

## Trail taxes on the rise

by Robert Baker

Published: June 27, 2017

Lackawanna Trail School Board approved a \$20.9 million budget for 2017-18 which will see taxes rise again both Wyoming and Lackawanna Counties.

The vote was 7-2 with board members Karl Beichler and Joe Strauch voting against it.

For property holders, taxes will rise 3.18 percent in Wyoming County from 88.78 mills to 91.61; and will increase 2.4 percent in the Lackawanna County side of the district from 158.56 mills to 162.43.

There was no discussion Monday night about what contributed to the increase although at previous meetings business manager Trail business manager Keith Glynn spoke to increases in health care costs for employees as well as the district's increasing contribution to the state retirement system.

The board members also addressed last winter that it had no appetite for raising taxes beyond a state Department of Education imposed index, as it did last year when taxes rose a hefty 13.9 percent in Wyoming County and 8.6 percent in Lackawanna County.

The budget was \$445,000 above the current year's.

Also on Monday, the board

\*approved Kevin Mulhern to serve as board secretary, and Michael Mould as board treasurer to 4-year terms at a stipend of \$600 a year. Both said they would return the stipend to the district with one-third the proceeds to go to Friends of Music; one-third to the Booster Club; and one-third to the Arts Alive program, should Lackawanna Trail continue to be involved in it.

\*tabled a contract for a bookkeeper/confidential secretary at a starting rate of \$20.44 an hour.

\*hired Sarah Richard as a special education elementary life skills teacher at an annual salary of \$55,200.

\*hired special education math teacher Jessica Bentley at an annual salary of \$55,200.

\*approved Judy McCullough as a school nurse at \$16.62/hour.

\*appointed Harry Powell as athletic director at \$16,000 a year.

\*approved Mason Stiver as percussion instructor at a stipend of \$1,975.

\*approved Brink Powell as dramatics director at a stipend of \$2,100.

\*accepted the resignations of Gary Wilmet as junior high girls basketball coach; and Tony Dalasio as Interact adviser.

\*granted unpaid leaves to Debra Joyce next October and Kenneth Yerkes through Aug. 31.

\*approved tuition waivers for Trail staff and faculty for 22 students who are not residents of the district. Board member Strauch voted no on the matter saying it was wrong to burden taxpayers with this expense.

In the administrator/board member reports,

\*Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas congratulated the Class of 2017 on its graduation. He said that on July 5 at 6 p.m., there would be a disciplinary review meeting to allow the public input on school policies in the student handbooks which are expected to be approved at the board's next scheduled meeting July 10.

\*Board member Ned Clarke congratulated Matt Kinback on his successes at the state track meet, and also thanked Kinback's coaches.

\*High School principal Mark Murphy also acknowledged the Class of 2017, and faculty who had recently retired. He noted that maintenance was already heavily invested in getting the high school building ready for a new school year and thanked Dave Kordish and staff for that.

\*Elementary principal Brian Kearney recognized the K'Nex team which for a second year in a row brought home a state title from Harrisburg. He also noted that Kelley Services which had supplied substitutes this past year recognized Lackawanna Trail as the 'School of the Year' for its support. He said the Elementary Center's produce market will continue during the year with the next one set for July 11. He also acknowledged that LTEC's librarian was making available a Lackawanna County Library system card which would give all students access to K-12 tutors.

\*Special education coordinator Amie Talarico said that an extended school program would be offered July 10-Aug. 10 with new hire Brenda Richard involved with teaching.

\*Maintenance coordinator Kordish thanked the board for purchase of Transfinder software which would improve record keeping. He also noted that PennDOT had promised him the now-closed bridge closest to the elementary center parking lot would be reopened by the first week of August.

\*Curriculum director Tania Ross took issue with a Scranton Times-Tribune report Sunday which had the district's quality rating at 50 percent. She said the data was a year old and incorrect, noting that in the future the state department of education would be doing readiness indexes which would be helpful to the public. Ross also noted the district received an \$1800 grant from the Highmark Foundation for the replacement of seven cots.

In the public comment, one resident asked the board and administration to actively be involved with a Junior Achievement program, financial literacy training which had been in the schools two years ago, and also 'Architects in the Schools.' Ross acknowledged that the elementary center's teams in the K'Nex Challenge had been actively engaged with architects in the community.