

School going for mill levy override election

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Holyoke School District Re-1J will be taking a mill levy override question to the voters in November.

Considerable time was devoted to discussion of a mill levy election at the July 17 board retreat. At the July 20 board meeting, detail of the decision and process were discussed further.

Board president Dan Kafka said the board is unified in the decision that this is the time to ask the voting public for additional funding through a mill levy election. He emphasized that doesn't necessarily mean all are in agreement about the election, but are unified in saying it's time to go to the people with the question.

A mill levy override involves a property tax increase that is approved by the voters. Specific dollar amounts or mill levy increase have not been determined, but will be clear for the voters to review before casting their ballots in the Nov. 2 election.

Kafka said the board anticipates two mill levy override questions. One will provide for funding for capital and/or technology for a designated number of years. The other will be for operational needs, to include such things as salaries.

Specific timelines (such as 10 years or five years) will be placed on the mill levy increase questions, as well.

At this point, the board has given Supt. Bret Miles the authority to file an intent to participate in the November election with Phillips County Clerk Beth Cumming.

At the Aug. 3 meeting, the board anticipates authorizing the superintendent to work with bond counsel to formulate questions for the ballot.

At the Aug. 17 board meeting, they will approve the ballot questions. From there, Kafka emphasized the board can provide information but can't go out and campaign.

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Community members interested in assisting with the campaign are encouraged to contact Supt. Miles who will have a great amount of information.

Kafka emphasized the importance of properly identifying how the extra moneys will be used, in order to educate voters before they make a decision.

Numerous cuts have been made over the past few years, and board members feel it's time to involve the community through this mill levy election.

Details on a master facility plan that is in progress will also play into the school's finance scenario. Miles said that plan will be presented Aug. 17.

Board member Jeff Tharp has been pleased with the community involvement on the district budget and facilities committee, which he serves on.

From that committee, he's comfortable the infrastructure is in good shape. However, specifics which can't be neglected nor ignored involve the impact technology has or will have on educating Holyoke students.

Tharp also cited the ongoing effort to reduce costs.

Kris Camblin noted teachers got a raise, which is important. Linda Jelden said teachers are the biggest influence on students, adding the district needs to retain quality of staff.

Kim Killin said she hopes the public will see this mill levy override as an investment in the community—not just the school.

Laura Krogmeier pointed out the board is seven individuals with their own perspectives and

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concerns about asking the community to support this.

As a group, Krogmeier said through budgeting and the lack of technology, they see the need to come together as a team—even if they're not excited about having to ask the community to help.

Kafka added they're a fiscally conservative group. He said if they're able to take this to a vote and tell the public how much they've shrunk and what they've had to cut, they have a valid question to ask the community.

While talking about the 1992 Taxpayers' Bill of Rights (TABOR) shrinking government, Kafka pointed out TABOR gives the ability to go to the public to vote on a tax increase.

"We're honoring TABOR," said Kafka, noting they've come to a need and are asking the community.

"We need to validate why we're asking and then just put the question out to the people," he added.

What does the community want its school to look like? This mill levy override election will allow for protection of some of those values.

Tharp mentioned the budget and facilities committee, which includes community members, adds oversight and accountability to the financial status. The committee gives a certain comfort level for overseeing the school's financial situation.

Retreat discussed

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While much of the July 17 board retreat was devoted to mill levy override discussion, other topics were also reviewed effectively.

Kafka noted this board works well together, and that was evident at the retreat.

Other retreat topics included goals for the coming year and progress on current goals. Discussion also included working with the Foundation and the desire to get a master facility plan in place. The board also reviewed the superintendent's entry plan.