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Trail taxes to jump 3.2 mills

Lackawanna County property owners in the district will see an 8.95 mill increase

FACTORYVILLE – The Lackawanna Trail School Board approved a \$20.3 million budget that will see taxes in Wyoming County side of the district jump 3.23 mills and also jump 8.95 mills in the part of the district in Lackawanna County.

Board President David Thorne made the motion approve the budget of \$20,340,969.00, which was seconded by Joseph Ross.

The millage rate for Wyoming County property holders jumps to 77.87 and in Lackawanna County to 146.01.

Prior to a roll-call vote, however, Board Member Joseph Strauch addressed language in the state budget law that suggests that school districts “may delay passing their budget until 15 days after the approval of the state budget in Harrisburg.” Under normal circumstances districts must approve their budget and set their tax rates prior July 1. At the time of publication Harrisburg has yet to pass a state budget, with the state deadline being June 30.

Despite this language, President Thorne said that, were the board not to approve a budget, Lackawanna Trail would not be able to make payroll through the summer. This is because, without a set tax rate and budget, Trail would see no state subsidies and would have no tax money coming in. This sentiment was echoed by Keith Glynn, Trail’s Business Manager.

When the budget motion went to a roll-call vote it passed with eight affirming it and Strauch against. Strauch said he regrettably voted against the budget because it did not include funds to hire an Elementary Choral Instructor. “Without that Music Teacher I must vote no.”

The board also voted 8-1 to approve the “2015 Homestead and Farmstead Exclusion Resolution,” which grants a property tax exclusion for family’s whose dwelling satisfies the Commonwealth’s definition of a homestead or farmstead. The motion to approve the agreement we made by Board Member Adrian Bianchi and was seconded by Board Member Carol Selwood.

Strauch, who was the only dissenting vote, addressed the fact that Trail gives up \$226 in property taxes per property exclusion as a consequence of the exclusion resolution.

Nonetheless, according to Business Manager Keith Glynn the district receives \$532,000 from the state for approving the exclusion resolution.

Strauch, still looking for a way to fund the hiring of a new Music Teacher, asked if the district was giving up enough money to pay a teacher’s salary.

According to Glynn, the difference between what money is surrendered and what money is received by approving the resolution is “negligible” and “not enough to pay a new teacher’s salary.”

Strauch voted against the motion.

Board President Thorne also made the motion to approve 17 tuition waver students for the 2015-2016 school year. Selwood seconded the motion. The motion passed 8-1, with Strauch again voting no.

“We are adding 17 bodies into the district from non-residents and non-taxpayers,” said Strauch, “and this is against my principles.” Strauch continued by saying, “If these parents believe we are such a great district, which we are, they should move into the district... I am against all tuition waver.”

According to Business Manager Keith Glynn the district will actually bring in about \$10,000 in charter school money and additional state funding as a result of the increased enrollment.

The board “reluctantly” voted to approve Kindergarten teacher Mary DeNault’s request to take an educational sabbatical for the second semester of the 2015-2016 school year and the first semester of the 2016-2017 school year. Despite the fact that the board voted unanimously to approve the sabbatical request, many board members expressed reservations, indicating that their hands were tied.

According to Board Member Kevin Mulhern, the board “requested that DeNault take her sabbatical at a more opportune time.”

Dr. Mould echoed Mulhern’s sentiment, saying, “While I firmly believe in professional training and assisting faculty in improving their skills, I also believe in timing.”

Mould added, “this is not a good time to fund this type of training as we are searching our souls in terms of cutbacks in our faculty.”

Pennsylvania law enacted in the amended “Public School Code of 1949” ensures that teachers are entitled to a “leave of absence for professional development or sabbatical leave” at a percentage of their total salary. Trail will pay roughly \$30,000 for this sabbatical.

The motion to approve the sabbatical request was made by Selwood and seconded by Board Member Ned Clarke. The motion carried unanimously, with Thorne, Strauch, Mould, and Mulhern voting “reluctantly yes.”

The board approved the 2015-2016 Elementary School Handbook and Secondary Handbook.

Mulhern made the motion to approve the 2015-2016 Secondary Handbook, which was seconded by Dr. Mould. The motion carried 8-1 with Strauch again voting no.

The board voted unanimously to approve Tony Dalasio as Interact Club Adviser at a stipend of \$2100. They also voted unanimously to approve Ryan Laubach as Head Girl’s Volleyball Coach at a stipend of \$3450. Connie Harris was unanimously approved as Student Senate Adviser at a stipend of \$2100.

The board also accepted with regret the resignations of Assistant Wrestling Coach Jon Hickok’s and Interact Adviser Mary Zbegner.

The Lackawanna Trail School Board will meet again on July 13