

**Trail tries to hold line on taxes**Robert Baker / Published: May 15, 2019

The Lackawanna Trail School Board made good Monday night on its promise to try to hold the line on taxes to support a proposed final budget for 2019-20.

The vote was unanimous for a proposed $21.6 million budget which business manager Keith Glynn said included a roughly 0.6 percent tax increase across the district.

For property owners in Lackawanna County the proposed increase (1.6 mills) was 0.97 percent. Their tax bill, if the budget is adopted in late June is 167.28 mills.

One mill represents a $1 in tax for every $1,000 in valuation of one’s property.

In Wyoming County, property owners could see, if the proposed budget is adopted, a 0.17 percent increase in taxes which would add 0.16 mills to the present 93.8 millage rate.

Along with the tax increase, the board voted the elimination of the district’s per capita tax which assesses $10 per adult in the district, and in some quarters was considered a nuisance tax that became more costly to collect with each passing year.

Glynn said the new taxes would hopefully generate around $120,000 budget.

The proposed budget includes increases in funding for basic education and special education, totaling around $75,000.

There are cost savings across the board, too, Glynn said, including with in-state tuition and travel reductions. The proposed budget also includes adding Chromebooks to both the elementary center and high school and replacing some of the Smartboards.

The high school would invest in servers to back up its infrastructure, the business department would replace its aged out lab and the business office would request a personnel module.

A new controller for the high school HVAC system is also included in the budget, as well as new weight room equipment and band instruments to invest in both sides of extracurriculars, Glynn said.

The school board also approved a resolution authorizing third party fees to be added to outstanding debt due to the district.

In a significant change, the board approved a financial services contract through June 30, 2022, with PS Bank which essentially moves all banking matters of the district most of which previously had been the domain of First National Bank.

FNB closed its only bank in the district - in Nicholson - in April.

Glynn indicated at the board’s May 6 work session that FNB only planned to renew its sponsorship of the high school auditorium if its banking relationship with the school district continued.

It was not clear whether PS Bank was considering naming rights to the auditorium.

\*\*\*Janice Bevacqua from PS Bank was at the meeting and said she looked forward to working with the district.

Other matters approved by the board:

\*$24,000 purchase of a 2012 Dodge 5500 Dump Truck from Factoryville Borough.

\*Advertising rates for the 2019-20 school year in the high school and elementary center gyms. This includes $250 for 3x4, space, $300 for 4x6 space, and an annual renewal cost of $75.

\*A one-year naming rights renewal for the high school library with Tri-County Insurance for $2,500.

\*A 2019-20 special education services contract with the Northeastern Educational Intermediate Unit.

\*A maximum of five days of summer employment for three guidance counselors, totaling $5,865.65.

\*The appointment of Kelly Services for substitute teacher and support staff services for the 2019-20 school year.

\*A first reading of Policy 251: Homeless Students.

\*Adoption of Policy 806: Child Abuse.

\*The appointment of Dr. Rajah Mulloth as the district physician for the 2019-20 school year at a stipend of $10,000.

\*Tuition waivers for 21 non-resident students for the 2019-20 school year. Board president David Thorne said they were children of District employees.

\*A contract for Tara Crum as the confidential administrative assistant at the rate of $20.85/hour.

\*Acknowledge the retirements of paraprofessional Gail Wydeen, effective June 11, and library assistant Dorothy Shaw at the end of the 2018-19 school year.

\*The appointment of Lauren Hales to teach for the extended school year, July 8-Aug. 8.

\*Retroactively approved unpaid medical leave for Matthew Zumbach (March 4 and April 2).

But, the board denied retroactively approving unpaid medical leave for Rebekah King (on April 24); and denied a retroactive unpaid leave of absence (May 9-21) for long-term substitute Jessica Norris.

School board member Joe Strauch spoke to his involvement with ‘Advocacy Day’ in Harrisburg where school board members from around the state have an opportunity to meet with state legislators in Harrisburg. He said cyber charter funding and the state budget were major discussion points.

Board president Thorne noted the next board meeting would be June 10, but the final budget would not be approved until another meeting in late June.

In the administrators’ reports:

-LTEC Principal Brian Kearney noted that Friday was an in-service day, and the school’s K’Nex team would be off to Harrisburg to compete in states; the school’s band and chorus concert would be at the high school May 21; there would be a ROARFest May 31 during school; and 6th grade recognition would be June 11.

-Records Management Principal Rebekah King said details for the Lackawanna Trail Cyber Academy had been worked out and she spoke to marketing strategies that could be employed.

-High school principal Mark Murphy noted standardized testing was ending and he had a “good feeling” about students’ performance. He said a junior and senior high National Honor Society induction service would take place Thursday; the school finished first, second and third in the Envirothon and the top team would be at Johnstown for states; and that commencement would be June 14.

-Special Education director Aimee Talarico spoke about filing a report with the state; and also spoke to the Unified special track participation which Trail was a part of. She gave a shout-out to the Wyoming County Press Examiner for its May 8 coverage of the Unified program with pictures that distinguished how the activity was different from a Special Olympics.

-Bus/Maintenance Manager Rick Kordish spoke of Doplar software which was employed a year and a half ago and is clearly now showing its value.

-Business Manager Glynn thanked the board for its approval of the proposed budget, and noted it would be available for public inspection for 30 days. He added that he didn’t expect massive changes before the final budget is up for a vote in June.

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