

Pattonville Offers Options, Possible Tax Levy Increase, To Solve District's Funding Problem

The district proposed four options to fix its floundering funds: Budget cuts, a flat tax increase, a variable tax increase, and a hybrid option.

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Nearly two-thirds of the tables set up in the Pattonville High School gym were filled with concerned district residents Tuesday night. The attendees came to offer their thoughts and opinions about the four options proposed that could solve the financial challenges of the Pattonville School District.

During a presentation conducted by Pattonville School District Superintendent Mike Fulton and Chief Financial Officer Ron Orr, the administrators explained that despite working through \$34.7 million in revenue changes over the last 10 years, the district needs to address at least another \$4 to \$5 million loss in funds by 2014-2015, which might become as large as \$10 million depending on the result of a pending court battle with Harrah's casino that has several million dollars of the district's taxes at stake.

There are two routes the district can take in handling the financial crisis: Cut its budget until it's balanced, or request some form of a tax increase on district residents.

Of Pattonville's budget, almost 90 percent is funded by local taxes, according to the presentation. The challenge the district faces is with its operating budget.

Nearly 57 cents from every \$1 the Pattonville School District receives goes toward teacher salary and benefits. It's two-thirds of the \$0.85-per-dollar budgeted for district salaries and benefits, according to the presentation, and impossible to make deep budget cuts without severely impacting staff.

Pattonville High School ranked 19th out of 560 high schools in Missouri, Fulton said during his presentation, and in the top 10 percent of the nation on U.S. News and World Report's 2013 Best High Schools list.

None of the residents in attendance at the end of Tuesday night's meeting supported cutting the district's budget without raising taxes.

The three tax options the district is considering to propose — for a ballot initiative — range from a flat tax increase, to a tax increase varying by property class, to a combination of budget cuts and a tax increase varying by property class.

The proposed flat tax increase would bump up commercial, personal and residential taxes by \$0.8998. It would cost a resident who owns a \$125,000 home \$17.81 each month.

The proposed tax increase that varies by property class would bump up commercial and personal taxes by \$1.1494 and residential taxes by \$0.3462. It would cost a resident who owns a \$125,000 home \$6.85 per month.

The proposed hybrid tax increase and budget cut option would bump up commercial and personal taxes by \$0.9889 and residential taxes by \$0.4397, and require the district to cut an additional \$1 million from its budget. The option would cost a resident who owns a \$125,000 home \$8.70 per month.

The district administrators, after their presentation, asked the attendees to discuss the options amongst themselves and pick the best option. [Click here to view a PDF of the Pattonville Community Forum presentation online.](#)

"We like (the option of the flat tax increase) and (the option of the variable tax increase without budget cuts)," Tracy Mellring said. "We don't like (cutting the budget without adding revenue)."

"Personally, if I had to choose between the (flat or variable tax options) I'd probably choose (the variable tax increase)," Lynn Davenport said. "Because the residential is a little less."

The proposed tax increase that varies by property class, but which does not include further district budget cuts, was the polled favorite of the people who attended Tuesday night's meeting. But, these opinions are only a sample from the residents of the Pattonville school district that would vote on and be affected by the tax levy.

Are you a resident living within the Pattonville School District boundaries? What do you think of the district's proposed options? Share your thoughts by leaving a comment below.

The Pattonville School District will consider the resident input over the next few weeks and decide how it will proceed. The deadline to file a ballot initiative for the November elections is Aug. 27.