

School taxes should remain steady

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
Wednesday, 26 October 2011 20:31

CG-B School Board chooses not to levy to the state limit; tax rate to stay at \$9.27 per \$1,000

The Cedar Grove-Belgium School Board decided not to levy to the maximum allowed by the state budget-repair law to keep the tax rate the same as last year — \$9.27 per \$1,000 of equalized valuation.

Unless there is a significant change in the individual property's valuation, taxpayers should pay the same as last year to support a \$10.3 million school budget.

The owner of a home with an equalized value of \$250,000 would pay \$2,318.

The tax levy will be \$5.5 million, which is \$300,000 less than was approved at the Sept. 26 annual meeting. Residents were told the levy would likely change after the district learned how much state aid it would receive and the equalized valuation.

The district will receive \$605,213 less than last year in per-pupil aid and the equalized valuation dropped almost \$1 million, from \$598.4 million to \$597.5 million.

The double whammy could have raised the tax rate to \$9.77 per \$1,000 equalized valuation for school purposes.

However, the School Board on Friday decided to keep the tax rate the same as last year by using unspent money in the school referendum fund for debt payments.

The district also has \$2.7 million in a reserve fund, which is 27% of the budget as recommended by the state Department of Public Instruction, that can be tapped if needed, Supt. Steve Shaw said Tuesday.

"We're conservative in our spending. If we underestimated on fuel savings and the middle school is more energy efficient than we planned, we may be alright. If not, we have the option to go back to the board to use some of the reserve funds," he said.

The board also decided to put \$100,000 in the community service fund. The proposed budget called for only \$37,000 to cover repairs to the 40-year-old pool.

"The pool committee has been coming up with some good ideas for increasing revenues. We want to show that we support them by providing funds to start some of those programs this year," Shaw said.

The School Board was prepared to cut the tax levy on Oct. 19 after receiving the equalized valuation and state-aid figures, but it was concerned that not taxing to the maximum would hurt the district in future years.

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However, Business Manager Julie Birschbach learned that because the district is growing in enrollment it will not see its taxing ability diminish next year.

“What we learned is the only schools it comes back to haunt are those who are stagnant or losing students. If you’re gaining students, you get that back. It’s only because we’re a growing, healthy district that we won’t be hurt,” Shaw said.

The district did not save as much in insurance premiums as expected despite the fact it changed carriers and teachers and staff pay 12% of the premium because more people are taking district insurance, Birschbach said.

“Some who were under their spouse’s plan now are taking our plan,” she said, noting in some cases the spouse lost his or her job.

Payments to the state retirement fund dropped 54% to \$260,364 because public employees are required to pay half of the contribution to the fund.

Salaries will total \$5.6 million with benefits adding \$1.9 million for a total of \$7.6 million in personnel costs, a 4% decrease. Two teachers and custodial workers were added this year.