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Commission OKs placing school bond of fall ballot

Approval to increase taxes for more schools

By Michael Roessler

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CONCORD - The decision to approve or reject

\$98 million in education bonds now rests with the public.

The Cabarrus County Board of Commissioners unanimously voted Wednesday to put a \$94.9 million public school bond and a \$3.1 million community college bond on the Nov. 2 ballot. "I think this is long overdue," Commissioner Richard Suggs said. "I'm proud to say I'm supporting this tonight."

If both bond questions are approved by voters this fall, they will require a roughly 7-cent increase in the county's property tax rate. That is equivalent to roughly \$108 on a \$150,000 house.

Each of the 11 people who addressed commissioners during a public hearing before the vote spoke in favor of placing the bonds on the ballot.

"I'm not a mother. I'm not an educator. I'm simply a single woman who cares about the future of education in this county," resident Angie Carter said.

The speakers told commissioners that building new schools with the bond money would help keep Cabarrus County an attractive place to live.

The decision to place the bond questions on the ballot comes after months of discussion and debate among commissioners, school officials and community members.

A committee created by commissioners met earlier this year to evaluate the construction requests submitted by Cabarrus County Schools, Kannapolis City Schools and Rowan-Cabarrus Community College.

The committee, which was composed of representatives from business and community organizations, validated each of the systems' requests.

The county school system is asking for \$82.4 million to pay for a high school in southwestern Cabarrus County; a replacement for Odell Elementary School adjacent to Harris Road Middle School; two elementary schools in northwestern Cabarrus County; renovations to A.T. Allen Elementary School; and renovations to the Northwest Cabarrus High School science labs and the Concord High School media center.

Kannapolis is asking for \$12.5 million for renovations to the auditorium at A.L. Brown High School and Kannapolis Middle School; replacement classrooms at Shady Brook Elementary School; classroom expansions at A.L. Brown and Forest Park Elementary School; and an expansion of the central office.

School officials said growing student rolls require the construction of new facilities.

RCCC is seeking \$3.1 million, which will be a separate ballot question from the public school bond, for the county's share of a third building on its south campus.

The state would pay for 55 percent of the building's cost. The county would pay the remainder.

Commissioner Robert Carruth said it is important for residents to understand that to pass both bond questions, two votes - one for the public schools, the other for the community college - must be cast on Election Day.

Chairman Robert Freeman urged the county's residents to vote for the bonds.

"We need to make sure we support this and make sure we're behind this," he said.

• Contact Michael Roessler at mroessler@independenttribune.com or 704-789-9141.

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