

Lackawanna Trail mulling hefty tax hike

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FACTORYVILLE — Lackawanna Trail School Board voted Monday to approve a final budget of \$20.4 million for 2016-17.

If the budget remains unchanged, school property taxes will increase by 8 percent in the Lackawanna County portion of the district and by 12.5 percent in the Wyoming County part 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. A mill is equal to \$1 in tax for every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

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 in Wyoming County and 158 mills in Lackawanna County.

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 7-1, with board member Joe Strauch casting the no vote. He 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 Mr. Glynn, who explained that the district was facing a considerable shortfall, due to rising costs. Mr. 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 7-1 — with member Joseph Ross voting no — to accept a memorandum of understanding between the district and the Lackawanna Trail Education Association regarding a pay freeze agreement. The memorandum is being sent to the teachers union for approval.

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

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