

WEST END

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3, 2022 | lakegenevanews.net | SECTION B

New Darien TIF approved

Taxing district will help make way for cold storage facility

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The final step has been approved to establish a tax incremental district in the Village of Darien for a proposed cold storage facility.

Members of the Village of Darien Joint Review Board unanimously approved, July 26, to establish a tax incremental district for NewCold Darien LLC to help the company

pay costs related to constructing a cold storage facility in the village.

The village board approved the tax incremental district, July 18, by a 5-2 vote, and the village plan commission had previously approved the district, June 29, also by a 5-2 vote.

Approval from the joint review board is the final step for allowing the tax incremental district to be established. The joint review board consists of representatives from local taxing bodies including the Village of Darien, Delavan-Darien School District, Walworth County and Gateway Technical College.

Representatives from NewCold Darien plan to construct a cold storage facility on 137 acres of land located near the southeast corner of County Highway X and Highway County C. The project is expected to cost about \$118 million.

NewCold is a Chicago-based company that operates cold storage facilities on three continents. The Darien cold storage facility is set to employ about 40 workers after it is completed.

The tax incremental district, which is set to close in 2039, will offer up to \$38 million in tax incentives to NewCold Darien to

reimburse the cost of making infrastructure improvements related to the construction of the cold storage facility.

"The developers pay for that site infrastructure and then get reimbursed through the agreement created," Brian Roemer, municipal advisor for Ehlers Public Financial Advisors, said. "This is basically what is called a 'pay-as-you-go' agreement. The village doesn't have to be the obligor of any debt."

Village Administrator/Clerk Lindsay Peterson said, despite the tax incremental district, the com-

pany will still have to pay annual taxes to the village.

"The incentive to the developer comes from the taxes that this company will pay each year," Peterson said.

During the joint review board meeting, Board Member and Walworth County Finance Director Jessica Conley said she has received emails from several area residents regarding the project and the tax incremental district and asked questions on the residents' behalf.

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WILLIAMS BAY

District approves reduced tax levy

Salaries set for school board members

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In an era when most costs are rising, often significantly, the Williams Bay School District is bucking the trend.

On a unanimous July 25 vote following a joint budget presentation by district administrator Dr. William White and new district business manager Jennifer Frederick, Williams Bay School District electors approved a reduced \$9,676,855 property tax levy in support of the district's 2022-2023 budget at the district's annual meeting in the middle school-high school lecture center.

The levy includes \$7,758,177 in support of the general fund, \$1,395,206 for referendum debt service, \$478,473 for non-referendum debt service and \$45,000 in support of the community service fund.

The tax levy approved by the eight district electors in attendance represents a 3.34% decrease from the \$10,012,740 levy that supported the district's 2021-2022 budget.

The proposed mill rate is \$0.00696 based on 2021 equalized property valuation within the district or \$6.96 per \$1,000 in property value. The final mill rate will be set in November following receipt this fall of updated equalized property valuation figures from the state.

Under the current property valuation with the decreased mill rate for 2022-2023, the owner of a \$250,000 property would pay \$1,740—down \$97 from the previous mill rate. The owner of property valued at \$750,000 would pay \$293 less at \$5,220.

The district's proposed balanced 2022-2023 budget of \$12,800,511—a 1.04% decrease from the \$13,935,382 budget for

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STEPHANIE JONES, REGIONAL NEWS

WILLIAMS BAY FINE ART & CRAFT FEST

The 46th Annual Williams Bay Fine Art & Craft Fest was held Saturday and Sunday, July 30 & 31 at Edgewater Park.

BIG FOOT HIGH SCHOOL

Big Foot eyes lower tax levy

District ups pay for subs, school bus drivers

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While prices are sharply on the rise across the board in the current inflationary environment, one cost may well be going down for residents living within the boundaries of the Walworth-based Big Foot Union High School District.

Big Foot serves the villages of Fontana, Sharon and Walworth, and the towns of Walworth, Delavan, Linn and Sharon.

In a bit of good news for beleaguered taxpayers struggling with the costs of rising interest rates and national inflation spiking to highs not seen since 1979, the Big Foot Board of Education on July 18 previewed the Grades 9-12 union high school district's proposed 2022-23 budget, which prelim-

inarily calls for decreased local taxation.

District business director Laura Long previewed the district's proposed balanced \$9,140,533 budget for the 2022-23 school year, which calls for the levying of \$6,908,098 in local tax revenues, down from \$7,214,940 for the 2021-22 school year.

The district's proposed \$9,140,533 budget for 2022-23, down from the \$9,607,454 budgeted for the 2021-22 school year, budgets \$3,128,387 for instruction, \$4,501,065 for pupil support, and \$1,511,079 for non-program expenditures.

"We have a three-year, non-recurring, \$350,000 referendum for operating costs the public passed in November 2018 that's falling off, which is basically the decrease in revenue for us," said district administrator Dr. Doug Parker. "It's very preliminary. We don't get

our final equalization value verified until October, so our numbers can still change, but because it's the second year of a biennium, it's pretty close to ballpark."

Parker said the district is projecting a mill rate of \$2.89 per \$1,000 in equalized property valuation, pending fall receipt of updated property value figures from the State of Wisconsin.

WIAA membership renewal

In advance of an Aug. 1 application deadline, the Big Foot Board of Education approved a one-year membership renewal with the Stevens Point-based Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) for select Grades 9-12 sports.

The WIAA membership renewal comes at no cost to Big Foot Union High School.

A WIAA Board of Control April 2015 suspension of dues and fees until the 2017-18 school year became permanent as a result of membership action at its 2017 annual meeting.

Other news

In other July 18 developments, the Big Foot Board of Education:

- Received an annual seclusion and restraint report showing zero instances of student seclusion or restraint at Big Foot High School or Lakeland School during the 2021-2022 school year. Established in 1950, Lakeland School serves approximately 200 special needs students ages 3-21 from all across Walworth County with a full range of services at its self-contained facility at W3905 County Road NN, Elkhorn.

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WILLIAMS BAY SCHOOLS

Bay Schools approve \$90,000 capital improvement project

Middle-high school gym lockers to be replaced over winter break

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After 26 years of wear, tear and increasing rates of repair, the Williams Bay Board of Education on July 25 approved designation of \$90,000 in district fund balance for the replacement of gym lockers at Williams Bay Middle School-High School.

The school, which enrolls 391 students in Grades 6-12, opened in 1996.

The project, which will see the replacement and configuration of the current locker system with 500 new all-welded lockers, also includes the installation of privacy stalls in the shower rooms.

According to district building

and grounds director Ryan Quinn, the lockers will be placed so as to open up the locker rooms to provide a central gathering area for team meetings, something the current locker configuration cannot accommodate.

In response to board questioning, Quinn said the work will be performed during winter break in December to prevent disruption to school operations.

In related news, the board approved the designation of \$59,275 from fund balance to pay for two ongoing capital improvement projects at Williams Bay Middle School-High School, including replacement of the main entry doors and the repair of the maintenance department loading dock.

Busing

At the behest of district administrator Dr. William White, the board, following the lead of other

area school districts, approved a request from Dousman Transport Co., Inc., to increase bus driver pay \$1.50 an hour.

The increase is intended to aid in the retention and recruitment of bus drivers in a tight and competitive labor market, and to help Dousman stay competitive with the pay rates offered by other area bus companies.

The additional cost to the district, White said, would be \$3,378 for the upcoming 2022-23 school year.

"Certainly we need drivers to drive our buses to keep those running," White said. "We need to help the bus company a little bit. I think it's in our best interest to support the bus company."

Dousman, which serves a number of southeastern Wisconsin school districts, operates two busing hubs in Walworth County — a Lake Geneva facility at N1889

County Highway H, serving Lake Geneva Area Schools; and a Delavan facility at 1736 Hobbs Dr., serving Delavan-Darien, Walworth and Williams Bay schools.

In related news, the board approved a five-year contract extension with Dousman Transport, \$86,137 for the 2022-23 school year, which calls for a 2.5% annual rate increase per year over the five-year contract period, which runs through the 2026-27 school year.

The new contract is effective Aug. 1.

Other news

In other action at the July 25 meeting, the Williams Bay School Board:

- Approved the resignations of middle school-high school physical education teacher Joseph Hauser and varsity softball coach Jeff Kuespert, and the hir-

ing of Matthew Landers as middle school-high school physical education teacher, Jessica Soskitch as assistant girls volleyball coach, and Nathan Borgen as varsity boys basketball coach.

- Approved a \$600 administration contract with Hartland-based Diversified Benefits Services, Inc. to administer the district's COBRA insurance plans. In 1985, the United States government passed the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA), which gives workers and their families the right to continue their workplace health insurance coverage after a qualifying event occurs where they would otherwise lose their health plan. The district has 64 COBRA-eligible employees.

- Approved the designation of \$10,000 in general fund balance to the district's Fund 46 long-term capital improvement trust fund.

Burlington School Board mulling referendum

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BURLINGTON — The Burlington Area School District board is considering a referendum.

If the board moves forward with its plan, a question asking if voters support the referendum would likely appear on ballots next April.

During a special meeting Monday, July 25, the school board seemed to agree on a non-recurring, five-year operational referendum to help fund school district costs and address its current seven-figure budget deficit. The topic was only discussed by board members; no action was taken during the meeting.

An operational referendum is different from a capital referendum, which funds building construction. In 2018, Burlington voters approved a capital referendum totaling more than \$43 million.

The operational referendum should be much smaller, but an exact amount has not been determined. The school board will discuss that topic at future meetings before voting to add a referendum



Turke

Plank

Schmalig

tendent Stephen Plank said it will compound in future years. Based on its projections, Plank said the school district would have a deficit of \$17 million in the 2026-27 school year.

"That's just jaw-dropping," Plank said. "It just becomes an exponentially more problematic and frightening reality."

BASD Board President Peter Turke said the school board has been fiscally responsible in recent decades and that operational referendums are a regular part of education financing in the state.

"I don't think it's a failure on our part of planning or being financially responsible to consider (a referendum)," Turke said. "We put out what we think is a good plan. Let the public decide."

Board member Barry Schmalig agreed.

"It's our job to give the public that question, to let them say, 'We do support what you're doing (or) we don't support what you're doing,'" Schmalig said.

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Burlington Area School District Board member Barry Schmalig.

question to the ballot. The board wants to pose the question to voters next spring instead of this November so there is more time to inform residents about the referendum.

The Burlington school district is facing a budget deficit of about \$2 million. If that deficit is not addressed, Burlington Superin-

Schools

From B1

2021-2022—would maintain the district's current \$3,475,265 general fund balance.

Frederick characterized the district's 2022-2023 budget as "a very conservative budget."

District resident Darla Thiel, Williams Bay Middle School-High School mathematics teacher, was elected to chair the annual meeting.

District electors approved setting the annual salaries of Board of Education members as follows: President, \$2,500; and vice president, treasurer, clerk and member-at-large, \$2,200 each.

Current members of the Williams Bay Board of Education are Jack Lothian, president; Karolyn Nelson, vice president; Ed Nichols, clerk; Dr. Patrick Peyer, treasurer; and Mark Schneider, member-at-large.

Electors set the date and time for the 2023 district annual meeting for July 24 at 6:30 p.m.

Looking ahead to the 2022-2023 school year in his address to district electors, White said the Williams Bay School District is facing both challenges and opportunities.

"I think we have a strong professional staff that are excited to come back this year," White said of opportunities for the district. "We've got some great new hires and experienced people we're bringing in. I think our staff are

bringing energy and excitement into our schools as they look to work with our kids. Certainly we have a great foundation to work with—we've got high student achievement, a strong professional staff and excellent kids. Our students come here to learn and our employees come here to help those kids dream, aspire and achieve."

Referencing the three biggest challenges facing the district, White said Williams Bay has plenty of company across Wisconsin and the nation.

Among the challenges facing the Williams Bay School District, he noted, is the "big, big issue" of school finances as they are configured by the state legislature, as well as the finance-impacting issue of declining enrollment.

"We know that we're facing some strong budgetary challenges," White said.

A major and growing challenge in education circles, White noted, is staffing shortages for both teachers and support staff.

"All districts are struggling to find employees," he said, "People are hard, hard to find. This is a national trend. A lot of school districts, especially the ones that are getting ready to start in August, are facing classrooms without an adult in them. We are struggling to keep staff. We just had a resignation this Friday, so we're working as hard as we can to fill that resignation. I am worried that if we get a late resignation we will have the inability to fill that

position, so we are working hard to make sure we have full classrooms. It is a very competitive job market. It's a very big challenge ... You open up WECAN (Wisconsin Education Career Access Network, started in 2001 to help educators search for teaching jobs across Wisconsin and streamline applicant review, selection and recruitment processes) and there are hundreds of jobs available and right now people are playing the system to get more money. They have the ability to increase their salary significantly by working the job market."

Said White of the trio of challenges facing the district as it heads toward the fast-approaching new school year, "We're going to continue to work through those and do our best."

The Grades 4K-12 Williams Bay School district enrolls 728 students and employs a total of 85, including five administrators, 61 certified educators and 19 support staff.

Members of the district administration team are Dr. William White, district administrator; Emily Soley-Johnson, middle school-high school principal; Dr. Ali Bond, elementary principal; Kassie McComber, special education director; and Jennifer Frederick, business manager.

The Williams Bay School District will add a new 3K program in the fall, with two full-time teachers providing 3K services for up to 30 students per day, five days a week.

District

From B1

Would anyone benefit?

Conley said several people have asked her if there is a connection between village officials, NewCold representatives and the landowner regarding the project. Peterson said she has heard similar concerns, but there has been no evidence that any village official would benefit directly from the project.

"There is no kind of agreement that they would somehow personally benefit from this, besides the benefit that any other resident would get," Peterson said. "Honestly, we encourage anyone who may have that information to please come forward. We've heard this statement over and over again, and nobody has been able to bring any details that would show any connection between any board member, company or the landowner."

Board Member Anthony Klein, who also is the business administrator for the Delavan-Darien School District, said the school district would not receive a direct financial benefit from the project.

"We would not get any money from it," Klein said. "In fact if this were to go onto all our property base, we might actually see our equalized assessed value go down in some respects."

Concerns about potential noise

Conley said some residents expressed concern about potential noise coming from the cold storage facility. Peterson said the Village of Darien has a noise ordinance in place, which the company would have to follow.

"This company, like any other piece of property or developer or residential property in the village, will be required to adhere to those noise standards," Peterson said. "There's specific processes in place if that's violated and how it will be addressed. So that ordinance is in place to address any kind of noise from any commercial or industrial development."

Retention pond management

Conley said she also has heard concerns that the retention ponds that would be installed near the cold storage facility could attract insects which would bring diseases to nearby farm animals.

However, Conley said she has talked with village officials who said as long as the ponds are at the correct minimum water retention levels and are filtered that would not occur.

She said the retention ponds also would have to be reviewed by the village engineer to make sure they are installed properly.

Peterson said before the cold storage facility is constructed the company would have to en-

ter into an agreement with the village that they would maintain the retention ponds.

"If they didn't, the village has the authority to go in and maintain those ponds ourselves or hire someone for the maintenance, and we can charge that back to the company," she said.

Peterson said if anyone notices any concerns related to the retention ponds, they should contact the village.

"If people had complaints that there was a swarm or something like that, they would bring those concerns to the village, and the village would deal with those," Peterson said.

Would taxes increase?

Several residents have questioned whether the village's water and sewer rates and taxes would increase as a result of the project and the tax incremental district, according to Conley.

Roemer said village taxes would not increase as a result of the project. He said NewCold officials would pay for any water and sewer infrastructural costs and then be reimbursed by the village through the tax incremental district.

"This isn't a cheese manufacturer that's disposing serious items into the sewage system," Roemer said. "This is simply kind of an office use, if you will, for water and sewer. So from that perspective they are paying for the tax incremental district, which is to pay for improvements to any utilities, and therefore there wouldn't be an increase to the current users. There wouldn't be a direct impact as a result of this."

Benefits to the community

Conley said the cold storage facility would bring about 40 jobs to the village after it is completed. She said the project also would attract construction workers who would visit the village's businesses.

"We're bringing economic development. There's going to be construction here," Conley said. "We're going to have people come in to build something. Whether they're Walworth County citizens or village citizens that are going to do that or whether they're going to bring in people from the outside, that means they're going to frequent our local businesses in the coming year to spend their money and help growth in that manner."

Conley said she also encourages village officials to distribute more information about the project and the tax incremental district to residents.

"It takes awhile for the word to get out on some of these types of things. A lot has happened quickly for most people," Conley said. "If this does occur and we move forward with this, then I anticipate that they're going to have more questions. If a new neighbor is coming in, you want to have a good relationship."

Big Foot

From B1

- Along with the Reek, Fontana, Walworth, Williams Bay and Delavan school boards, agreed to raise Dousman Transport bus driver wages by \$1.50 an hour in

an effort to help Dousman stay competitive with the pay rates offered by other area bus companies.

- Approved a five-year bus contract with incumbent busing services vendor Dousman Transport Co., Inc., of Dousman, which operates Walworth

County transportation hubs out of Delavan and Lake Geneva. The district's contract with Dousman, \$208,423 for the 2022-2023 school year, calls for a 2.5% annual rate increase per year over the five-year contract period, which runs through the 2027-2028 school year.

- Renewed the district's shared school nursing services contract with Reek Elementary School. Contract terms are unchanged.

- Approved a schedule of 2022-2023 student fees at a rate unchanged from the 2021-2022 school year.

- Approved a \$15/day increase in the district's substitute teacher pay rate from \$110 to \$125 per day, a move that aligns Big Foot with area districts in the competition for substitute teachers.

- Approved the hiring of Big Foot alumnus Sophia Foster as junior varsity cross-country coach.