

# Pinelands Regional School District Bond Referendum – Tuesday, January 24, 2017 Frequently Asked Questions

The Pinelands Regional School District will ask the communities served by the District to vote on a \$53.6 million Bond Referendum on Tuesday, January 24, 2017 (2:00 pm – 8:00 pm). If approved, the referendum will address the critical structural issues identified at the High School in late summer 2015, as well as fund important basic repairs and no-frills upgrades and renovations needed to maintain a safe and effective educational environment at the District’s Junior and Senior High School campuses.

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### Highlights for Homeowners

The total Referendum is \$53.6 million and includes three questions.\* Pinelands Regional School District is eligible to receive **state funding for up to 40% of the estimated total project cost which will reduce the local share** for all three questions.

- **Question 1:** \$46.8 million for site work, critical exterior system replacements (brick structure and roof), and necessary interior basic repairs. HVAC replacement and critical electrical/security/communications upgrades at both schools.  
  
- **Tax Impact after state aid - \$28 million**
  
- **Question 2:** \$4.8 million for new, secured, all-weather entrance at PRJHS/ PRHS, a more efficient and safer rear bus drop-off and pick-up area at PRJHS, renovations to the main entrance/office and library at PRHS to improve safety and security, and IT infrastructure upgrades at both schools.  
  
- **Tax Impact after state aid - \$2.9 million**
  
- **Question 3:** \$1.9 million for new grass field at stadium, track and tennis courts resurfacing at PRHS.  
  
- **Tax Impact after state aid - \$1.6 million**

*\*Question 1 must be approved for the district to move forward with Questions 2 and 3.*

## Referendum FAQs – Your Frequently Asked Questions

### Background

#### **Q1 Why do we need a Referendum to address these issues?**

**A1** The District had a plan for building/system maintenance and upgrades, including a \$5.2 million Energy Savings Program (no additional cost to taxpayers). But when the **structural problems were identified at PRHS in late summer 2015, the Board of Education recognized the necessity of taking immediate steps to address the issues.**

Due diligence conducted by the District highlighted potential issues of even greater magnitude which could mean even higher costs. With the previous debt retiring and the availability of state aid and low interest rates, the District determined that a referendum was the most cost-effective means of preserving these community assets and their essential systems, and continuing the long-term viability of both the Junior and Senior High Schools.

The **Referendum will fund the basic repairs and essential building system replacements and no-frills upgrades** to maintain a safe campus, effective educational environment, and energy-efficient facilities.

#### **Q2 What type of structures are the Junior and Senior High School Buildings?**

**A2** Both of the buildings are structural steel with a brick veneer exterior. The Junior High School building was constructed 10 years later and does not reflect the current conditions that exist at the High School.

#### **Q3 Why Now?**

**A3** In late summer 2015, the District identified significant structural problems at the High School:

- Parts of the structure were eroding and, if not repaired soon, would continue to deteriorate.
- Structural problems could impact the health and safety of the students, staff and community members.
- Buildings are used for community gatherings, continuing education programs, and as emergency shelters, i.e., PRJHS was used as a shelter for more than 1,000 residents and pets during Superstorm Sandy.
- There also are health and safety, accessibility, and maintenance concerns at both the Junior and Senior High School campuses.

In addition,

- Pinelands Regional School District is **eligible to receive up to 40% in state funding for Questions 1 and 2, and 19% for Question 3**, for the estimated total approved project cost.
- The **state funds are available only if the referendum passes**. They are not available if the projects are included in the annual budget.
- Interest rates are at historic lows. Combined with currently stable, but projected **rising, construction costs**, this is an ideal time to move forward with critical facilities repairs and no-frills upgrades.
- The acquisition of new debt coincides with the retirement of existing debt, **which further reduces the overall impact to the taxpayer**.

**Q4 Why not build a new High School, rather than make these repairs?**

**A4** Although there are a number of renovations and upgrades proposed for the High School to rectify the current issues, the referendum also provides upgrades and renovations to Pinelands Junior High School as well. Building a new school would cost twice as much as the planned renovations. More important, the State would fund only a small portion of new construction – reimbursing just \$143/square-foot at 40% in state aid.

**Q5 Are any of the High School’s problems covered by insurance?**

**A5** No. The projects outlined in the referendum address areas of the district’s buildings that have reached the end of their “useful life”, and have not been impacted by an event such as a fire, flood, storm, etc. The District did have an insurance claim last year after the fire in the Science Lab, which was then reconstructed at little cost to taxpayers.

**Q6 If the brick exterior and support structure of the High School is failing, why doesn’t the District sue the original architect/contractor?**

**A6** Because the original construction of the building took place in 1979, most warranties on the items included in the referendum have expired. Under the legal system, the statute of limitations for redress on this work is 10 to 12 years, and has long since expired. Legal counsel believes it is unlikely that pursuing any claims against the contractor and/or architect would prove successful, would be cost-prohibitive, would fail to solve the real problem, and waste taxpayer dollars.

**Q7 Is school enrollment in the District increasing or decreasing?**

**A7** The District should expect relatively stable student enrollment for the foreseeable future, based on annual student counts at Pinelands Regional and for its constituent districts of Bass River, Eagleswood, Little Egg Harbor and Tuckerton.

### **Q8 What is the worst-case scenario?**

**A8 Without a successful vote**, the Board of Education will be unable to authorize the necessary repairs and there could be significant consequences, leading up to and including the need to resort to the use of split sessions or leasing trailers for classroom space. The District already is operating at a disadvantage, with nine (9) classrooms currently out of commission due to the need for critical repairs.

In the event of a failed vote, the District likely will seek voter approval during one of the five state-approved election dates to field the Referendum again. The estimated costs of holding a special election in four communities are between \$20,000 and \$30,000.

If a special election is called and the Referendum fails again, it is possible that the State would mandate a project of only the most urgent repairs. This is not a desirable option, nor would it be in the best interest of the community, as it likely would provide a very short-term solution to a long-term, increasingly more complicated problem. In order to remain functional, the District likely would be required to use current funds, borrow, or enter into lease-purchase agreements to make the necessary repairs, **at a significant cost – without state aid – to taxpayers.**

### **Referendum Projects**

#### **Q9: What projects are included in Question 1?**

**A9: Question 1 - \$46.8 million, Tax Impact after state aid - \$28 million**

#### **High School**

- Reconstruct the original 1979 deteriorating and potentially dangerous brick structure (all sides of the building)
- Replace the roof
- Provide metal panels on the rising masonry walls of the roof
- Replace existing 1979 unit ventilators on three-story A wing with new rooftop units
- Replace poorly functioning air conditioning units in some classrooms with ones that are energy-efficient
- Install new exterior windows and doors and security hardware
- Install new fire safety-rated stair tower doors and side lights.
- Renovate bathrooms to ensure ADA-compliance
- Replace interior doors with ADA-compliant frames and hardware, and fire safety-rated units and intruder locks
- Replace all corridor ceiling tiles
- Install new fire suppression system in Home Economics room stove fume hoods
- Install new dust collection system in the Wood Shop
- Repave rear parking lot and add drainage improvements
- Install new interior and exterior security cameras

### **Junior High School**

- Replace the roof
- Provide metal panels on the rising masonry walls of the roof
- Replace the original 1991 boilers with energy-efficient modular units
- Replace original, inefficient 1991 HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning) roof top and/or air handling units with new energy-efficient units
- Install air conditioning in the two rear classroom wings (others added through current Energy Savings Program)
- Renovate bathrooms to ensure ADA-compliance
- Replace all corridor ceiling tiles
- Replace indoor and outdoor public address system
- Mill, resurface and do a small expansion of front parking lot
- Reconstruct rear loop road and make drainage improvements
- Add exterior stairs and ramp on northern side of the building
- Install new concrete curbing along service drive (next to fields)
- Install new interior and exterior security cameras

***Question 1 must be approved for the district to move forward with Questions 2 and 3.***

### **Q10 What projects are included in Question 2?**

**A10 Question 2 - \$4.8 million, Tax Impact after state aid - \$2.9 million**

### **High School**

- Add new, all-weather, secured entrance to building
- Install new lighting at front of the building and along the road to the stadium
- Install new, ADA-compliant interior building signage
- Add storm water management features to the stadium road
- Make access to the stadium field ADA-compliant
- Install new concrete walkway from the gymnasium to the stadium
- Replace flooring, ceiling and lighting at the main entrance
- Relocate, renovate, and reconfigure the Main Office
- Renovate and reconfigure the teachers' workroom
- Add a drop-ceiling, new finishes, new lighting and shelving to the library
- Install a new ceiling-hung curtain behind the existing bleachers in auxiliary gym
- Upgrade IT infrastructure

### **Junior High School**

- Add new, all-weather, secured entrance to building
- Install new, ADA-compliant interior building signage
- Install new concrete, pavers and landscaping at front entrance
- Install new, exterior digital signage at entrance
- Remove existing wood walkway in courtyard and make landscape improvements
- Install retaining wall, lighting, curbs and a sidewalk near the rear loop road
- Widen rear loop road to safely accommodate buses (loading/unloading area)
- Upgrade failing gymnasium scoreboard
- Upgrade IT infrastructure

### **Q11 What projects are included in Question 3?**

**A11** Question 3 - \$1.9 million, **Tax Impact after state aid - \$1.6 million**

### **High School**

- Install a new natural grass field, goal posts, and a storm water management system.
- Resurface the deteriorating tennis court, and add new nets and fencing.
- Resurface the deteriorating running track and track and field event area, including providing new fencing.
- Install a sidewalk around the track to link to the grandstands and parking lots.

### **Q12 Are the projects in Referendum Question 3 necessary?**

**A12** Failure to address the deteriorating conditions of the athletic areas in Question 3 will render those facilities inoperable. The result will be unsafe and unusable facilities that will restrict the District's ability to offer students extra curricular activities and eliminate valuable resources for community use. In addition to students, many individuals of all ages enjoy the PRSD track and tennis courts for fitness and fun at no charge.

### **Q13 What happens if Question 2 passes and Question 1 does not?**

**A13** Question 1 must be approved for the District to move forward on Questions 2 and 3.

**Q14 Why is there such disparity between the cost of replacing the brick exterior (\$15 million) and replacing the entire roof system (\$3.6 million)?**

**A14** The District's Structural Engineer of Record estimated the cost of \$15 million for the High School building exterior reconstruction. Currently, the \$15 million High School Exterior project is calculated as: 51,026 square-feet at \$293.97 per square-foot. This includes replacement of interior concrete masonry and exterior brick masonry of 15% of the building external surface; exterior brick masonry replacement and structural repairs to the interior concrete masonry portion of the remaining exterior; and repair/ replacement of building structural steel within the perimeter wall which has been damaged by corrosion.

The District's Architect of Record computes roof replacement costs based on current industry standards: the \$3,578,848.00 roof replacement is calculated at 127,816 square-feet at \$28.00 per square-foot. This includes removing the existing out of warranty system to the structural deck inspection and install new tapered insulation, 3 Ply SBS system, roof drains, scuppers and perimeter metal as required.

The complexity of the building exterior and structural steel portion of the project far exceeds that of the expected roof replacement. For more information on the condition of the structural steel framing and brick exterior, please review the engineer's structural report at <http://www.pinelandsregional.org/copy-of-referendum-information>.

**Q15 What happens if the total cost of the projects is less than the amount passed in the January 24<sup>th</sup> Referendum?**

**A15** State law requires the District to return all unused bond proceeds to the taxpayer in the form of tax relief. The District is not permitted to utilize the bond proceeds for projects other than those approved by voters in the Referendum.

**Q16 What if the actual costs of the projects exceeds the amount approved by the January 24<sup>th</sup> Referendum?**

**A16** State law prohibits the District from spending more than that stipulated in the Bond Referendum approved by the voters. The District believes the overall project plan includes prudent estimates. However, in the unlikely event that actual costs of the project exceed the gross bond proceeds (in order of consideration), the District will search for more efficient means of achieving the Referendum's overall objective, reduce project scope, or seek voter approval for additional funds. The Board of Education stresses cost efficiency with its professionals.

**Q17 Brick on the High School structure would be replaced under Question 1. How do we make certain the same quality control construction issues do not happen again?**

**A17** There are “soft costs” included in each of the questions of the Referendum. Some of these funds are earmarked for an independent, district-hired Construction Management firm to oversee all of the projects that are part of the Referendum. This firm is responsible and accountable for ensuring that all construction is made to the proper, approved and requested specifications. Stringent oversight will ensure that all steps are taken to address the critical structural issues properly.

**Q18 If approved, when would the projects be completed?**

**A18** Upon approval of the Referendum, the District will address urgent projects immediately. The District plans to initiate construction in spring/summer 2017, with an ultimate completion date of all projects anticipated for fall/winter 2018.

**Q19 Are there solar projects in the Energy Savings Project or Referendum?**

**A19** There are no solar projects in the Energy Savings Project or the Referendum. The District considers solar, and all forms of alternative energy, part of the overall capital plan. The District needs to first upgrade the facility to reduce overall energy consumption. The Energy Savings and Referendum projects will prepare the facility (roof, infrastructure, etc.) for a solar apparatus. The new energy efficient equipment (boilers, lighting, windows, air conditioning, etc.) will enable the District to properly size the necessary alternative energy systems, should a solar project be considered in the future.

**Q20 Will any other renovations/improvements be necessary in the near future?**

**A20** The Pinelands Regional Board of Education and professional consultants have worked diligently to identify the renovations and improvements needed to support the buildings through the life of the loan. The Board **does NOT anticipate any additional major renovations and improvements in the foreseeable future**. Of course, as is the case with community members’ own homes, activities related to normal maintenance and wear and tear will continue.

### **Impact on Property Taxes and State Aid**

**Q21 How will the Referendum impact property taxes?**

**A21** If approved, the average annual tax impact for Question 1 is less than \$100/year for the average assessed home in all of the four communities served by Pinelands Regional. If approved, Questions 2 and 3, add no more than \$22 per year depending on the community.

Homeowners in each of the communities can use the tax calculators available on the Referendum Page on the District website to **calculate the specific tax impact based on their home's assessed values.**

Current tax estimates for the average annual local tax increase over the 25-year loan, based on average assessed values, are:

Community	Q1	Q2	Q3	Average Assessed Home
Bass River	\$97	\$14	\$8	\$221,017
Eagles-wood	\$97	\$14	\$8	\$252,215
Little Egg Harbor	\$80	\$11	\$6	\$196,100
Tuckerton	\$67	\$10	\$5	\$200,000

**Q22 How will the proposed Referendum affect taxes for senior citizens?**

**A22** Seniors and people with disabilities may be protected from future property tax increases by applying for the Property Tax Reimbursement Program (Senior Freeze). Seniors and people with disabilities must meet eligibility requirements, which can be found on the NJ Division of Taxation website (<http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/ptr/index.shtml>). For more information, go to the website or call the NJ Division of Taxation at 1-800-882-6597.

**Q23 Will the Referendum affect the amount of annual state aid given to the Pinelands District and/or the K-6 regional districts?**

**A23** The Referendum **will have NO impact on the annual state aid** received by the Pinelands Regional District or any of its sending school districts. School bond referendums – including this one – are completely unrelated to, and have no impact on, annual state aid to a school district.



## **Voting, Voter Registration, Voting By Mail**

### ***Voting on the Referendum***

The vote will take place on **Tuesday, January 24<sup>th</sup>** during a special election. Community members will vote at their usual polling places between **2:00 pm and 8:00 pm**:

<b>Municipality/Ward</b>	<b>Poll Place Name</b>
Bass River	New Gretna Fire Company, 5 North Maple Avenue, New Gretna
Eagleswood	Municipal Building, 146 Division St.
Tuckerton-01	Borough Hall, 140 E Main Street
Tuckerton-02	TIP Seaman Park, 120 Lakeside Drive
Ltl Egg Harbor 01,12	Parkertown Fire, 830 Railroad Ave.
Ltl Egg Harbor 02,16	Senior Center, 641 Radio Rd.
Ltl Egg Harbor 03,04,13,14	Community Ctr, 317 W Calabreeze Way
Ltl Egg Harbor 05,06	Mystic Island Fire, 827 Radio Rd.
Ltl Egg Harbor 07	Mystic Shores Clubhouse, 204 Shenandoah Dr.
Ltl Egg Harbor 08,09,10	LEH Town Hall, 665 Radio Rd.
Ltl Egg Harbor 15	Sunrise Bay Clubhouse, 2 Windstar Dr.

### ***Registering to Vote***

Community members aged 18 and older can register to vote by completing and submitting a voter registration form, which are available online (<http://www.state.nj.us/state/elections/voting-information.html>), at Pinelands Regional High School Main Office, Pinelands Regional Junior High School, Pinelands Regional School District Office, or from the County Clerks' Offices in Ocean or Burlington Counties. **To be eligible to vote on January 24, 2017, you must be registered by January 3, 2017.**

### ***Voting By Mail***

Applications by registered voters for a mail-in ballot must be received in the County Clerk's Office (either Ocean County or Burlington County) **at least 7 days prior to the election – January 17, 2017 – in order for a ballot to be received via mail.** Voters also **may apply in-person** for a mail-in ballot in the County Clerk's Office **anytime up to 3:00 pm on the day before the election – January 23, 2017.** Applications are available online in both Ocean and Burlington Counties.

Voters should follow the return instructions on the ballot. **All ballots must be received by the close of voting on Tuesday, January 24, 2017.**