

Trail Board to float \$3M note

Robert Baker

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Lackawanna Trail School Board agreed last Tuesday to float a tax anticipation note of \$3 million at a rate of two percent or less and for a period of roughly nine months so it could meet its local obligations while a budget stalemate remains in place in Harrisburg.

Board president David Thorne said, "It stinks that we are in this position to begin with."

Board member Kevin Mulhern said he wanted to ask district solicitor John Audi, "Can we sue the government for getting us here?"

He was told that Audi should be at the next board meeting so he could ask him then.

At the front end of the meeting which took place on Tuesday because of the Monday holiday for Columbus Day, the board meeting was moved from the board room to the elementary center gym to accommodate around two dozen members of the public who were present.

Around eight of the residents were members of a Factoryville Girl Scout troop who were there to find out if the district would host a Mental Health Awareness Day at the high school gym on May 26, with informational tables set up.

One of the scouts said she felt people needed to be aware of mental illness and the families which sometimes need help.

High school principal Mark Murphy told the girls, "I'd be happy to talk with you further."

He promised to give them a facility use sheet to fill out and said he would need to check the high school calendar to make sure nothing else was scheduled that day.

Board vice president Ned Clarke asked the scouts about where the idea originated, and one of them said "we were thinking about something that people weren't talking very much about.

Thorne applauded the girls for proper planning way ahead of the scheduled date. "Planning is the key," he said.

For about an hour, parents affiliated with the Trail Youth Soccer League presented information and asked questions about why Lackawanna Trail High School didn't support a varsity soccer team.

(A separate story about that issue is on page 17.)

As part of a consent agenda, there were four field trip requests that were approved:

*Dina Berrios' request to take cheerleaders to perform at a Philadelphia 76ers game on Mar. 16;

*Mary Belle Gilroy's request to take 50 art students to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Guggenheim Museum of Modern Art in New York City on Nov. 4;

*Anthony Dalasio's request to take 88 seventh and eighth grade students to Washington, D.C., on May 5-7; and

*Tom Lengel's request to take 30 ski club students to Stowe, Vt., on Jan. 28-30.

In his superintendent's report, Matt Rakauskas said he was pleased to see a new firm coming into the Lackawanna Trail School District, Crystal Windows and Doors, which is promising to bring 300 jobs to the region.

"That can only be a good thing," he said.

He also noted that curriculum director Tania Stoker was preparing a grant application for \$25,000 to pay for the security cameras installed around the elementary and high schools.

"We should know by December if we get it to reimburse costs," Rakauskas said.

Principal Mark Murphy introduced Grace Gallagher, a student, who said that the Pink Paws for a Cause campaign in honor of Lois Foley had raised \$6,425, and they didn't want to end the benefit but rather shift its focus to a dance next year with proceeds to maybe go toward a playground or playground equipment in Foley's memory.

Murphy gave an update on the school's Bring Your Own Devices policy and noted that teacher, Mrs. Nancy Brown, had accepted her first paper through Google Docs, noting a downside was there was "no red pen, but she liked that," he said.

Murphy also acknowledged that Homecoming would be coming up with a bonfire Thursday, Oct. 22, followed by pep rally and football game Friday, and Homecoming Dance in the school gymnasium Saturday.

Transportation director Dave Kordish acknowledged that next week would be bus safety week.

In other business, the board:

*Moved that Plan Con K with regard to athletic fields financing be approved for submission to the Pennsylvania Department of Education;

*Gave a second reading to a policy on student meal charging;

*Approved an additional substitute list;

*Appointed Nancy Brown as yearbook adviser;

*Accepted the resignation of Ethan Johnson as junior high wrestling coach and approved him as an assistant varsity wrestling coach;

*Moved that Lori Swanchak be approved as a volunteer girls' basketball coach.

Parents Plead for LT Soccer

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Around 12-15 parents of children involved in youth soccer showed up at last Tuesday's Lackawanna Trail School Board meeting to see about getting boys' and girls' soccer added to the menu of varsity sports now offered at the high school.

Jayson Prutzman presented the board with a petition with more than 100 signatures, and said he believed soccer was probably the least expensive of all sports to set up.

He noted that 168 youths were presently playing in the Trail Youth Soccer League, representing ages 4-17.

When asked by school board president David Thorne about how many were in grades 7-12, Prutzman said 28. But he also pointed out that a lot of kids don't even stay in it because they know the school doesn't support soccer.

He said his oldest son doesn't understand why the school doesn't have a sanctioned soccer program.

"We have to be their voice because the kids can't speak on this matter," Prutzman said.

He said a U12 travel group was started, but it's not like representing a school.

"My son wants to show his Lions' pride for the school," Prutzman said. "We know at the younger ages the kids learn teamwork and other life lessons."

He added that an organized program would also create the opportunity for kids to qualify for scholarships.

He told the board that the sport is very popular, noting that "On any given Saturday we may see 500 youths playing."

Prutzman said that Lackawanna Trail was one of the few school districts that don't have soccer, and said that a smaller district such as Old Forge "has both soccer and football."

Asked about costs, Prutzman said it was not difficult to calculate what schools are paying because it's on the Pennsylvania Department of Education website what each school is paying for each sport.

He threw out a \$22,000 figure, and said something comparable was spent at Mountain View where there are seventh grade, eighth grade, junior varsity and varsity teams.

"The totals are a drop in the bucket compared to what we spend for football," he said.

Prutzman said, "I know the budget is tight, and we're not expecting the school to shoulder the full burden of costs."

High school principal Mark Murphy thanked Prutzman for acknowledging the budget impasse in the state and a willingness to help.

Murphy added, "I don't think anyone here is fundamentally opposed to soccer."

Board member Kevin Mulhern asked if the district had looked into the possibility of teaming up with another school like Mountain View, with the suggestion that Mountain View students could play football and Trail students could potentially play soccer at Mountain View.

"That's not a route I'd like to see us go," Prutzman said, while acknowledging that Mountain View had a team that was "out of this world" with state titles to its credit.

"Truthfully, I'd like to see Trail have its own team," he added.

Board Vice President Ned Clarke said, "There's no question in my mind this board supports athletics and academics."

Parent Todd Westcott, who has been TYSL president for the past three years, also spoke up, noting he communicates regularly with 392 parents.

"I think there's an opportunity for us," he said. "We don't need lights, but could find some resources with a booster club. Right, wrong or indifferent if there are kids ready to play soccer, we'll find a way for them to do that."

Westcott added, "Right now I don't need more scheduling pressures, but I would be thrilled if this moved forward for our kids. I want to thank you for your time to hear us out."

Superintendent Matt Rakauskas acknowledged that he couldn't speak for the board, but could come back at one of the November meetings with a presentation.

President Thorne said he knew how passionate kids are about soccer, because his own son was there at one time.

But, he acknowledged his son was fully into the saxophone now, and wondered aloud how that would have changed if varsity soccer had been available.

Board member Mulhern asked the administration to poll students to see how many would be interested in soccer, and those numbers could be matched with the ones the league had of comparable age groups.

"They might be the same people," he said, or they could be different.