

LOCALNEWS

FALLS SCHOOL BOARD

Board favors upping membership to seven

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

The fate of an odd-numbered school board lies in the hands of voters.

When local voters head to the polls in November, they will be asked if they support adding another member to the Falls School Board, bringing membership up to seven. If approved, it would go into effect during the 2016 general election.

The board Monday agreed on a 5-1 vote to have the question placed on this year's ballot. Darrell "Boxer" Wagner voted against the motion.

The main reasoning behind the action stems from the board's history of being split on its votes. The most recent occurrence popped up during last month's meeting on the decision of re-enrolling in the Quality Compensation for Teachers,

or Q-Comp, program. Moving to an odd-numbered board would alleviate a split vote on issues as well as a headache among some board members.

"We need an odd number on the board," board Chairman Gordy Dault told The Journal in May after it was briefly split on who to hire as the district's superintendent. "Diversity on a school board is a good thing, but when you end up on different sides of an issue, an odd number can easily resolve it."

During Monday's meeting, Dault said he looked into the possibility of going down to a five-member board, but reported legislation would likely stand as a roadblock to that action.

"Basically, we can't go down," he said. "It's almost impossible to get legislation."

Board member Michelle

Hebner said an odd-numbered board would be favorable moving forward.

"Not to say we'll always be split in the future...but I think it's important to have that one deciding vote," she said.

Wagner disagreed.

"Right now, if the vote is split, the vote either fails or passes," he said. "I don't see where it'll do us any good. It's just wasting taxpayers' money."

In other business Monday, the board rescinded a memorandum of understanding with the local teacher's union for participation in the Q-Comp program, and unanimously agreed to bring it back for the upcoming school year.

The program pays teachers an additional stipend of \$3,000 on top of their contract pay if they meet all five benchmarks determined by the program.

Last month, Dault expressed concern about results produced by the program. Monday, however, he said after researching the program and talking to school officials around the state, he saw mathematics test scores for students in grades 4,5,6 and 8 had improved.

"I disagree with how Q-Comp is set up by the state," he said. "But all the teacher involvement is very well done in portfolios I've looked at."

Superintendent Nordy Nelson explained to board members the program runs on about a \$100,000 levy from the district and receives about \$200,000 in state aid.

"If you did not have that in place, that \$300,000 has to be taken from the present school budget," he said. "It's nothing coming in, but it's going out of your budget. That's where I have to stand on it's approval."

District principals Tim Everson and Melissa Tate said the program covers state-mandated teacher evaluations, and both expressed their support of Q-Comp.

Meanwhile, the board also:

- Approved a contract reassignment of Beth Shermoen as the .7 FTE assistant principal and .3 FTE athletic director.
- Approved the elimination of one bus route beginning during the 2014-2015 school year for a savings of about \$33,000.
- Approved the elimination of the West End Elementary secretarial position.
- Approved a new, combined Community Education/Falls Elementary secretarial position effective Aug. 18.

- Approved the placement of Barb Johnson on an unrequested leave of absence as a Local 510 secretary effective Aug. 15 with recall rights to the extent of .42 FTE.
- Approved the hire as Michael Paulson as a secondary social studies teacher.
- Approved the hire of Erin Morin as a secondary English teacher.
- Approved the hire of Alex Ringhofer as a .55 FTE secondary math teacher.
- Approved the hire of Marva Fairchild as a .82 FTE secondary Family and Consumer Science teacher.
- Approved the hire of Jim Jelinski as a motivational speaker/educational consultant for seven anti-bullying presentations for the fall of 2014.
- Accepted the resignation of Larry Pullar as custodian due to retirement.

Council questions airport levy; County to consider city report on law

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

The International Falls City Council presented information to its co-owners of the Falls International Airport about a state law that may apply to how Koochiching County levies for operation of the airport.

A motion made Monday by Councilor Cynthia Jaksa authorizing her, city Attorney Steve Shermoen and city Administrator Ken Anderson to meet with the county board next week was



Cynthia Jaksa

approved on a 4-1 motion.

Mayor Bob Anderson voted against the motion. He suggested the information be brought to the meeting of the local airport commission, made up of county and city elected officials and an at-large member. The information could then be brought to the county board

by its representatives.

County Administrative Director Teresa Briggs said Thursday the board asked the city to provide the information about the law in a written report to allow county Attorney Jeff Naglosky and other staff to review it before meeting with the city representatives.

In addition, Briggs said the county board is very busy handling flood concerns and would be better able to focus on the airport levy issue at a later date.

Briggs told the council

Monday the county's levy to fund the airport "may not be following statute."

Shermoen said it does appear there is an issue with the way the levy has been handled for years and it may be county officials are unaware of the statute. He suggested it be called to everyone's attention: the county board, city council and airport commission.

Councilor Pete Kalar said he would vote yes on the motion in an effort to allow the airport funding issue to come to a head. "We need to

work together, and I hope this is the start of the end of the airport war," he told the council.

In other business, the council heard from George Hnatiuk on an alternative sound system for the council chambers. The council is seeking a grant to match city funding for an audiovisual system to record meetings held in the council chambers.

Also Monday, Anderson agreed to allow city workers to mow grass at the cemetery after city property is mowed. Mike Rud told the

council the cemetery will ask for volunteers to do the work, but is having issues with staffing.

Anderson said a number of area residents have asked him about the cemetery upkeep.

"While we're contributing a little more money than we have in the past 40 years it's still not adequate to keep up the cemetery," Anderson said.

Jaksa said the city has increased its contribution from \$6,000 to \$12,000 in recent years.

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