

Smaller Wichita school bond vote not on horizon, district says. ‘We have no plans’

BY KYLIE CAMERON
kcameron@wichitaeagle.com

Wichita school district officials say they don’t have plans now to come back to voters to ask for a smaller bond issue vote. Voters narrowly rejected a \$450 million bond issue earlier this year. “We have no plans,” the district’s Chief Financial

Officer Addi Lowell said Thursday at the first meeting of a new citizen financial oversight committee. That committee could eventually come back with a recommendation for another public vote on a bond proposal, though. Right after the February election, officials with the district and the Vote Yes campaign had signaled

that a smaller bond vote could be a possibility. The newly formed committee, mostly composed of community members with financial backgrounds and some USD 259 parents and students, is an advisory group that can make recommendations to the district’s school board. It’s tasked with finding short-term financial solu-

tions for the district, which is likely to face significant financial challenges as deferred maintenance costs on school buildings continue to increase. The district had hoped to replace a bond issue that falls off the tax rolls in 2029 with a new one to address some of its building issues. “Today we’re focusing on the short-term op-

tions,” Lowell said. “I’ve got to focus on the budget for next fiscal year and we can engage in future meetings about our long term options, certainly.” Those short-term options could include finding outside funding, reducing the district’s operating budget, or closing schools, among others. The committee did not signal which direction it

planned to go in its first meeting, but it could make some recommendations at its next meeting in May. “I could summarize school finance in, there’s never enough resources to do all the things we want to do for our kids and keep up with our infrastructure needs,” Lowell said. USD 259 wouldn’t be the first district in the state of Kansas to come back and ask for a smaller bond issue in recent memory. Voters in the Kansas City, Kansas school district rejected a \$480 million bond issue in early 2024. The district then downsized its plans to a \$180 million bond issue, which passed several months later.

Kylie Cameron:
ByKylieCameron

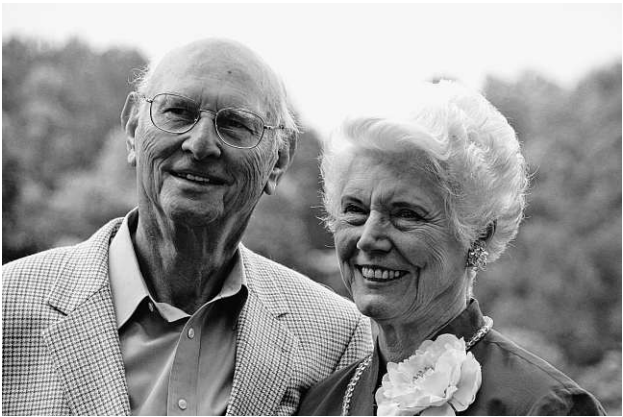
FROM PAGE 1A WILKE

body president. At Yale University, he earned a master’s of divinity and the school’s senior preaching award. His combination of confidence and abilities as an orator and storyteller never failed to make an impression. Rev. Amy Lippoldt, senior pastor at Wichita’s First United Methodist Church where Wilke once held the same position, studied Wilke’s Bible course in college with friends and then heard him speak about a decade ago when he was in his 80s. “He was magnificent.” Lippoldt said Wilke was starting to have memory issues at the time, “but, boy, he knew what to do at the pulpit.” “He was really relatable. He told stories that made sense in people’s lives. He really cared about people as much as theology.” Though she didn’t know him well personally, Lippoldt said Wilke “was incredibly encouraging” to her. “He was just so thrilled that I was coming to First Church.” She said he also was proud of the TV ministry he started there half a century ago. Wilke was still a relatively young pastor in his 40s when he joined First Church in 1974. Just as Wilke was a coach to others, Sarah Wilke said her father also was coachable. “He surrounded himself with giants.” One of those was Olive Ann Beech, the co-founder of Beech Aircraft who was known as the First Lady of Aviation. Big churches can be a lot to run, Wilke said. Though her father was Beech’s pastor, it still was crucial for him “to have someone like Olive Ann Beech to sort of say, ‘Well, pastor, I can help you with that.’” Wilke said her father was a strong administrator in addition to being an amazing orator. “That’s why he could grow a church, frankly. Once he grew it, he also knew how to run it.”

‘ALL WAS WELL’
First Church member Jack Focht was a lifelong close friend of Bishop Wilke, so he knew him as a buddy, a great athlete — ping pong was one of his favorite games — and competitor, too.

It wasn’t hard for him to remember his friend was a pastor as well. Long ago, Focht said he was drinking too much. “Dick kept straightening me out with that.” Focht said he respected both Wilke’s scholarship and humanity. “He had the ability to change his mind on important things when he looked into them and got what the facts were.” Sarah Wilke knew that as well as anyone. In 1990, she went to see her parents, who were living in Little Rock where her father was serving as bishop, to tell them she is a lesbian. Her parents responded with love along with concern. Later, Wilke passed her father’s room before going to sleep and saw him bedside on his knees — where he always went to process issues when he was struggling. “He was right there praying, and I knew all was well.” In 2019, when the United Methodist Church faced a split over LGBTQ+ issues, Wilke offered what was to be his final public address to United Methodists — and beyond. He made a plea for healing and shared his own family’s experience with his lesbian daughter. “It was sort of a family decision this video has to get made,” Sarah Wilke said. The video has been seen almost 60,000 times.

‘A GREAT IMPACT’
Wilke and his wife had four children, nine grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren, with one more on the way. One grandson, Rev. Matthew Wilke, said there never was pressure on any of them when it came to their spirituality, but many of them ended up serving one way or another. “His family is still making a great impact across the church,” Bishop Wilson said. Growing up, Sarah Wilke said a friend of hers marveled that she and her siblings would disagree with their parents at the dinner table, but she said they encouraged healthy debate. “Well, yeah, what fun would it be if you all took the same side?” she said. Wilke said her father “didn’t expect you to just swallow the company line, so to speak.” There was, though, a



Courtesy photo

Bishop Richard Wilke and his wife, Julia, together wrote the 34-part Disciple Bible Study, which millions around the world have studied.

rule about what they could eat when their father inevitably brought home someone from the church for dinner. The family didn’t have a lot of money on a pastor’s salary — or a lot of meat. The family signal of FHB, or “family hold back,” meant they could eat all the mashed potatoes they wanted but had to leave what little meat there was for the guest, then perhaps have a bowl of cereal after the person had gone. Frugality was one of the many lessons the Wilkes taught, but they did eventually have more money when he became a bishop and the family received decades worth of royalties from the Bible workbooks. They gave it away, to missions, through hunger ministries and with scholarships at Southwestern College. “They taught us all to be tithers,” Sarah Wilke said. “It’s a faith act.” She said most of the quiet financial help her parents gave “was really more about what can we do . . . that will build up the church and help people?”

EASTER JOY
As Rev. Matthew Wilke was driving to sunrise service in Tonganoxie on Easter morning, he got the call his grandfather had died. “There was a moment of grief, but it turned to gladness,” he said. “In the sorrow, because of his faith and because of the hope of the resurrection, there was also joy.” Wilke said it was striking that his grandfather left on that note, and he discussed it during the service. “He kind of preached as he went out,” Rev. Wilke said. “It’s just kind of beautiful, and you find some comfort and encouragement in that, his witness at the very end. . . . In his dying, he just points us to everlasting life and our

hope in resurrection. It just was pretty cool.” Wilke knew his grandfather more as a grandpa than anything, but they connected on another level as well. “If there’s anybody who made me believe I could make a difference, it’s him.” Sometimes, Wilke would give his granddad a book he thought he might like or find useful, and he said the prolific reader would devour it in hours. His grandfather taught him the importance of study but also of being outwardly focused and in the world to help. “Transformation in people’s lives he believed happen in small groups where you make a kind of nonbiological family. . . . He knew that, and he was able to put the Bible in an approachable format so people could be in those groups and make that transformation.” While Bishop Wilke “was incredibly consistent in reading, writing ministry, in taking another step to push the church forward,” his grandson said, he also always was a grateful, joyful person. “His approach was to see the world like Jesus did, to treat people like Jesus would. . . . It’s a simple lesson. Anybody could do that. He just did it.” *Visitation is from 4 to 6 p.m. on May 5 at Miles Funeral Service in Winfield, and a funeral will be at 11 a.m. May 6 at First United Methodist Church in Winfield. The funeral will be live streamed by the church and at Great Plains Annual Conference UMC. Memorials may be made to the Richard and Julia Wilke Institute for Discipleship at Southwestern College.* **Carrie Rengers:** 316-268-6340, @CarrieRengers

FROM PAGE 1A DEFICIT

now, but in real numbers, those are real numbers for you.” A mill levy increase would be an additional \$11.50 on a homeowner’s bill for every \$100,000 of valuation. Wichita homeowners currently pay \$377.38 to the city for every \$100,000 of valuation on their home. That doesn’t include taxes from the state, school district and county governments. The mill levy for 2025 is 32.816 for the city of Wichita, 28.701 for Sedgwick County, 31.387 for Wichita Public Schools, 1.5 mills for the state of Kansas and an additional 20 mills for the school district’s general fund. Residential property owners who live in the Wichita school district pay a total of \$1,315.27 for every \$100,000 of valuation. Amounts for Wichita residents in other school districts would vary. For commercial property owners, the property tax rate is more than double, at \$25 for each mill levied by the city. Commercial properties pay \$2859.28 in property taxes for every \$100,000 of valuation; \$820.40 of that goes to the city of Wichita. A one-mill increase could generate around \$5 million for the city, according to city finance director Mark Manning. Adding a 1% sales tax in the city limits would generate much more revenue for the city, about \$100 million a year, according to Manning. Council member Dalton Glasscock suggested beginning a conversation on what a 1% sales tax would look like to pay for capital projects so that property owners aren’t the only ones footing the bill. The city has said it over-allocated for capital improvement projects for the coming years by about \$25 million. “How can we still seek revenue but make sure it’s in a more equitable way?” he said. Adding a 1% sales tax in the city could cost taxpayers much more money than raising the mill levy. For a family of four in the city, with a combined income of \$50,000, a 1% sales tax would be an estimated increase of \$173 a year, according to adjusted Internal Revenue Service data. On the other hand, Council member JV Johnston said, a sales tax would force suburban residents who commute to

Wichita to share in the cost of city services. “My concern is all these bedroom communities are using our services but not paying for any of it,” Johnston said. “They’re using our roads, a lot of times they’re using our libraries, our parks, not paying for any of it.” A mill levy increase could be approved by a majority of the council during its budget process. A 1% sales tax increase would have to be approved by voters. Considering election deadlines for this year, a referendum on a sales tax wouldn’t be able to happen in this year’s general election. Wichita does not now have a city sales tax. It asked voters for a 1% tax in 2014 to pay for a new water supply and several city departments. Voters overwhelmingly rejected the proposal. People who spend money in Sedgwick County do pay a 1% sales tax that goes toward infrastructure projects, which the city benefits from. Sedgwick County has also discussed adding an eighth of a percent sales tax to fund its cultural art and recreation programming, which includes the Sedgwick County Zoo and Exploration Place. That’s in hopes of reducing the county property tax rate. Wichita City Council members will continue discussing the budget, including how to address the projected deficit, at several of its meetings leading up to the budget vote later this summer.

Kylie Cameron:
ByKylieCameron

The latest news in your inbox
Our newsletters have something for everyone. Scan the code and subscribe.
qr.getne.ws/wic-email

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS
See an error or another problem with content in this edition? Report it by calling 1-888-905-2036. To report delivery or account issues, call 800-200-8906.

THE WICHITA EAGLE

CUSTOMER SERVICE
24 hours a day, 7 days a week
Contact our customer service center at
1-800-200-8906
or kansas.com/myaccount.

WEEKLY SUBSCRIPTION PUBLISHED RATES	
Wednesday, Friday and Sunday:	\$34.99/week*
Sunday:	\$34.99/week*
Wednesday/Sunday:	\$34.99/week*
Single-copy rates:	Daily \$3*/Sunday \$5.99*/Special Editions \$7.99/\$9.99.
Digital only, including Edition:	\$34.99 per week*
*plus applicable sales tax	

For your convenience, **your subscription will automatically renew** after the initial term at the current rate unless you tell us to cancel. Cancellations take effect at the end of your current subscription term. All subscription account payments are non-refundable and include applicable tax. Our content is delivered to you by various methods and formats. We reserve the right to substitute the delivery and format of your print subscription with an Edition subscription at any time. Notice of rate changes will be mailed or emailed to the subscriber billing/email address at least 30 days in advance of the change. A \$0.59 Supply Chain charge will be applied weekly. For subscribers that receive a mailed renewal bill, a \$4.99 printed bill fee will apply for each renewal period. All home delivery subscriptions will include delivery of the Thanksgiving Holiday Edition. An additional \$4.99 will be added to all subscriptions for each of these premium editions in 2025 for 4/13, 6/22, 8/24, 10/19 and 11/26. A \$9.99 fee will be applied for each special premium edition on 5/11/25 and 12/7/25. An additional \$9.99 will be added to all subscriptions for each of these premium editions in 2026 for 4/26, 7/26, 9/27, 11/25 and 12/27/26. You can cancel at any time by contacting Customer Service at 1-800-200-8906. Your subscription is subject to additional Terms of Service at <https://www.kansas.com/terms-of-service>.

ADVERTISE
Retail: 316-268-6371
Place a Classified Ad: 316-268-6000 or online at classifieds.kansas.com
Legals: legals@wichitaeagle.com
Obituaries: 316-268-6508, obits@wichitaeagle.com
EAGLE EXECUTIVES
Michael Roehrmann, Executive Editor
316-269-6753, mroehrmann@wichitaeagle.com
Marcia Werts, Managing Editor
316-268-6216, mwerts@wichitaeagle.com
Dion Lefler, Opinion Editor
316-268-6527, dlefler@wichitaeagle.com

The Wichita Eagle (ISSN 10463127) is published three times a week, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday by Wichita Eagle and McClatchy Co., 301 N. Main, Suite 1550, Wichita, KS 67202-2830 (by appointment only). Periodicals Postage Paid at Wichita, KS (USPS 12050). **Postmaster:** Send all UAA to CFS: NON-POSTAL & MILITARY FACILITIES: send address corrections to McClatchy 1601 Alhambra Blvd Suite 100 Sacramento, CA 95816. A McClatchy Newspaper

McClatchy