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REALTORS® Urge “Yes” Vote on Mercer Island Levies

BELLEVUE, Wash. (Dec. 21, 2009) – Three levy renewal proposals for Mercer Island schools received endorsement from the Seattle King County REALTORS® (SKCR). The measures will be on the Feb. 9, 2010 ballot.

SKCR president Keith Nelson said the endorsement was by unanimous vote of the Association’s Governmental & Public Affairs Committee, which considered several factors in its deliberations.

The funding requests include a General Fund Levy, a Capital Levy and a Transportation Levy. All three measures would extend expiring levies for the district, which serves more than 4,000 students.

In urging voters in the Mercer Island School District to join REALTORS in supporting the measures, Nelson said SKCR members are also being asked to volunteer for phone banks, preparing mailings, placing signs and other hands-on assistance to get out the vote and promote passage. “With additional state education funding cuts expected, continued local support for school levies is critical,” he remarked.

“Good schools are the first thing homebuyers ask us about,” said Nelson, In emphasizing the importance of high quality schools, he noted good schools preserve and enhance the value of family homes, and “they’re crucial to the futures of the students in the Mercer Island School District.”

Nelson, in a letter to Dr. Gary Plano, superintendent of the Mercer Island School District, praised the district’s academic performance and its high bond rating. Among academic achievements, he noted the district’s students continuously meet or exceed state and nationally recognized standards on various aptitude tests. Nelson also touted Mercer Island High School’s #1 ranking nationally for the percentage of students who graduate on time, based on a Manhattan Institute study.

Nelson applauded Mercer Island for being one of a only a few districts in Washington to receive a AA+ bond rating from Standard & Poor’s and Moody’s.

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Other factors SKCR's president cited that influenced the association's endorsement included:

- The Council of Chief State School Officers and Standard & Poor's have identified Mercer Island as an "Outperforming District" for performing at a level that significantly exceeds statistical expectations.
- The district has an impressive number of teachers who have achieved advanced certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. While approximately 4 percent of the nation's teaching population has attained this highest level of certification, more than three times that ratio – 13.2 percent – of Mercer Island teachers have earned that credential.
- A high level of parent and community support to assure funding for operations, school academics and enrichment programs. The Mercer Island community has demonstrated a commitment to excellence with its long history of support for school funding measures.

If renewed, the four-year General Fund Levy, which proponents describe as "mission critical," would help pay for nearly 25 percent of all educational and support programs in the district. The district ranks 166th out of 295 districts statewide in per pupil revenue from all sources. Among programs to be funded with this levy are 88 teachers and support staff, lower student-to-teacher ratios than the state funds, enhanced special education programs, programs for English-language learners and most of the sports programs.

The six-year Capital Levy funds renovation and maintenance of the district's assets at every school. If renewed, key projects include additional learning spaces, replacement of worn-out heating and communication systems, increased security and energy efficiency in all buildings, and improved student athletic and play areas.

The third measure is a standard one-year transportation replacement levy to keep school buses safe and more efficient.

The total additional cost to taxpayers in 2011 for the three levies would be \$460 for the owner of a house assessed at \$1 million, according to the Committee for Mercer Island Public Schools.

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