Pros and cons of a mill levy override were pondered at a March 3 work session of Holyoke Re-1J Board of Education, following the regular board meeting. In a mill levy override, a ballot question allows voters to approve or disapprove additional property tax levied specifically for the school district. Still in the research phase, a mill levy override will be evaluated by a committee of community members, with board members Linda Jelden and Kendon Olofson also serving.

Board members were each asked to come up with three to five names for committee consideration, and a group will be organized soon.

Jelden opened pro/con discussion Tuesday by noting if the mill levy override is ballot consideration for the 2009 election, the process needs to start immediately.

She cited the board is also in the midst of a superintendent search, which involves a time commitment. She said she still maintains before going to the community to ask for money, there needs to be more education on what's been done and considered in the budget process.

Dan Kafka cited the district is at a crossroads. An elementary art position has been cut for 2009-10, and he said if the district doesn't get more money, it will have to continue to cut.

Two things Kafka said would help in a mill levy override election are: not to be in a recession and to have a solid superintendent in place.

Kafka said he thinks questions have to be asked about transportation, technology and general fund. "I don't think we can wait," he added, saying more money is needed now.

Jeff Tharp said the problem he sees is once you begin cutting and cutting deeply, the issue with declining enrollment can become worse, and there's a possibility the school district will become one the community can't be proud of.

"There's inherent value in the community taking pride in the school district," added Tharp. He agrees Re-1J is at a crossroads where the district will start to look different.

Being conservative, Kafka said it's hard for him to want to raise taxes. He emphasized the importance of having clear numbers and a clear direction of what folks are going to get for their money in a mill levy override ballot question.

He suggested posing a question for the community to help the board understand if they want more cuts or if they have other ideas. "We knew this was coming at some point," said Kafka.

"Now we're starting to hurt," said Kendon Olofson. He noted there are so many things the district can't do because it's short on money. "We need to be adding, not just holding on to what we've got."

Jon King acknowledged the district is in a crunch, but pointed out a newly-hired superintendent will not have time to get acclimated to the community to lead an effort to pass a mill levy override.

It was noted in the district's bond election 10 years ago, it was the board who took the lead, rather than the superintendent. School employees, including the superintendent, can give information, but can't devote work-day time to working with the "yes-vote" committee.

The yes-vote effort must be from a civilian committee, making phone calls and promoting a mill levy override endeavor.

Kris Camblin asked about the size of such a committee. Supt. Stephen Bohrer suggested an executive committee of five and a full committee of around 24.

Josh Magden of George K. Baum Company would start coming out for some of the monthly meetings, noted Dr. Bohrer.

Magden spoke to the board Feb. 10, highlighting his com-pany's work with school districts to organize various types of revenue elections, including mill levy and bond elections.

Kafka said he's received calls recently indicating people feel it's time to go for the mill levy

override.

Bohrer said he would encourage pursuing it because the money is needed now and if it fails, it can be tried again the next year.

Board members liked the idea of getting a committee together and of identifying areas of need, such as technology, transportation, roof and operational deficits.

It was emphasized this is just a research committee at this time, as no official decision has been made as to whether the 2009 ballot will carry the mill levy override question.