

District Advisory Council Notes
January 17, 2018

Submitted by Jennifer Lessinger

BOARD UPDATE

School Board Member Chris Patricca attended as the board representative in place of Mary Fischer. She stated that the district is in a funding crisis and encouraged DAC members to attend the Tuesday, January 23 School Board Meeting where the board would be voting on whether or not to proceed with plans to hold a special election for a half cent sales tax increase.

PRESENTATION

Capital Plan Update with Dr. Ami Desamours, Chief Financial Officer

Desamours said it was likely the board would vote to proceed with the half cent sales tax increase. If that is the case and the County Commission approves it, the proposal would go to special election May 15. If the special election happens, Desamours said that the school district will be tasked with educating and encouraging the public to vote in favor of the sales tax increase. The school district can't use funds to lobby so it is likely a private group will form to do the lobbying for the district, said Desamours, who encouraged DAC members to contact county commissioners to show support for the special election. The BOCC will ultimately choose the date for the special election, but will do so in cooperation with the LCSD.

Desamours then turned to DAC members for feedback regarding ideas on how the district could get their message to the public.

Comments included:

- Reaching out to the media
- Social media blasts
- Reach out to people without children
- Invite board members to speak at Home Owners Associations
(Patricca interjected that there is a direct link between quality schools and property values)
- Place billboards in front of schools
- Reach out to Little Leagues, at parks and at ballgames
- Emphasize that the financial crisis is not the fault of the district, but rather the state is not doing it's part in providing funding
- Reach out to Rotary clubs, trade associations, realtor groups, and Chambers of Commerce
- Contact non-profits
- Contact the Lee County Bar and educate the lawyers and explain that we've got to invest in the kids now or we will invest in them in the criminal system later.
- Have the school kids tell the story
- Combat the negative spin TV news is already using
- Use radio
- Create a communication toolkit and flyers for people to use
- Contact large employers in the area
- Create an easy slogan/jingle to use
- Inform people on just how desperate the situation is

— Inform district employees

A DAC member asked about the cost of the special election and why the sales tax needed a special election rather than being placed on the ballot in November. Desamours (with Patricca periodically interjecting) explained that the November ballot is full and they are afraid the sales tax would get lost or used as someone's campaign fodder. Also, the decision to not put the referendum on a primary ballot was due to the fact that Florida is a closed primary state so typically there is low voter turnout. The estimated cost of the special election is \$888,000 and the money will come from the district. Patricca said the board members are looking at the election cost as an investment with a return of \$55 million a year for the next ten years if the sales tax increase pass. Patricca said she feels it is significantly more likely to fail if the vote is taken in anything but a special election. In order to pass, 51 percent of the people who vote in the May 15 election will have to vote for the tax increase.

Another DAC member asked what the district plans to do if the vote fails. Desamours said a failed vote means the acquisition of more debt, deferred maintenance and less money for maintenance, and continuing to overpopulate the schools.

If the referendum passes it will be in effect for ten years and another election will be required for it to continue. The estimated cost of the half cent sales tax increase is an average of \$64 a year for a family of four.

MIDDLE SCHOOL BREAKOUT SESSION

Topics brought up were:

The Math progression plan — some students go to 7th grade advanced, some to pre-algebra — and she is wondering how much autonomy the schools have in placing the students in the most appropriate class for them. A teacher from the district noted that there is currently no math coordinator at the district level.

Participation of DAC members at the DAC meetings. Members feel that, apart from the current meeting, most meetings don't encourage participation from members, but are mostly presentations providing members with information.

Usage of chrome books and text books. Shouldn't we be all book and paper or all chrome book? Not both.

AFTER THE BREAKOUT

SAC committees may request school board members to come to SAC meetings to discuss the special election.

The high school group discussed ways to get more members to join SAC and suggested setting up a SAC table at open house or providing homework passes to kids whose parents attend SAC meetings.

The high school group also suggested that the school board should threaten to take away sports (and arts) programs if the sales tax doesn't pass.

DAC minutes will now be posted and available within one week of the meeting.

The next DAC meeting is February 21, 2018.

