

Part of school's mill levy override will sunset in 2015

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Budgeting in Holyoke School District Re-1J is difficult at best for the 2014-15 preliminary budget, which must be adopted by June 30.

Not only is the state school finance act not finalized, but part of the local mill levy override, which passed in 2010, will sunset in 2015. Discussion on the budgeting process was conducted at the April 23 meeting of the Board of Education.

Superintendent Bret Miles said it appears that a small increase in state funding will return to the district through the Legislature. That is still in the Senate for a final decision.

Voters in Holyoke School District approved a mill levy override of 7.5 mills in November of 2010. Of that total, 4.0 mills was approved through 2020, while 3.5 mills will sunset in December of 2015 if an election has not been successful.

The 2014-15 budget will be passed with all 7.5 mills included and funded through the 2010 override. However, the board is very conscious of the challenge in adding costs this year without knowing if that revenue stream will be there two years out if the mill levy override sunsets or goes away.

Board member Dennis Herman, who also serves on the Budget and Facilities Committee, emphasized the board's need to evaluate if new funds from the state are recurring or one-time as they project budget numbers.

Herman said he feels a successful mill levy override needs to occur this November.

As the board looks at budget parameters, Michelle Van Overbeke noted that these are just guidelines. However, she pointed out that without a mill levy override extension through an election, they're looking to make budget decisions based on the fate of an election that they won't have answers to until after it has been conducted.

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Several options could be considered for a mill levy override election.

If the board chooses to put a mill levy question on the ballot this November, Miles said they would need to do a call for election either in June or the first meeting in July. Technically, he said they have until the first meeting in August, but he feels it would be better to make a plan closer to adoption of the budget so they have more time to prepare.

Consideration for placing a mill levy override question on the November ballot will be an action item at the May 6 school board meeting.

Budget parameters were discussed briefly for 2014-15, but without the final word on the state school finance act, parameters could not be finalized.

Just to get started, Miles noted a preliminary budget will be built using a student count of 582, less than one pupil increase from 2013-14.

Budget considerations in the areas of compensation, equipment, supplies and personnel will be highlighted more specifically when the board can adopt parameters.

A reserve balance that is approaching what the board has considered a floor at \$1.2 million is also a consideration when it comes to budgeting.

In reviewing the third-quarter financial report, Miles told the board that both revenue and expenditures are tracking as expected. He said finances will be carefully watched as they finish the year to make sure the ending fund balance is protected as much as possible.

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