

### Trail taxes could jump 12 percent

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Lackawanna Trail School Board voted Monday to approve a final budget of \$20,399,197 for 2016-2017.

If the budget remains unchanged, school property taxes in the Wyoming County part of the district will increase by 12.5 percent, and by eight percent in the Lackawanna County portion of the district.

A \$20.3 million budget was approved last June with Wyoming County millage at 77.87 mills and Lackawanna County millage at 146.01.

By law, the budget must remain on public display for 30 days before the school board can give it final approval.

The real estate tax for the 2016-2017 school year is scheduled to be set at 88 mills (Wyoming County portion of the school district) and 158 mills (Lackawanna County portion).

However, business manager Keith Glynn explained after the meeting that the assessment could shift as much as one-half a mill in either county, depending on information on assessed property values the district receives before the budget is passed.

The vote to approve the budget was seven to one, with board member Joe Strauch casting the negative vote.

Strauch explained afterward that he voted no because the budget does not include money to hire a music teacher for the district to replace one who retired.

A potentially large increase in property taxes was announced by the board in March, following a presentation by Glynn, who explained that the district was facing a considerable shortfall, due to rising costs.

Glynn said Tuesday morning that millage increases in both counties would help the district realize \$800,000 in new revenue.

Another potential revenue source is a possible pay freeze being discussed between the district and the teachers, administration, and support staff.

The board voted seven to one - with member Joseph Ross voting no - to accept a Memorandum of Understanding between the district and the Lackawanna Trail Education Association - the teachers' union - regarding a pay freeze agreement. The MOU is being sent to the LTEA for approval.

"I just don't believe in the agreement," Ross said when asked why he voted against the proposal.

District Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas explained after the meeting that details are still being worked out on the proposals for pay freezes for the administration and support staff, which was why they were not on Monday's agenda.

The board also voted to hire Municipal Revenue Service, a law firm specializing in collecting delinquent taxes. Municipal will be paid a 6 percent fee of the \$951,500 owed to the district for back taxes, going back to 1993. Lackawanna Trail will receive \$550,000 up front from Municipal on closing, which the district will be able to use immediately, providing it with much-needed revenue.

In other financial matters, the board approved obtaining a \$6 million tax/revenue anticipation note from Fidelity Deposit and Discount Bank at a fixed rate of 1.39 percent. Repayment is due on June 30, 2017.

In other business, the board heard a presentation from Bob McTiernan, executive director of Intermediate Unit 19, who provided an overview of the NOLA cyber school program which the IU oversees.

Concerns have been previously expressed by the board and the public over the amount of money the district pays to support cyber schools and charter schools. Tania Ross, director of curriculum and resources, explained Monday that about 70 students locally are participating in cyber school or charter school programs.

McTiernan said the IU intends to contact the people to determine why they are using alternative education.

Through interviews and other methods, they hope to create models for the IU's cyber system that will allow it to better serve the public.

What they hope to create, McTiernan continued, is a 'hybrid model,' that will be able to do more in meeting peoples' needs.

High school principal Mark Murphy suggested that McTiernan also ask people how the cyber system they are now using falls short, and what could the IU do to address the situation. McTiernan thought that was a good idea and said it would be incorporated into the survey.

"We're going to collect data, analyze the data, brainstorm, and come up with ideas," McTiernan said.

Also:

\*Rakauskas reported that board's work session scheduled for June 6 has been canceled.

The next board meeting will be June 13, which will be a voting session, and there will be one meeting after that which will be June 27, also a voting session.

\*The board approved a second reading of Policy 823, regarding the use of Naloxone on people experiencing an opiate overdose.

\*The board voted seven to one to appoint Sweet Stevens Law Firm as solicitors for the 2016-2017 school year. Strauch, who voted no, said he believes the district should advertise for bids for the position.

\*The board voted seven to one to approve five days of summer employment for each of the guidance counselors for a total payment of \$6,814. Ross, who voted no, said he has never agreed to the proposal in his 12 years as a board member, explaining that he believes summer employment is part of the guidance counselor's job description.

\*The board approved the first reading of Policy 246, covering Student Wellness.

\*The board approved a resignation agreement between John Brander and the Lackawanna Trail School District.