

Tax talk at NH board meeting

Written by George Browning

Tuesday, 04 May 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 04 May 2010 12:11

Residents of the North Harrison School District, which includes Blue River, Morgan, Spence, and Jackson Townships in Harrison County, have been getting tax bills that in some cases have been double. A mistake in the Bus Replacement Fund has been responsible for the error, and the board explained the situation and took comments in a special board meeting Thursday in the North Harrison High School Auditoria.

An extra \$410,000 was added on the 2010 Bus Replacement Fund rate to offset a loss of \$410,000 in 2009.

In addition, two Debt Service payments were made in 2009 from Riverboat Revenue, dropping the Debt Service tax rate. The Debt Service rate was increased in 2010 as well.

These two factors caused a lower tax bill than usual in 2009, but the problem is that the tax bills are higher than normal in 2010.

Several residents of the school district spoke during the public comments portion of the meeting.

Gina Carter said, "There are seniors out here that have been hit really hard. My mother's in her 70's. How is she supposed to make it? It's a pretty good hike for a lot of people."

Carter stressed that she thought the board had gotten most of the school's financial picture in control.

"It seems like you've got your needs under control," she said.

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North Harrison Supt. John Roeder stressed that next year's tax will be lower, as a result of the lower rate for 2011. This is mainly to adjust for the higher rate in 2010.

Board president Gary Byrne said that as "soon as we found out what the tax was, it was too late to change it."

Byrne pointed out that North Harrison has had two interim superintendents and three permanent ones since the beginning of 2007. He thought the lack of continuity has been a hindrance to the school corporation.

Byrne said that an "interim superintendent had raised the budget \$1 million higher than it had ever been." The extra million resulted in the higher property taxes.

"For this year, there is no recourse," said Roeder. "That's just the way it is."

Board member Mike Beyerle said that when he found out about the tax rate being too high, it was "already too late" to change it.

Local resident Dusty Rhoads said he had two questions: Who is the person responsible for the budget proposal, and is it just one person?

Beyerle said it was essentially on the shoulders of the superintendent of the school corporation.

"It's his responsibility to develop the budget," said Beyerle.

Blue River Township resident Lawrence Hoffman said that he's recently experienced difficulty in the job market, and has had to go to four day work weeks, as well as pay cuts.

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"I've had to decide where I'm going to cut," Hoffman said. "When times are tough, and people are experiencing tough times, what are you doing to keep it to the bare boned minimum?"

Board member Jerry Renneker said that it came down to keeping spending in line over the next year.

"Hold the line on spending," he said. "We are looking to trim other expenses."

Hoffman said he was the fourth generation that has owned his family's farm, but that he was thinking of selling out due to economic conditions.

One unidentified resident said, "My taxes are almost \$1,300 this year. If this keeps up, I'm going to have to hand the state my keys."

Resident Tim Gutknecht asked if the budget could be adjusted after the state approves it.

Roeder said that it "could be done," but that he was not aware of any changes in the budget being made after the state approval.

Beyerle assured the audience that he didn't foresee this situation happening again.

The board voted 4-1 (Robert Chinn voting no) to pass a property tax resolution, directing Supt. John Roeder to carry forward the balance of \$990,000 into 2011. This will reduce next year's tax collection to approximately \$4 million, based on the assumption that Riverboat Funds used for Debt Service Reduction total at least \$500,000.

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Renneker said that the whole process has been “a bitter pill to swallow.”

“Society likes to blame somebody,” he added. “If that makes you feel better, blame whoever you like.”

Beyerle regretted the situation as well. He pointed out that the board told the public that their taxes wouldn't go up, but they did.