

Tax askings up 1.49% after building fund is reduced

By Jan Schultz

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Chase County Schools board members removed \$101,000 from the proposed 2009-10 budget at a meeting last week, taking it out of the money to be added in the building fund.

Board members spent considerable time at the Sept. 8 meeting looking at additional options for the 2009-10 budget, in addition to what was proposed.

In the end, they voted 8-1 to approve the \$9,102,620 budget with \$5,346,450 in property tax support.

The proposed budget had sought \$5,447,450 in property taxes, which would have upped the property tax request from \$5,268,210 the past year, or an increase of \$179,240.

With the reduction made last week, the property tax request now increases by \$78,240, or 1.49%.

Board member Todd Burpo was the single nay vote on the budget, believing the board should reduce the tax askings even further.

Referring to previous meeting discussions, Burpo said he thought they decided to collect the same dollars in property taxes this coming year, and see less in tax askings compared to 2008-09.

He noted the budget has an increase in the school's cash reserve of \$250,000, some of which can also be used for building projects.

At issue through most of the discussion was how much to contribute to the building fund.

The original budget proposal had \$202,000, or 3.7 cents per \$100 valuation, for the building fund, but the board also considered dropping it even lower to just .40 of a cent, which would have generated about \$22,000 additional building fund dollars.

The board finally cut the building fund request in half of what was proposed, to 1.8505 cents, generating new building fund dollars of \$101,000.

The building fund currently has \$430,890, according to Supt. Matt Fisher.

With the change made in the building fund, total levy for the 2009-10 school year will be .9796 per \$100 valuation.

That drops it nearly 10 cents from last year's levy of \$1.0779, and is the first time since 1982 the school levy is below the \$1 mark.

This month, the school made its last payment on the bonds that funded construction of the 18-year-old East 9th St. facility, so there is no money levied for 2009-10 in the bond fund.

There are other bonds the city is paying on toward its costs for the pool/athletic facility, but those dollars were moved to the General Fund this year. That was done, in part, so the school's General Fund levy is above the 95-cent mark.

Supt. Fisher said that CCS will "take a hit" in state aid if the General Fund levy drops below 95 cents, and estimated at a previous meeting that it could result in a reduction of \$200,000 to \$300,000 in state aid.

Of the total .9796 levy in the budget, the General Fund will use 95.63 cents of it, just above that 95-cent mark.

The board had also looked at a budget proposal that would have added just \$70,000 to the cash reserve instead of \$250,000 and a full 3.7 cents to the building fund.

While that option would have put the overall property tax request just under last year's by \$760, the General Fund request would have been 91.97 cents, well below the 95-cent mark.

In addition to the school being paid off, a 10% increase in the district's valuation also helped the budget planners by spreading the costs over more property. That's the second consecutive year the school district's valuation increased 10%.

The district's valuation rose from \$495,660,691 to \$545,790,885 the past year.

Other school board business

- A teacher's job description was approved by the board last week, after several months of consideration. The original job description was too lengthy, according to discussion at a previous meeting, so administrators met to compact the information, also using some staff input. One change made in the document last week was who is listed as "reports to." The original proposal listed the supervising principal as that person, but board members changed that to supervising administrator. Rather than have the job description as a set school policy, the board chose to make it the administrators' responsibility to oversee the job description details.

- CCS senior Chevy Smith was introduced as the school board's 2009-10 student member, who then took his oath of office. The student board member does not vote and cannot attend the board's closed sessions, but has a place on the agenda each month for a report. Board President Sheila Stromberger told Smith they want him to be a liaison to the board for the student body. Later in the meeting, Smith did offer some comments/requests to the board—1) filling potholes in the high school parking lot, 2) a request for giving "administrative rights" on the Mac laptops, possibly to students who are on the Honor Roll, and 3) a suggestion for possibly including community musicians in the school's pep band, due to low numbers.

- Board member Penny Strand said she had some questions from senior citizens about possibilities for parking around the new football field to watch games. The field wasn't designed with that in mind, but Supt. Fisher said there might be some space available. Unlike the former field where numerous vehicles could park outside the fence, there would be limited space at the new site. If it develops, the board seemed to favor some type of permit being issued for that vehicle parking.

- Speaking of facilities, Supt. Fisher said the junior high football team will continue to play its home games on the Wellington field. That will allow no interruption of high school practices and make it more special when the younger athletes get into high school and can play on the new field, Supt. Fisher said.

- The school website was discussed again. Supt. Fisher said it is being redesigned using the new Mac laptops, but there have been problems accessing it with Internet Explorer, which they are hoping to correct. The board continued discussion of making the school web design an extra-curricular activity instead of a class as it is now. Board members emphasized the site needs to have up-to-date information and have a professional look.

- One of the checks on the list of financials was for \$86,055.33 to Apple Lease Agreement, as pointed out by Supt. Matt Fisher. He noted it was the first payment of three (one each year through 2011) for the new Mac laptops purchased for high school students and teachers this year.

- Some slight increases in school enrollment have been seen since the third day report. A written report from 7-12 Principal Mike Sorensen shows 144 in the high school and 104 in junior high, up five overall from the third day. In the K-6 classes, enrollment is now 301 compared to 300 on the third day of school, according to K-6 Principal Nathan Vitosh's report.

- A resignation from Jamie Jussel, who was a Reading Mastery Program aide, was approved by the board.

- A presentation on some of the technology available with the new Mac laptops was given by high school teachers Jill Bauerle and Renae Bottom.

- The board met in closed session with Supt. Fisher as he presented his yearly goals, which is part of his evaluation process. Next month, board members will receive evaluation forms to fill out.