

Lackawanna Trail approves “safety net” budget



The Lackawanna Trail school board voted Monday evening to approve a preliminary budget that could potentially raise taxes in Wyoming County for 2015-16 by nearly seven percent.

It was also announced that board member Mark Lombardi of Dalton was stepping down. His resignation was accepted with regret.

“He will be greatly missed,” Vice President Ned Clarke said.

Regarding the budget, business manager David Homish said he was presenting a, “worst case scenario situation” to the board, which he expects will likely be drastically changed by its final form.

Under a worst case scenario, the millage rate could change in Wyoming County from 74 to 78.81 mills.

In Lackawanna County, it would go from 137.06 to 148 mills.

According to Homish, every February, the school board must vote on a referendum that says they will not raise taxes above the 2.5 percent Act 1 tax threshold.

Homish said that this year, with a new administration in the governor’s mansion, he was unsure of how much money, if any, would be coming from the state.

“I wanted to make a budget that purposefully went over the limit,” Homish said. “I’m using it as a safety net.”

According to Homish, “It’s way too early to draw up a budget,” but the State demands a preliminary budget before they can grant exceptions to the tax limit.

Those exceptions would be related to special education funding and retirement funds.

“Just in the last two days, over a thousand dollars got freed up,” Homish said. He added that the expenses had been over reported and revenue had been under reported for the purpose of the budget.

According to Homish, “It’s not even close.” He emphasized that the preliminary budget has no actual consequences at this point.

“I’m not saying it’s even going to go over the limit,” he said, “I have no idea at this point.”

The board also heard a presentation from Henry Sallusti from RBC Capital Markets concerning financing options available for a replacement for the elementary school roof.

According to Rick Kordish, the director of transportation, the roof is 24-25 years old.

“We have been doing preventative measures,” Kordish said, “We’ve been patching it ourselves.”

“It’s like driving a ‘96 car around,” Homish added, “It’s going to go someday.”

Sallusti presented three options for the school board that would provide \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million at 2 to 2.5 percent interest.

According to board member Clarke, the money would be kept as a separate line item in the budget and could only be used for big ticket expenses.

According to Homish, it would be better to get the money now while interest rates are low, then to wait for a potential emergency situation to occur when rates may be much higher.

Kordish added that the insulation in the school would also have to be changed, which would save money on energy costs.

Kordish also mentioned that the parking lot at the high school would have to be redone soon.

“It’s becoming a liability,” board member Joseph Strauch added.

In other business, the board also voted to add several names to the district substitute list. Included are Paul Zbegner, of Tunkhannock, for maintenance, Caitlin Harrison and Robert Pryal, of Archbald, for the elementary, and Leslie Nichols, of Fleetville, for biology.

The board also approved a second reading for the Naming Rights document concerning sponsored events and building names and the Acceptable Use of the Internet document as well as an updated 2015-2016 high school curriculum guide.