

# Lackawanna Trail proposed budget includes tax increase

## Tax rate might change before final budget deadline of June 30

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With rising expenditures across education, school districts are being forced to make some tough financial decisions and Lackawanna Trail is no different.

At a school board work session on May 5, Lackawanna Trail business manager Keith Glynn presented the district's proposed 2025-26 budget, which includes a 6.1% tax increase for Lackawanna County residents, a 3.05% tax increase for Wyoming County residents and expenses of \$25,626,868. The school district has until June 30 to adopt a final budget for the 2025-26 operating year, and can make changes over the next month.

"I wish I was coming to this board with better news, but it was a tough year in terms of expenditures," Glynn said. "I wish I could control costs but I can't. The budget & finance committee will continue to look at this budget to find ways to reduce expenses where possible to lower the increase."

According to Glynn, the tax increases are necessary to meet a balanced budget. Without the increases, Lackawanna Trail would be required to cut \$550,000 from the budget in order to have a balanced budget. If the budget is passed as is currently proposed, Lackawanna County property owners will see a 11.99 mill increase and Wyoming County property owners will see a 2.81 mill increase. A mill is \$1 for every \$1,000 of the assessed value of a property. Approximately \$137,500 in revenue is added for each percentage of a tax increase.

The overall expenses show an increase of over \$1 million from last year's budget. Some of the reasons include medical insurance increasing by 18%, and increases in supplies — both educational and maintenance.

As is the case with every year's budget, Lackawanna Trail is not aware of how much state funding it will be receiving as Pennsylvania's State Budget has not been passed by the Legislature. Glynn said last year's state funding amount came in lower than initially thought, and no matter what amount Lackawanna Trail receives "it won't be enough."

“Right now what the state is giving us is barely covering the costs of the basics of education,” he said. “It’s anyone’s guess as to what we will get this year in terms of funding, but I wouldn’t have high expectations.”

School board members expressed frustration with the state legislature’s budget process and its funding of public schools. The legislature is supposed to have its budget passed by June 30, but typically does not meet that deadline. The 2024-25 state budget was signed into law by Gov. Josh Shapiro on July 11, 2024.

“It’s always funny how we need a budget passed by June 30, but the state can take however long they need,” board member Adrian Bianchi said. “It really hampers us a school district when we’re trying to get our budget process done.”

Glynn also advised against dipping into the district’s fund balance to balance the budget instead of raising taxes.

Lackawanna Trail School District has until June 30 to adopt a final budget, and will vote on a budget at its June meeting.

The district will also make some fund balance assignments for future possible expenditures. From its unassigned fund balance, the district assigned \$250,000 to future capital projects and another \$250,000 to future textbook and curriculum costs. Some monies were also reassigned: \$500,000 was reassigned from future pension increases to future classroom refurbishment; and \$400,000 was reassigned from future charter school tuition increases to future capital projects.

The Lackawanna Trail High School Marching Band will also be getting new uniforms for the first time in over 30 years. The uniforms will be purchased from Fruhauf Uniforms Inc. in the amount of \$54,611.72 from an unassigned fund balance. The uniforms will arrive before the start of the 2025 football season in August.

In other business, the board will vote on:

The appointments of: Dr. Rajan Mulloth as the school district physician for the 2025-26 school year; Brittany Young as an independent contractor BCBA services for the 2025-26 school year; Jessica Reed as a short-term elementary special education substitute for the remainder of the school year; Valerie Lewis as a short-term Family & Consumer Science substitute for the remainder of the school year; Stephanie Cook as a full-time maintenance II employee; Jessica Reed as a full-time paraprofessional; Michelle Fahey as assistant varsity field hockey coach; and Ed Laytos as a volunteer softball coach.

The retirements of: Lynn Gower as cafeteria manager effective June 20; and Maryann Puerner from her maintenance II position effective May 29.

The resignation of Ashlinn Simpson as Inclusion Club advisor, Unified Track & Field and Unified Bocce Head Coach effective June 30.

The third reading and adoption of the following policies: 218-Student Discipline; 218.1-Weapons; 218.2-Terroristic Threats; 236.1-Threat Assessment; and 247-Hazing.