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La Conner School Board sends levy proposals to voters

By KERA WANIELISTA @Kera_SVH Dec 12, 2015

LA CONNER — The La Conner School Board approved Thursday sending both a two-year, \$2.39 million replacement educational programs and operations (EPO) levy and a two-year, \$590,000 replacement technology levy to voters in February.

The EPO levy, which pays for things such as salaries for teachers and staff, textbooks, and activities and athletics, comprises about 13 percent of the district's total revenues, said director of business and operations Bonnie Haley.

If both levies pass, taxpayers would pay \$3.20 per \$1,000 of assessed property valuation, an amount that is lower than what residents pay now, said board President Rick Thompson.

In total, with bond issuance payments, taxpayers would pay \$6.17 per \$1,000 valuation.

The levy decision was made Thursday after a Monday meeting to discuss the levies was continued because the board decided it could not proceed with discussions until the district had more information from the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community about potential future contributions.

The tribe recently agreed to give the district \$400,000 in 2016, which the district is using to reduce the impact of the Great Wolf Lodge decision for remaining taxpayers on its current levies.

The tribe, which operates its budget on a different cycle than the district, said that was a one-time contribution that could be renegotiated in the future.

“But as the district went forward with levy proposals that would take effect in 2017, school board members wanted to assess the likelihood of future contributions from the tribe. If it could not feel confident about future contributions, the board would have looked at a one-year levy as opposed to a two-year levy, Rick Thompson said at the Monday meeting.

On Thursday, after discussions with the tribe, Thompson and board member Brad Smith said they felt confident the tribe would contribute an additional \$400,000, which the district would use to offset the levy that takes effect in 2017.

“We came away with a very, very strong feeling that we have no problem getting an additional \$400,000 for the coming year,” Thompson said. “The tribe seemed very keen on what we were asking for in the levy, the tech levy in particular.”

In an effort to reduce the impact of the Great Wolf Lodge decision on the remaining taxpayers, the district is asking for less money from both levies than it previously did, including \$50,000 less on the technology levy. The board has asked the tribe to consider contributing that \$50,000 as well.

“We will make this work,” Thompson said. “Like we did before.”

The district has previously reduced collection on its current levies by \$250,000 for each of the previous two years.

“We tightened our belt,” Thompson said.

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