

St. Germain town board seeks elector approval of significant tax levy increase

By Fred Williston
SPECIAL TO THE LAKELAND TIMES

During a meeting of the St. Germain town board on Thursday, Oct. 20, supervisors voted unanimously to ask the town's electors for permission to raise the tax levy to be collected in 2023 by \$200,000.

Wisconsin state statute only allows municipalities to increase their levies in small percentages without voter approval. In the case of St. Germain, that permissible increase would be limited to \$2,858.

Municipalities with populations of more than 3,000 people accept or reject major levy increases by referendum. Their smaller counterparts — like St. Germain — have the issue decided by resolution and a vote of the town's electors.

Ostensibly, an additional \$200,000 would represent a 53% tax increase for town property owners, but town board chairman Tom Christensen spoke with *The Lakeland Times* on Friday and explained why that number is misleading.

"There are two parts to the levy," he said. "And that's how I'm going to approach it on the night of the special meeting. The two parts are made up of the funds that we use to operate the town business, which amounts to

\$373,039 for next year. That's the allowable levy with the increase of \$2,858. And the other part of the levy is the debt service. And the debt service amounts to \$536,349. So our total allowable levy ends up being \$909,388."

He said due to state regulations, the percentage of the increase must be figured only against the operations portion of the levy, excluding the debt-service portion. The \$200,000 represents a 53% increase to the operations portion of the levy, but only a 22% increase to the total levy.

Christensen also told *The Times* there is only one expenditure driving the need for the tax increase.

"What we would like to do is to add \$200,000 for a special road-maintenance program. And that \$200,000 will only be spent on the

road-maintenance program," he said. "And I would anticipate the road funding will continue into the upcoming fiscal years."

During last Thursday's meeting, supervisor Kalisa Mortag voiced her concern about the increase being difficult for the town's electors to swallow.

"I just wish that percentage didn't look that way, because it makes it sound so horrendous," she said.

Christensen replied "There's no way around that. There's no sugar-coating it. It is what it is ... if we want something done with the roads, there has to be more money. That's all you can do."

"The fifty-three (percent) is a little strong," he said, "But we'll soon have some information from (road-builder) Pitlik & Wick, and I'll try and take some measurements on some of

the roads so everybody kind of gets an idea of 'Here's what it costs to start fixing these roads.' I think the \$200,000 shouldn't be hard to justify, to be perfectly honest with you. Whether or not it's acceptable (to the electors) is another thing."

A special meeting of the town electors will be held on Wednesday, Nov. 16, at 7 p.m. in the Community Center to decide the levy issue. Electors will cast a year-or-nay vote (by secret ballot) on whether to allow the increase of \$200,000. If the nay votes prevail and the increase is not allowed, electors will then vote on whether to accept the original operational levy with only the \$2,858 increase permitted by statute.

On Friday, *The Times* asked Christensen for a prediction regarding the result of the upcoming voting.

"Oh, it's going to be a flip of a coin," he said, "Depending on who all shows up ... Sometimes our voter turnout for levy approval has been 30 or 40 people; sometimes it's been two."

Only St. Germain residents are eligible to vote. Taxpayers who own property in the town but reside elsewhere are not.

Town clerk June Vogel told *The Times* "Currently, we are at 1,612 people who can vote, but that number is fluid. It changes every day as we get new voter registrations."

According to a written statement provided by the board, "The Road Maintenance Program is not for upgrade of gravel roads to asphalt paved surface, emergency road repair, or asphalt paved surface road reconstruction."

"The qualifying road would have been resur-

faced or reconstructed in the last thirty years. The condition of the road is still very good; however, for the extended life of the road, some asphalt/surface maintenance is required."

"Examples of the roads are, but not limited to, Birchwood Drive, Juve Road - Hwy. 155 to Four Corner Lane, paved section of Moon Road, Four Corner Lane, Maplewood Drive, Dixon Road, Renner Road, Rollmann Road, Half Mile Road, Hemlock Lane, Hemlock Road, Jackson Lane, etc."

The statement also read: "The type of maintenance/repair under the Program would include adding gravel to and grading of gravel roads, chip/aggregate sealing, spot asphalt repairs, shoulder repairs, crack repair/sealing, and crack leveling."



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
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