

SPECIAL PUBLIC MEETING
JT SCHOOL DISTRICT #342
CULDESAC JSD #342

The Board of Trustees held a special public meeting for levy input discussion on Wednesday, December 7, 2011 in the School Library as posted. Those in attendance Chairman Cecil Martin, Vice-chairman Lori Zenner, Trustees Richard Grant, Kathryn Bomar and Bryce Scrimsher, Superintendent Darrell Olson, Clerk Loretta Hammond-Nichols, 12 patrons and four staff members.

Chairman Cecil Martin called the meeting to order stating the purpose of the meeting is for public input regarding levy discussion. Mr. Martin thanked those for coming and asked Superintendent Olson to review the proposed state funding figures and expenses for this coming year. Mr. Martin was interested in determining if a multi-year levy option would be supported.

Superintendent reviewed the proposed state funding estimate with a comment that the legislature has not met to determine the actual funding. These expense figures are status quo operational numbers and 3% less in revenue due to the state of the economy. The surplus that is being discussed for state revenue will first be used to replenish their rainy day fund before distribution to the schools. The funding unit calculation is down by .5 for the M&O due to declining enrollment and this year we are utilizing a big portion of the fund balance to fill in the holes from operating on state dollars without any local support after the levy failed. We have made staffing cutbacks the last several years. Classroom supplies and materials have been cutback as well these past years. The estimated revenue for state funding is about \$826,000.00 and the expenses for this year are expected at about \$1,209,000.00. The difference to discuss for levy is \$383,000.00. I don't believe the community would support that amount in a request do to failing a \$350,000.00 and then a \$250,000.00 levy earlier this year. The need is for several years until the economy turns around again.

Chairman remarked that figures show a need of \$383,000.00 for this year and until the legislature meets we will not know the actual numbers in the spring. We need to look at setting the levy and when to run it at the December meeting. We have March or May to pick and the sooner the better in case it fails in order to run it again. August is pushing the deadline as the request to the County deadline is in September. The sooner we know the better for budget and staff purposes. The levy dollars will not be collected until January 2013.

Patron asked regarding funding units for staffing and that May might be better after legislature has met so the school has the numbers they need for budgeting before asking for levy money.

Superintendent replied that 11 units provide three for elementary staff and eight secondary staff. It would be better to have the levy passed in March for staffing contracts.

Trustee Richard Grant commented that if it fails in March they would have the opportunity to try again in May. Last year the Levy failed in May and again in August which was just before the County September deadline for publishing the tax statements.

Trustee Bryce Scrimsher noted that the Board wait until the figures from the State are back in the spring then the levy amount could be reduced with a better chance to pass. March election is by mail-in ballot and May election the voters go to vote at the polls. If the levy fails we will not have enough to run the school on State dollars alone.

Superintendent explained that the legislature is not done until May which is last minute for running the levy.

Chairman commented that with state dollars the quality of school will be diminished with more cutbacks that will hurt programs and reduce staffing again. If we cannot deliver a quality education then we need to make some difficult decisions and do the best thing for our students. What amount is the community willing to support? The \$350,000.00 and \$250,000.00 levy requests failed. Would a \$200,000.00 or \$175,000.00 levy pass or even something lower? If so, at what cost to the quality of the education that we could offer to our students? Do we keep

the doors open or look to find an alternate solution?

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I do not want to hand out a diploma to students who will not be prepared properly for the outside world. The community needs to put up or shut up if they want to keep their school. Increased enrollment or a better economy is needed to turn the state funding around for the school.

Staff replied that the students do receive a quality education and to graduate they have to pass the same standards and tests as any other school. Our school may not have the most desirable students but these same students would be lost in a larger school system without the special attention that they receive in a small school. We have a purpose and that is to serve these students so they can be successful.

Patron remarked that they do not envy the Board decision and noted that it can't be made by emotions but with financial dollar and cents bottom line. The economy does not look good for the next few years and with people out of jobs they can't afford to support a levy for over \$200,000.00 to \$250,000.00 levy. This amount will not fill all the holes in the budget but a two year levy would help give stability. The impact of the economy has people struggling to pay their bills but voting down the levy will not be the answer to avoid taxes.

Staff member asked what items makes up the Board/District/School/Business portion of the Budget?

Superintendent responded that the Board expenses include the annual audit of about \$25,000.00, annual training/travel and legal fees. District is the Superintendent and Technology network administration costs. The School portion is for Principal and Secretary with student data software costs. Business section is for Clerk/Treasurer and accounting software costs.

Patron asked what the cost of the levy rate would be if passed. Previous levy rate estimate for the \$175,000.00 levy that expired was about \$365 per \$100,000.00 market value. It would be nice to break down the different rates for the requests and what the levy is paying for in more specific details.

Patron concerned about the computers for students that Mr. Luna has asked for and how to pay for them.

Superintendent Olson replied that the classroom technology will first go to staff and then following years to students. Currently our district is ahead of the technology as we have computers for students in all our classes. The next step is paying for the on-line classes that students need. Last year we actually had a student who would have finished her Senior year with the opportunity to take college classes on-line.

Chairman asked if the patron was referring to the laptops that were to follow the student through high school and that has not been implemented yet.

Staff explained that the quality of education at Culdesac is that the sky is the limit since every student has on-line access if needed. IDLA classes are offered to our students every semester and with the small numbers, staff can help the students most any time.

Why do other schools tax levy for more pay less taxes for the larger levy?

Our districts property market value is lower with most of the land Tribal which is not on the tax role calculation. Also the lack of business in the town does not create a big tax base to draw from like area schools in small towns that have large business tax base to draw from.

Patron asked that the Board have a Plan B in case the levy does not pass again for next year.

Chairman noted that the options to discuss would be to keep the doors open with just State dollars, consolidate with another area school or pay tuition to attend Lewiston. Boise has discussed a code change that would provide the opportunity for schools to consolidate with another school that resides in the same county rather than one with an

adjacent boundary. Due to economy issues that discussion did not go far. Years ago the discussion of consolidation included one school district per county.

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Staff asked if administration costs could be shared with another district? It would be good to split the cost.

Chairman explained that both districts would need to agree and neither of them needing a full time administrator for that to work. Both administrators would be half time for that to work. If we do not provide adequate pay for staff then we will have a revolving door without any stability. It will be a challenge for the Board to keep long term staff due to the economy. It would be tough to make even more cuts to this status quo proposal. We need to have our ground work done for an alternative option. We have been accused of being negative but I believe we are being truthful by not hiding our heads in the sand and willing to talk about the hard decisions that need to be made. We need to quit kidding ourselves and face reality by passing a levy to fight to keep the school or talk consolidation. We need to be more aggressive.

Superintendent noted that the projected budget is still bare bones.

Trustee Lori Zenner remarked that the Board has tried for the last three to four years different options to keep the school open. People have accused the Board of trying to shut the school doors when the options have not succeeded. We need the levy to pass to keep the school here.

Trustee Richard Grant asked the patrons to call their legislature and put pressure on them to fund education.

Staff asked how they could help get the word out to the community regarding the levy request for the school?

Chairman responded that the PTSA and volunteers make phone calls, go door to door and encourage everyone to vote. Use the information to educate and answer questions about the school needs and how important it is the levy pass to keep our school here in their own community. They can't avoid school taxes. If they don't want to pay for Culdesac, then they will be paying to the district where the students are sent after leaving here. Remind parents to register to vote. If after the election we fail due to a low turnout of voters we may have another chance at running another levy later. If we fail due to a large turnout, then the people have spoken and we need to look at other alternatives.

Trustee Bryce Scrimsher asked that we run a levy at an amount that will pass so we don't run on state dollars next year.

If we wait until May for the state funding information, we may be able to reduce the levy request. The May election is done at the polls versus mail-in ballots where we could receive more no votes. We need to get the community the hard facts with the information regarding the budget needs.

Trustee Kathy Bomar believes that the levy request should be \$200,000.00 to \$250,000.00. The school needs books as our books are ten years old.

Chairman agreed since the Principal at the last meeting discussed the need for English, Math and Science books with a cost of about \$60,000.00 that needed to be ordered for this year with other subjects to follow for next year. The Board and Administration would be able to find some stability in a two year levy. Chairman noted that staff contracts and budget deadlines are tough when you wait until May.

Superintendent explained that some texts were being ordered this year using the cash reserve. After this year the reserve will be depleted and if the levy fails this next spring, the school will only be running on state dollars for next year.

Chairman asked the patrons for their preference regarding the amount of the levy and support of a multi-year.

Patron comments: two year levy, two year at \$350,000.00, two year with more information sent out to the public,

two year with explanation of the school operating on reserves with state dollars this year and the depletion of the reserves, two year and run in it March, two year at \$250,000.00, two year and wait until May for \$200,000.00, better have a Plan B in place if the levy fails, and if levy fails in March then run it again in May.

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Patron commented the disappointment in the turnout of the community with the opportunity to attend the meeting as this is a big issue that will affect their community. The more information and facts they can get the more informed they will be to make decisions. Other concerns were the cost of the different amounts of the levy requests for the taxpayer compared to other local schools.

Trustee Richard Grant calculated the following rates for levy requests: \$350,000.00 is \$6.51 per \$1,000.00, \$250,000.00 is \$4.65 per \$1,000.00 and \$175,000.00 is \$3.26 per \$1,000.00.

Chairman explained that March 13, 2012 is the next election date available. Volunteers will be needed to help get the word out and generate support by reminding everyone to vote. The consolidation issue is not popular but without the levy passing a Plan B is needed.

Patron asked the Board for their opinion regarding the levy.

The Chairman would like to see a two year levy at \$400,000.00 which would be a tough sale to help get from under the deficit to build our reserves, address administration staff costs, purchase books, put extracurricular and field trips back into the budget.

Trustee Kathy Bomar requested the \$350,000.00 levy, disappointed in the second failed levy of \$250,000.00 and don't understand why the community does not support the school. A two year levy is needed and those who do not vote have no excuse to complain and no clue of the school needs.

Trustee Lori Zenner supports a \$350,000.00 levy for two years and was thankful for the newsletter last week that reminded the community of the meeting tonight. Negotiations for the past years have been tough due to state rollback and cuts to salary and benefits. It makes it tough when you have nothing to offer the staff.

Trustee Richard Grant commented that it is a big jump from the previous levy of \$175,000.00 and asking the community a lot to consider a double at \$350,000.00. We need to take a reality check in asking for \$400,000.00. I could support a multi-year levy at \$250,000.00. This last year we waited until May and then had to try again in August when the levy failed which backs it up to the September deadline for the county. March would be better time to try the levy.

Trustee Bryce Scrimsher thought that the multi-year levy would be good but at \$250,000.00 or \$200,000.00. Over the \$250,000.00 request, you will not get the community to support or pass it.

Chairman agreed that may be the case due to the economy.

Trustee Lori Zenner noted that \$383,000.00 is needed and at \$250,000.00 collecting a year later, you are behind in keeping up paying expenses.

Superintendent explained that at the \$250,000.00 levy a scaled back budget would be needed. A multi-year at \$250,000.00 would help and better than operating under state dollars.

Chairman asked the Superintendent to check out the accreditation needs after a scaled back budget to see if the school would still be operational.

Patron asked if Transportation and Hot Lunch Programs have to be offered and could they be cut out of the budget?

Superintendent responded yes, but you would find students not coming to school and many students receive their best meals from the Lunch Program. No that would not be a good option for cutbacks.

Chairman adjourned the meeting (8:55 P.M.) as he thanked everyone for coming to state their comments and support. Please speak with neighbors and get the information out to others. Next Wednesday will be the regular meeting at which time the Board will make a decision at 7:00 p.m.

DECEMBER 7, 2011 X _____, Clerk x _____ Chairman