

## **An April Referendum Question for Rosholt**

By Christopher Thompson, EdD, District Administrator

On April 5, 2022, members of the Rosholt community will vote on an operational referendum for the Rosholt School District. This is a non-recurring referendum that will provide the School District with four years of funding that fills the gap not covered by state aid and local tax revenue. The previous non-recurring referendum was approved in 2017, lasted five years and sunsets in June 2022. This referendum is for operational purposes meaning that it will fund staff salaries and the day-to-day work occurring within the school buildings. It is not for new projects.

The Board of Education approved the resolutions involved with a school district going to referendum at the January 12, 2022, regular meeting. The referendum question on the ballot will read as follows:

*"Shall the Rosholt School District, Portage, Marathon and Waupaca Counties, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by \$1,100,000 for the 2022-2023 school year, by \$1,250,000 for the 2023-2024 school year, by \$1,400,000 for the 2024-2025 school year, and by \$1,550,000 for the 2025-2026 school year, for non-recurring purposes consisting of District operating expenses?"*

The referendum election ballot will ask District electors to vote "yes" or "no" on the referendum election question as set forth above. A "yes" vote on the question is a vote to authorize the Rosholt School District budget to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes for the amounts listed above for non-recurring purposes consisting of District operating expenses. A "no" vote on the question is a vote to deny the Rosholt School District the authority to exceed the revenue limit for the amounts listed.

### How did the School District determine these figures?

Rosholt School District partnered with Robert W. Baird Financial Services to forecast the funding required to operate the School District. We forecasted four-years out through June 2026. Using Baird's guidance, we determined the amount of revenue the School District can expect to receive from the State, as well as from the local municipalities that comprise Rosholt School District. Those amounts are driven by two factors: (1) property tax value for the total amount of private property within the school district's boundaries and (2) student enrollment.

While property value in Rosholt School District has remained steady, student enrollment has been slowly decreasing over the past twenty years. Our enrollment decrease has tabled off in the past two years; however, state aid takes three years to reflect current student numbers. A decreasing number of students in our classrooms results in less aid coming from the State to cover school district expenses.

The School District cannot cut costs any further to reflect this trend without impacting the instructional services it provides. Rosholt has already enacted the following cost-saving reductions:

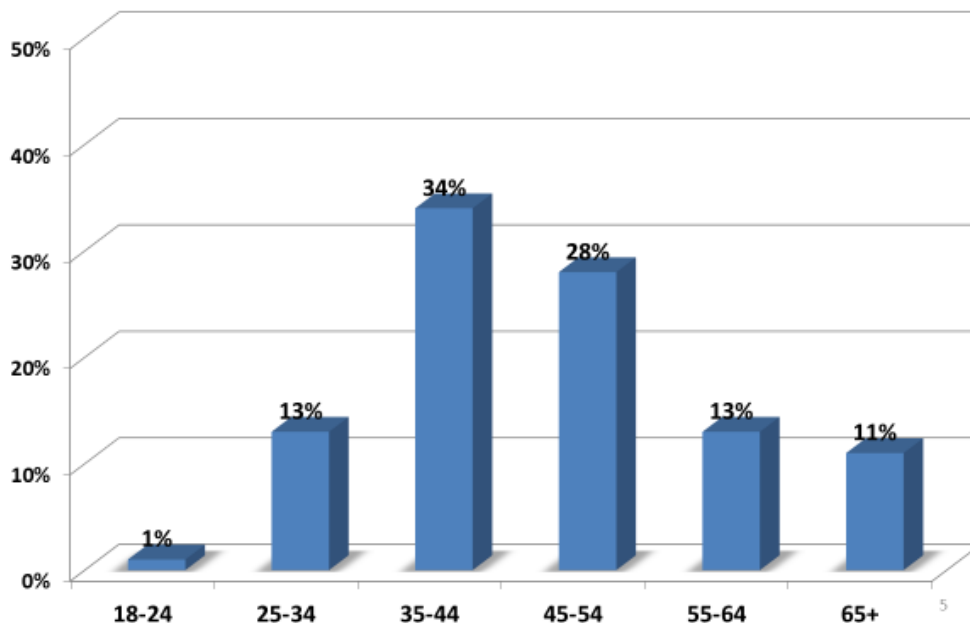
- Eliminated the food service director position and staffed department leadership from within the kitchen staff team
- Eliminated one part-time clerical position
- Eliminated one bus route
- Left one part-time cleaner position unfilled
- Reduced most areas of the budget by 5-10% in each of the past 3 years
- Reduced the elementary principal position to an 11-month contract

Up to this time, we have not made reductions in our teacher workforce as we want to maintain smaller class sizes and continue offering a variety of high school courses. A reduction in the number of classrooms we operate would result in an increase to the student:teacher ratio. Rosholt Elementary School currently operates with a 16:1 student:teacher ratio; Rosholt Middle and High School currently operates with a 17:1 student:teacher ratio.

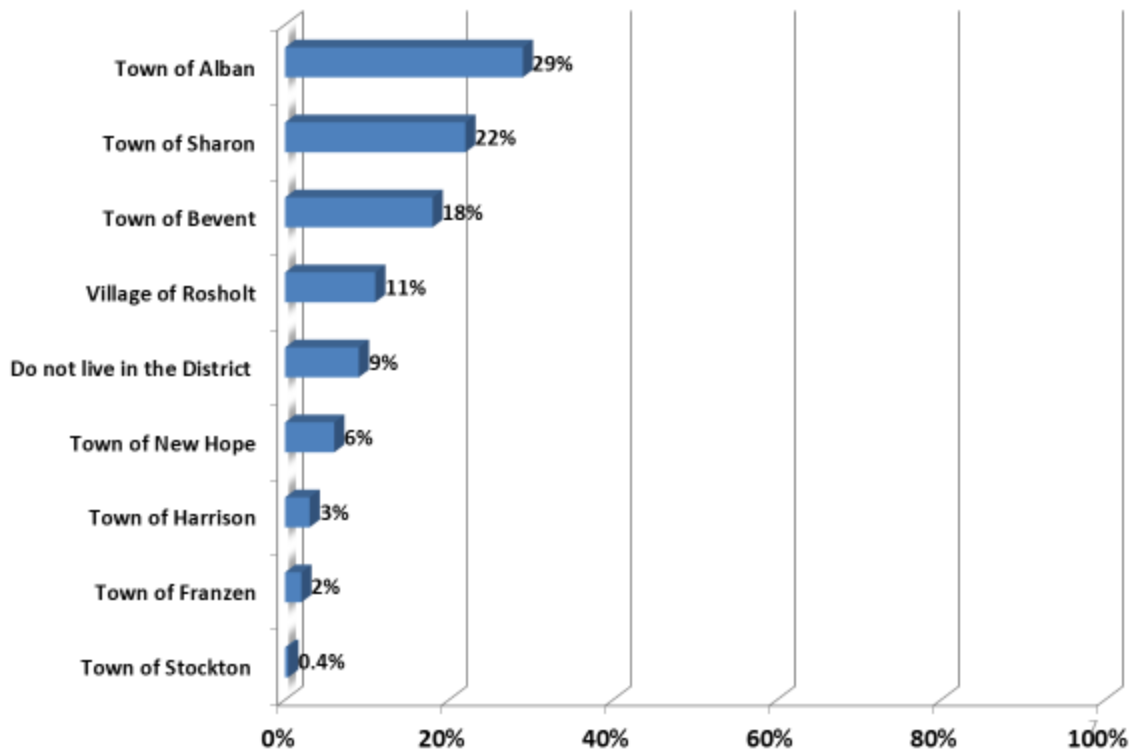
How did community input play a role in determining the referendum figures?

In Fall 2021, the School Board of Education mailed survey access postcards to all community residents. The survey was meant to garner feedback regarding their thoughts on a referendum. We received 245 responses on our survey. The two graphs shared below demonstrate the age groups and municipality distributions for the survey participants.

### What is your age?



## In which municipality do you live?



The distribution of participant age groupings and school district municipality population disbursement in relation to the municipality populations indicate the survey response reliability for forecasting community support for a referendum.

Three differing referendum amounts were shared in the survey with a request for feedback. Each amount corresponded with a funding ramification for the school district. The amounts and funding priorities were as follows:

- Option 1: A four year non-recurring referendum with \$1,100,000 for year one, growing by \$150,000 each following year (\$1,250,000 for year 2, \$1,400,000 for year three and \$1,550,000 for year 4). *This option would require Rosholt School District to cut approximately \$72,000 per year. Minor staffing or programming cuts would be necessary with this option later in the school years it funds.*
- Option 2: A four year non-recurring referendum with \$1,200,000 for year one, growing by \$150,000 each following year (\$1,350,000 for year 2, \$1,500,000 for year three and \$1,650,000 for year 4). *This option would allow Rosholt School District to avoid making significant cuts to programs and services and provide an average of approximately \$30,000 each year for ongoing maintenance projects such as replacing aging parking lot pavement.*

- Option 3: A four year non-recurring referendum with a flat \$1,500,000 for each of the four years. *This option would allow Rosholt School District to avoid making significant cuts to programs and services and provide an average of approximately \$100,000 for ongoing maintenance projects, such as replacing aging HVAC, boilers, roofing and parking lot pavement.*

The below graph depicts the community feedback received regarding support for the three options.

## Referendum Options Responses (School District Residents Only)



The red dotted line represents the 50%, plus one of the population responses that a referendum vote must receive to pass within a community. Option 3 (blue), a flat \$1,500,000, received the greatest support in each of the respondent groupings. However, the Non-Parents Residents grouping best describes the largest portion of our school district residents. As a result, it is necessary to focus on Option 1 to achieve a plurality that has the strongest chance of being passed by our community (blue + red + green = plurality; this plurality is a grouping that takes the least expensive option and adds the community support from the more expensive options 2 and 3 to create greater than 50%+1 support).

The Board of Education listened to the community's input from the Fall 2021 survey. The funding described in Option 1 is reflected in the referendum question that will appear on the April 5, 2022, ballot.

#### How will this referendum impact my tax bill?

If approved, the referendum will have a \$135 total tax increase for the 4-year term for a home valued at \$100,000. That equates to \$2.82 per month. The mill rate for the current 2021-22 school year is \$9.00. The mill rate for year 1 (2022-23) of the referendum is projected to be \$9.50. Year 2 (2023-24) is projected to have a mill rate of \$9.99 with both years 3 (2024-25) and 4 (2025-26) projected with a mill rate at \$10.35.

#### Are referendums common?

In the last ten years, nearly 350 districts (approximately 83%) across the state have passed referendums to help with ongoing budget challenges and update facilities. In our region alone, voters in 29 of 35 (83%) of our comparison schools (those in CESA 5) have supported a referendum.

#### Where can I go with my questions regarding the referendum?

Rosholt Schools District Administrator, Chris Thompson, and members of the Rosholt School District Board of Education will be attending town and village meetings in March 2022 to share what's happening in the school district as well as discuss the referendum. The visits to these meetings have been scheduled for the following dates, times and locations:

- Town of Bevent: Wednesday, March 2, 2022, at 7 pm at Bevent Town Hall, 205825 County Road Y, Hatley, WI 54440
- Town of Sharon: Tuesday, March 8, 2022, at 6:30 pm at Sharon Town Hall, 6704 State Highway 66, Custer, WI 54423
- Town of Harrison: Monday, March 14, 2022, at 6:30 pm at Northland Lutheran Church (basement), N9880 State Highway 49, Iola, WI 54945 (first item on agenda)
- Village of Rosholt: Monday, March 14, 2022, at 7 pm at Rosholt Village Hall, 101 S. Main Street, Rosholt, WI 54473 (last item on agenda)
- Town of Alban: Tuesday, March 15, 2022, at 5:40 pm at Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative, 10401 Lystul Road, Rosholt, WI 54473
- Town of New Hope: Wednesday, March 16, 2022 (tentative date), at 7 pm at North New Hope Lutheran Church, 845 County Road T North, Amherst Junction, WI 54407

You can also visit the Rosholt School District website's April 2022 Referendum page at <https://www.rosholt.k12.wi.us/district/april2022referendum.cfm> for additional information including full Fall 2021 survey results. Finally, you can always email Rosholt's District Administrator, Chris Thompson, at [chthompson@rosholt.k12.wi.us](mailto:chthompson@rosholt.k12.wi.us) with your questions.

The Rosholt School District is grateful to the community for their continued support for public education. We are proud to offer Rosholt children a quality education.