

Administrative raises draw criticism

Written by Mark Jaeger

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Resident says board move out of touch with reality

In most years, the Northern Ozaukee School Board has routinely approved administrative pay hikes without fanfare.

Board members learned Monday that this is not like most years.

Town of Saukville resident Don Bloecher told board members they demonstrated they are out of touch with the troubled economic times by approving administrative pay raises last month.

“My school taxes went up \$200, and then I read about employees getting \$2,600 raises. In that same paper I read about county employees being given furloughs, and a little further back

I saw long lists of foreclosures,” Bloecher said.

His comments were aimed at the board’s decision to give seven administrators 2% increases in salaries and benefits retroactive to last July.

Although the agreement includes the employees paying an additional 5% of the health-insurance premium, the increased cost of that insurance placed the value of the total package at \$2,650. Salaries were raised by \$1,933.

“I read about these guys getting big raises and teachers are probably expecting raises, too. How can we give pay raises when other places are taking enormous cuts? Where does that

fit in with the reality of the times?,” Bloecher said. “It doesn’t.

“If these people are unhappy with what they are getting, they are welcome to go to the private sector. They can make big money there, but they’ll have to work hard and can’t expect automatic raises. There is a disconnect from the private sector and what those in the public sector are getting, especially in benefit packages.”

Business Manager Walter Clarke said the criticism does not take into consideration that the district had one of the lowest tax rate hikes in southeastern Wisconsin.

Despite Bloecher’s critique, the board later voted 8-1 to approve the terms of the second year of the agreement with the seven administrators, essentially offering

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\$1,000 raises for the 2010-11 school year.

Board members thought they had already voted on the raises, but Board President Paul Krause said the initial motion did not explicitly detail the second-year pay hike.

Board member Kendall Thistle voted against the motion, as he did against the pay increases approved last month.

At that time, Thistle said increasing pay and benefits was not appropriate at a time of “financial crisis nationwide.”

Another financial concern got in the way of approving a new contract with one of three administrative support-staff positions brought the board Monday.

The board approved \$1,800 raises for Director of Buildings and Grounds Roger Sinnen and his assistant Dean Brookins.

However, it voted 7-2 against a similar increase for Administrative Assistant Vicki Depies because the contract would have expanded her early retirement benefits.

Under the proposed contract, Depies would have been eligible for coverage by the district insurance for the first four years of early retirement.

The other contracts maintained the current policy of offering three years of insurance to retirees.

The extended coverage for the three positions was blocked in December by a 4-4 vote of the board.