

Niagara-Wheatfield BOE begin budget talks amid uncertainty in state funding

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO
Interim Tribune Editor

The Niagara-Wheatfield Board of Education held a virtual board meeting last week where members began tentative budget discussions for the 2020-21 school year.

A proposed budget of \$77,119,627 shows only a moderate 3.7% increase from last year. However, amidst the uncertainty brought on by COVID-19, board members will have to await the governor's decision regarding the end of the month before they can decide whether or not to move forward with the figures.

Superintendent Daniel Ljiljanich and Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Management Allison Davis outlined some of the changes in this year's proposed budget, including a significant percentage aimed at helping to increase the district's ability to quickly and efficiently engage and inform the community.

Among these plans were the creation of a community education/public relations coordinator position. Ljiljanich considered the district's lack of social media presence during the coronavirus

outbreak a significant shortcoming.

"We've been at a loss when it comes to communication. We've had a lot of other things to add over the years, and this has been something that's been on the back burner," Ljiljanich said.

Other communication plans also included working with education technology company Apptegy to revamp the school district's website and social media accounts, while also replacing the current Blackboard Connect system the district currently uses. With a \$12,000 one-time cost, and a \$15,000 annual cost, Apptegy's services would only create increases to the 2021 budget as schools would continue to utilize Blackboard Connect during the transition period.

Other increases in the proposed budget included \$40,000 for additional floating bus aides.

While the board's consensus was that increased communication efforts were important, board member Richard Sirianni advocated for caution moving forward, particularly in regard to the new full-time position, citing fears of burdening the cap. BOE

President Steve Sabo countered, noting the proposed position simply adds 20 more hours to a position that is currently in the budget. Sabo went on to call the plans for increased communication resources "prudent," noting the active confusion for parents and teachers throughout the district as they try to navigate the bevy of updates and notices coming from New York.

Ljiljanich and Davis said any proposed increases would not have to come from either the state or the tax levy. Instead, the funds would be coming from offsetting revenue that the district has on hand. According to the budget report, the district has over \$5 million across seven reserve funds.

Looking at the district's overall financial outlook for this year and next, Davis said that, thanks to the reserves, she's optimistic but was concerned about the lack of money from the state.

"Right now, I'm very comfortable with where we are. I think we'll be fine next year. I'm just hoping before the end of the year we can get some cash flowing from New York state," Davis said.

Ljiljanich noted he was expecting to hear from state officials later this week.

There's still uncertainty as to how much state and federal aid will be available next year, as officials deal with the impact of the coronavirus. Ljiljanich went on to point out just how radically the pandemic has altered the district's own projections from earlier this year.

"It's really important to note to anyone listening, we were in a very different place a few months ago when we started this budget process," he said. "If you're looking at the budget presentation that's online, the first four actual slides all contain information that was at one point relevant. It's not anymore, the landscape has changed significantly. ... We thought we were going to get some community set-aside money for next year; we're not. It's no longer going to happen. The good news is that expense-based aids are not going to be rolled into foundation aid."

To compound matters further, the BOE will have to delay advancing the proposed budget until after April 30, whereby the

governor will have to decide whether or not to do a "take back" on funds appropriated for budgets next year or even this year. Gov. Andrew Cuomo has said such take backs would be predicated on whether or not federal aid is coming in, particularly through the CARES act.

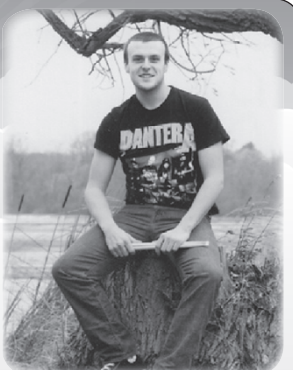
Ljiljanich also expressed a sincere gratitude to the work the BOE budget office had done to secure the reserve funds.

"I know there was a lot of hard work and difficult decisions in some cases to get those reserves to where they are. I just want to say thanks for all that hard work so we can make decisions next year that don't impact our program," he said. "If we didn't have reserves, if we didn't have money we could appropriate, we would be in a much different position moving forward for next year."

He quickly added, "I say all that with the understanding that we hope we don't hear about significant take backs."

The full recording of the April 22 meeting can be found at <https://www.nwcsd.org/Page/3992>.

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Law enforcement agencies in Niagara County partner on resident checks
The Niagara County Sheriff's Office and the Lewiston Police Department are partnering with one another to use an existing system to conduct welfare checks on residents.
LPD has utilized the "Are You OK?" system to check on residents for quite some time. It has now opened up the system to be utilized countywide. The system places a daily, timed phone call to participating residents to confirm that they are OK. The system works with a home-based or mobile line and is free to anyone who signs up.
Any resident of Niagara County wishing to be involved in this partnership is asked to make contact with the LPD at 754-8477 to register for the checks.
The information provided to the Lewiston Police Department will be entered into the "Are You OK?" system and will result in a call being placed to the resident to ensure they are OK. If no response is given, or the resident needs help, an alert will be generated and sent to the Niagara County Emergency Communica-

Niagara SBDC receives grant from Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation
On Monday, the Niagara County Community College Small Business Development Center was awarded a grant from the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation. The grant award total was for \$36,300.00, part of the foundation's COVID-19 small business relief fund. Thanks to this timely funding award, the Niagara SBDC will be able to offer Niagara County businesses emergency relief services. These services include expert consultation on e-commerce development, free participation in a multiple-part small business crisis management webinar series, and individual advisement on enhanced marketing sales techniques.
Through this project, the Niagara SBDC anticipates supporting as many as 120 local small businesses.
The Niagara SBDC remains open remotely through the COVID-19 pandemic, assisting clients over the phone, via email and in online meetings. For more information, or for assistance, call 210-2515 or visit <http://www.niagaracc.suny.edu/sbdc/>.

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LEGAL NOTICE
Notice of formation of Brawn Property LLC. Arts. of Org. filed with Secy. Of State of NY (SSNY) on 01/14/2020. Office location: Niagara County. designated as agent of LLC upon whom process against it may be served. shall mail process to: c/o the LLC, 916 Ridge Rd, Lewiston, NY 14092. Purpose: Other

LEGAL NOTICE
Cellco Partnership and its controlled affiliates doing business as Verizon Wireless is proposing to collocate antennas on a 108-foot water tank at 120 Lockport Street, Youngstown, Niagara County, NY. Public comments regarding the potential effects from this site on historic properties may be submitted within 30-days from the date of this publication to: Maggie Klejbuk - CBRE, 70 West Red Oak Lane, White Plains, NY 10604. whiteplainsculturalresources@cbre.com or (914) 694-9600. Publish Tribune/Sentinel May 1, 2020

LEGAL NOTICE
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
Town of Niagara
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that at a Public Hearing will be held on May 19, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. before the Town Board of the Town of Niagara, at the Town Hall, 7105 Lockport Road, Town of Niagara, New York in regards to: Rezone the property at 4798 Lockport Road, SBL No. 131.17-1-4 from R-1 to H1 Heavy Industrial District. At such time and place all persons interested in the subject matter thereof will be heard concerning the same. By Order of the Town Board of the Town of Niagara, Niagara County, New York.
Pursuant to Executive Order No. 202.1, issued by Governor Cuomo on March 12, 2020, and advisories issued by Federal, State and Local officials related to the COVID-19 virus, the Town Board will convene its meetings remotely.
Call with your phone, +1 646 558 8656 US (New York) and then enter Meeting ID: 266 996 2599.
Publish Tribune May 1, 2020