



Geneva school board under fire for budget

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The Geneva school board faced a tough room Monday night in a nearly 90-minute budget hearing before a crowd of 140-plus residents and staff.

Even though it presented last-minute adjustments that put the operating funds portion of the budget in the black, audience members told them they hadn't done enough. When you add in the money the district pays for its loans, legal insurance and expenses for construction and land, expenditures outpace income.

"Please stop saying that 'We have cut all the fat' when you have barely scratched the service," resident Fred Cregier said.

The operations budgets account for the expenses of running the schools - salaries, supplies, maintenance, busing and the like. The district plans to spend \$74.24 million in its operating budgets and expects income of \$76.37 million. Last year it spent \$73.5 million in those same funds.

One cut came from the proposed bus parking-athletic fields-maintenance garage project at Brundige and Keslinger roads.

Donna Oberg, assistant superintendent for business services, proposed cutting \$2.4 million of spending for it. New board member Mark Grosso, who was critical of district spending in his campaign in April, went further, moving to cut an additional \$2 million out of the \$5 million project. The rest of the board agreed, and his motion passed 7-0.

Most of the remaining money already is earmarked for permits and an intersection improvement contract with Kane County.

"We're doing nothing. We're not moving forward with it," Oberg said of the project, which would have moved maintenance vehicles offsite at Geneva High School and other district buildings. The district will still proceed with scheduled requests for zoning changes for the site, in case it decides to build later.

Overall, the district expects to take in \$88.8 million and spend \$97 million. The expense side of the ledger includes \$6.76 million in site and construction spending to wrap up construction of the new Fabyan Elementary School, which opened in August, and remaining bills from several remodeling projects throughout the district. However, the income for that work is not in the 2009-10 budget but instead showed up in previous years' budgets, when the money was actually borrowed, said Oberg, explaining part of the discrepancy.

Several audience members criticized credit card expenditures in the previous fiscal year for staff luncheons and board holiday receptions at local restaurants; a tax watchdog group obtained district records showing there are 111 of the so-called "procurement cards" spread throughout buildings and staff.

And others didn't like how much the district spends to bus students. The district buys 66 new buses a year and sells them back to the manufacturer at the end of the year at an 80 percent or better return rate.

The amount of administrators also was criticized, with Cregier saying the district is "bloated" with "assistants to assistants."