

Each of my referendum information articles are also available for review on our website via the “Referendum Information” button. The referendum website is the central location for all other referendum information as well, including the facility assessment, financing strategies, and tax impact information.

This month, my article is focused on the tax impact information provided by our outside financial consultants – Baird and PMA. Historically, the Cornell school mill rate has been well below the state average. This past year, the state average school mill rate was 7.09 while Cornell’s was 5.04 (\$709/\$100,000 home versus \$504/\$100,000 home). If the proposed referendum passes in April, Baird and PMA estimate a maximum increase of 2 mills (\$200/\$100,000 home) which would still result in Cornell having a mill rate below the state average. To provide some perspective, Cornell’s mill rate during the 1995-96 school year was 18.02 (\$1,802/\$100,000 home)!

Cornell’s 5.04 mill rate was the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest, behind Granton’s 5.03 mill rate, in the entire CESA 10 region during the last school year. Our District being debt free since 2013, when we paid off the elementary school bonds five years early, has helped keep rates low. It should be noted that Baird and PMA’s estimates are conservative. I believe property valuations will exceed their assumption of an increase of 1%/year, and that bond rates will stay below the 5-5.5% assumptions they are using with rates currently about 4.5% – however, I do agree it is better to estimate conservatively rather than the other way around!

One comment that has come up within the community is that if the referendum fails, taxes will go down since we will not have a high school. This is not true. While taxes would not increase due to a failed referendum, no matter if there is a high school building or not, the district is still responsible for the education of the high school aged students and will need to pay tuition to whichever district students attend. School taxes will not go down due to a failed referendum. School district revenue, thus taxes, are calculated in part based on the number of students residing in the district.

Of the 421 public school districts in Wisconsin, Cornell is one of only 53 that has never held a referendum to exceed the state-imposed revenue caps for operations. We actually collected less money than we were allowed to in taxes during two different fiscal years. The board of education has been committed to living within the state allotted revenue caps and keeping property taxes as low as possible while still providing a highly academic education to the children of Cornell. However, our middle/high school facility has reached the point where it is no longer conducive to that high-quality education.

As always, please reach out with any questions or comments to [pmschley@cornell.k12.wi.us](mailto:pmschley@cornell.k12.wi.us) or call me directly at 715-861-6970.

