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Kenston board considers combined levy in 2021

Julie Hullett

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BAINBRIDGE — Kenston Local School District residents could see a new levy on the ballot in 2021, according to Treasurer Paul Pestello.

While presenting the five-year financial forecast to the Board of Education on Monday, Mr. Pestello noted an expected decrease in state foundation aid and real estate tax revenue. Mr. Pestello is also anticipating more expenditures this year due to an increase in remote learning and other measures taken during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

When the five-year forecast was discussed in October, Mr. Pestello said that there would need to be a levy on the ballot in 2021 or 2022. But with cuts in state funding and increased expenditures, he said a levy is more urgent.

“The design of what I provide to you is to notify you out in front that there’s a potential problem out there and it’s now that we need to start to decide the course of action to avoid that particular road that has a bridge out,” Mr. Pestello said. “It’s my responsibility to let you know miles ahead of that bridge being out that we should take a fork in the road as opposed to getting close to the bridge and saying ‘Oh there’s a bridge out’ as we go over.”

In 2015, the school board combined an operating levy and a bond issue and the public voted on them in one ballot issue. Now, the board is discussing combining an operating levy and a permanent improvement levy. Mr. Pestello said that funds from a permanent improvement levy can only be used for certain projects, such as infrastructure and the upkeep of facilities. He said that the combined levy would run indefinitely.

There are options for how to combine the operating levy and the permanent improvement levy. Board Vice President Neysa Gaskins pointed out several different scenarios, such as a 4-mill operating levy with a 1-mill permanent improvement levy or a 5-mill operating levy with a 1.25-mill permanent improvement levy.

Mr. Pestello said that last year, the district transferred \$470,000 from the general fund for permanent improvement costs, which he said is average. He added that a 1-mill levy would generate \$825,000 per year.

“It would probably make more sense to do a little bit of a larger permanent improvement [levy] and not so much increase the operating [levy],” he said.

The board has not yet decided if the levy will be on the May or November ballots in 2021. Mr. Pestello pointed out that if the school board chose the May 2021 ballot, it is less than a year away, causing a time crunch for campaigning. If the levy were on the ballot in May and failed, Board President Beth Krause said, it would give the school district a chance to try again in November.

Ms. Gaskins asked what minimum millage the district should ask for, and Mr. Pestello said 4 mills for the operating levy, which goes to the general fund. He said that he cannot guarantee that it would last more than two to three years.

“What I have found in my very short time here is that the district has done extremely well in managing its funds,” Mr. Pestello said.

The next school board meeting will be held on July 20 at 7 p.m.

Julie Hullett

Julie Hullett has been a reporter for the Chagrin Valley Times since August of 2018 and covers Gates Mills, Hunting Valley, Moreland Hills, Orange, Pepper Pike and Woodmere. She graduated from John Carroll University with a journalism degree in 2018.