

6/11/2008

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Daniel Boone tax hike questioned

The Daniel Boone School Board has fielded questions about why it's planning to raise taxes by 1.4 mills.

The proposed \$47.5 million budget would raise the tax rate to 27.65 mills. The owner of a property assessed at \$100,000 would have to pay \$2,765 in school taxes.

The board expects to officially approve the budget June 23.

Comment: John Salaneck III told the board at its meeting Monday night that a version of the proposed budget on the district's Web site didn't give clear information about where some of the money would be going.

He also asked why a tax increase is necessary since the budget allows for \$3.1 million to be set aside for savings and the state budget is expected to give the district more money.

"Aren't these the times when we should be tightening the purse strings and tightening the belts rather than raising taxes?" Salaneck asked.

Superintendent, David H. Robbins said the state budget hasn't been passed yet and isn't expected to be by the end of June.

He also noted that the state and federal governments contribute only 29 percent of the district's budget and said principals and other administrators have been asked to keep costs down.

"Building budgets have been frozen for the last four years," said Robbins, who was attending his last meeting prior to his retirement. "Technology has been the same for five years."

Nelson L. Ott Jr. also said the district should cut costs.

He and Salaneck are Union Township supervisors but said they weren't speaking to the school board in that role.

Ott, who runs the Geigertown Greenhouse in Union, suggested the district study ways to cut utility costs.

"You can cut costs, and I'm not saying you need to cut teachers' salaries or anything like that," he said. "My business, we're doing it right now."

Board member Richard C. Fidler said cutting costs is difficult with the new Monocacy Elementary Center opening this fall.

"We all realize that gas prices are going up," he said. "The expenses for the district are going up also."

Plus, taxpayers will see money come back to them from state gambling income, Fidler said.

Robbins pointed out that among 15 school districts in Berks County, Daniel Boone spends the 14th-lowest amount per student: \$12,540.

And since 2004, the district has saved \$1.2 million by watching its energy use, assistant superintendent Ann Marie Traynor said.

The board suggested that Salaneck meet with Fidler and district business manager, Robert P. Bruchak to go over the budget.

Board member Andrew Basile suggested that the district look into using alternative energy sources, such as wind and solar power, and get grants to help cover the cost.

- By Rebecca VanderMeulen