

School budget draft seeks \$8.5 million from county; could force taxes to go up

by Robb Hoff

PITMANS CORNER—The Lancaster school board and county supervisors last week discussed a proposed \$13.2 million school budget for 2004-05, which is about \$1.4 million more than last year.

Approximately \$840,000 of the increase is earmarked for higher teacher pay and increased local contributions for state retirement and life insurance benefits.

The budget bolsters salaries for 137 teachers by \$460,000 and adds another \$375,000 for benefits division wide.

The base salary increase reflects a step scale for teacher pay that school board chairman William Smith called "very competitive" with neighboring counties.

The overall increase in salaries and benefits, including a 2.5 percent pay raise for 94 non-scale employees, is \$1 million.

The total proposal is 11.5 percent higher than the current budget but the county's share would jump by 19 percent, from \$7.1 million to \$8.5 million, effectively accounting for all of the \$1.4 million increase.

If the proposal is approved, the cost could be shouldered mainly by property owners unless other sources of revenue such as a retail sales tax, meals tax or lodging tax are implemented.

When considering the 2004 reassessment of property here, county administrator William H. Pennell Jr. said preliminary estimates show that real estate tax revenues would be within one-percent of last year's level if the tax rate is lowered from the current \$.60 to \$.45 per \$100.

However, funding the \$1.4-million increase could require about 8 cents more, said Pennell.

District 5 supervisor B. Wally Beauchamp noted that the coun-

Hearing set

The Lancaster County School Board will conduct a public hearing on its proposed 2004-05 school budget at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 23.

The hearing will be held in the Lancaster Middle School Theater in Kilmarnock.

According to its most recent draft, the school board is proposing a \$13.2 million budget, up some \$1.4 million. The local portion would be \$8.5 million, also up some \$1.4 million.

The school board must adopt a budget by April 1 to forward to the Lancaster County Board of Supervisors for consideration. The supervisors also will conduct a public hearing prior to approving the school budget.

The board of supervisors must adopt a county budget and set a tax levy to support the budget by July 1.

A hearing must also be held on the proposed tax levy.

posed school budget.

"That's a major, major hit on many of the taxpayers," Beauchamp said.

Any increase in the tax rate, beyond a rate necessary to generate the same tax receipts for the county as last year, is considered an effective tax rate increase.

Besides the \$1 million increase to cover salaries and benefits, other increases in the school budget total some \$400,000 more.

Of that amount, \$148,485 more is sought for the school division's \$1.2-million operations and maintenance category. Included in the increase is \$61,727 itemized for \$176,951 in purchased services.

At the request of supervisors' chairman Patrick G. Frere, the purchased services item was explained by school superintendent Dr. Randolph Latimore. He said it includes service contracts for copiers, water service for Lancaster Middle School and the school bus garage, septic tank cleaning, gym floor refinishing, bus driver drug testing, fire alarm system inspections, survey work for paving the Lancaster High School parking lot, parking lot sealing at Lancaster Middle School, and additional heating and air conditioning work at Lancaster Primary School.

An additional \$63,150 increase under operations and maintenance is requested for three items that include duplicating paper, general materials and supplies, and repair and maintenance supplies.

Another \$75,531 increase is sought for \$196,250 in textbooks at all three schools. State revenues will provide \$29,244.

For the special education program for 18 county students, the budgeted increase is \$75,371 for \$372,445 in expenditures.

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ty's overall increase in property values from 2000 to 2004 is estimated at 35 percent. Those whose properties increased in value by that amount would pay more real estate taxes even if the rate is lowered to \$.45 per \$100, he said.

Using his own property as an example, Beauchamp said his real estate tax bill would be \$1,000 more than last year even if the tax rate were lowered to \$.45. He calculated that it would be nearly \$2,000 more if the tax rate is set at \$.53 per \$100 to cover the pro-



Bob Booth (Left) and Tim Booth of W. F. Booth Inc. display the Rappahannock River Waterfowl Show official 2004 show print by Art LaMay. W. F. Booth Inc. is the show print sponsor. The prints, depicting a group of widgeon, will be distributed among show visitors.

25th annual Rappahannock River Waterfowl Show lands in White Stone this weekend

WHITE STONE—The Rappahannock River Waterfowl Show celebrates its 25th anniversary this weekend at the White Stone firehouse and old school building.

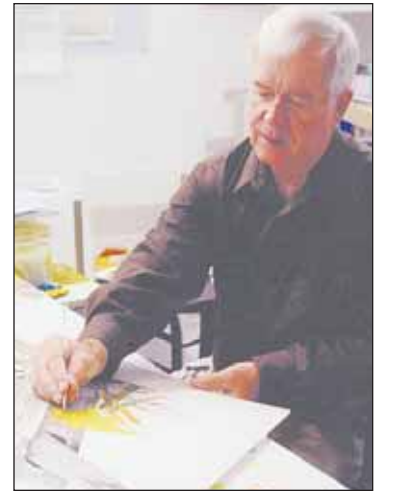
Ninety artists will participate, making this one of the biggest shows ever, said director William Bruce of White Stone. There is something for all ages and interests, he added.

During the years many features have been added, but none as popular as the "show print," said Bruce. Each year an artist is selected to be the "Artist of the Year" for the show. The artist creates an original painting and prints are given away to those attending the show.

The program started in 1984 and the early show prints were black and white limited editions. For the past several years, color prints have been printed and more are available for show visitors. Those attending the Preview Night Gala on Friday evening will receive a signed and numbered print.

The 2004 "Artist of the Year" is Art LaMay of Palm Coast, Fla. LaMay exhibited at the first show in

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Artist Art LaMay of Palm Coast, Fla., is the "Artist of the Year."

Supervisors allow home construction 20 feet from creek

by Reid Pierce Armstrong

HEATHSVILLE—Sometimes, county supervisors must make unpleasant decisions.

Such was the case last week when Northumberland County narrowly approved a Chesapeake Bay Act exception for a new house in Reedville. During a heated public hearing last month, more than a dozen residents spoke against the proposal.

Platted long before the 1989 Bay Act, the parcel is not large enough to accommodate a 50-foot

setback from Cockrells Creek. The proposed 1,500-square-foot house would sit only 20 feet off the water in some places and entirely within the seaward resource protection area.

After obtaining legal advice from the attorney general, the Chesapeake Bay Local Assistance Department (CBLAD) and the county attorney, supervisor Ronald Jett said that to deny the request would deprive the owner of her vested right in the property.

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School budget hearing set for Northumberland

LOTTSBURG—The Northumberland School Board will conduct a public hearing Monday, March 22, on a proposed \$13.5 million budget for 2004-05.

The hearing begins at 5:30 p.m. at the school board office in Lottsburg. A work session fol-

lows at 6 p.m.

As proposed, the \$13.5 million budget represents an increase of \$1.1 million overall and \$945,000 more in local funding. The county share, supported by the local tax levy, would climb to some \$8.4 million.

County equalization board to consider assessments

LANCASTER—Lancaster County property owners who question the reassessed value of their property can schedule a hearing to have their concerns heard by a board of equalization.


Property owners may call the county commissioner of the reve-

nue's office at 462-7920 to leave their name and telephone number to schedule a hearing date.

The five-member board appointed by the board of supervisors is set to start the hearing process on Wednesday, March 24.

Carrots

Carrots should be planted at the end of March or beginning of April. Many types are available from round and blunt to long and tapering. The half long or blunt types are best for home gardens. Soil compaction will cause deformities, particularly in long types. The extension agency recommends trying Gold King seeds, which are nearly coreless and can be harvested in 72 days. Rabbits and voles love carrots.



Kitchen Gardens

By Reid Pierce Armstrong

Whether a gardener swears by the Farmer's Almanac, the St. Patrick's Day rule or the Vernal Equinox, green thumbs have already plotted their kitchen gardens in notebooks and are busy planting their early spring vegetables. April 10 is the average last frost date in the Northern Neck.

"People need to do their homework before starting a vegetable garden," said Master Gardener Anne Olsen. Local soil can be either clay or sand and must first be tested with a soil kit, which is available through the extension office. Compost and manure should be added to the soil prior to planting, but Olsen warns that commercial fertilizers and pesticides are unnecessary and can be harmful to the bay. Bugs, birds and other critters come with any garden. A little saucer of beer will take care of slugs. Fencing can help with rabbits.

As for the rest, "Just plant enough for everybody," Olsen said. She also recommends using newspaper to cover paths and topping it with straw. "It works like a blanket," she said, keeping weeds out and moisture in. It can be mulched into the garden the following year. Olsen added that gardeners should invest in a soaker hose and water vegetables deeply.

The Master Gardeners are available to answer questions at the local farmers' markets. Source: Virginia Cooperative Extension

Lettuce

One of the first things to be planted in the spring, most varieties of lettuce thrive in cooler weather. Successive plantings every two weeks can provide salads through the fall. Lettuce is sensitive to low pH and lime should be added if the soil is below pH 6. Spring mixes can be planted in early March. By late April, the extension agency recommends using heat tolerant varieties such as Summer Time, Dark Green Boston and Paris Island Cos. Young lettuce can be eaten as thinned.



Tomatoes

Tomatoes can be started inside during the early spring and should not be transplanted until mid- to late-April. Cherry tomatoes will proliferate in most gardens and can be harvested in only 65 days. Olsen said. She suggested interspersing several different varieties, such as Mountain Spring for sauces and canning, Sweet 100 cherry tomatoes for salads and Roma Plum Dandy for sandwiches.



Corn

Sweet corn varieties are susceptible to cold soil conditions, and will not come up well when soil temperatures are below 65 degrees. Silver Princess, Silver Queen and Silver King are all varieties recommended by the extension service. Some corn can be harvested as early as 75 days. Golden varieties take longer. In limited spaces, gardeners may want to consider forgoing corn because it can take up a lot of room.



Cucumbers

Homemade trellises can save space for vining vegetables such as cucumbers. Wait to plant these until mid-April when the danger of frost has passed. Cucumbers grow well in the area, but the extension office recommends Dasher II, Bush Whopper, Sweet Slice and County Fair as particularly disease resistant varieties. Cucumbers can be harvested in 55 to 65 days. Be careful not to plant more than the family will eat.



Hot peppers

All types of pepper do really well in this area, Olsen said. They should be planted inside in early March and transplanted in late April. Fruiting plants such as tomatoes, eggplant and peppers need a full 10 hours of sun to produce normally. If outdoor space is limited, peppers, as well as tomatoes and lettuce, do well in pots.




Radishes

One of the easiest vegetables to grow, radishes are a great crop for children to plant. Ready to harvest in only 24 days, Cherry Belle is a sweet, round variety that will suit most taste buds. Radish seeds can be scattered in almost any empty corner of the garden and covered with a half-inch of soil. They can be planted in March and early April.




Peas

Local lore states that peas and potatoes should be in the ground by St. Patrick's Day. Sweet peas, however, don't do well when they go in that early, Olsen said. English pea varieties such as Knight should be planted in March. Wait until April to plant Sugar Snaps and other edible pea pods. Peas can be harvested in roughly 60 days and vining types work well when grown up fencing.



Potatoes

Like digging up treasures—that is how Olsen thinks of harvesting potatoes in the fall. A wide variety of potatoes can be planted together in the early spring and will be ready for harvest by fall, at least 100 days from planting. Nooksack potatoes are more drought resistant than Russett varieties. Stueben red and Superior do particularly well in eastern Virginia, according to the extension agency. Olsen said she has not had much luck with sweet potatoes, which have an even longer gestation period.




Bell peppers

As with tomatoes and eggplant, peppers are a warm season crop and should not be planted until all danger of frost has passed. Lady Bell and Boynton Bell are recommended by the extension agency as drought and disease resistant. Harvest time is 110 days. Once harvested, peppers can be roasted and canned for use throughout the winter.



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