum strikes a reasonable balance between the facility maintenance needs of the district and the property tax impact to the community. We encourage voters to invest in the future of education in Janesville by supporting the capital referendum on November 3.