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# Lew-Port tax rates dip

## School board approves slight tax break; money was for reserve fund

By Mark Scheer

Niagara Gazette

500HP

LEWISTON — Taxpayers in the Lewiston-Porter School District will get a slight break on their tax bills this year, but it will come at the expense of the district's reserve fund for capital improvements.

Lewiston-Porter School Board members on Tuesday voted unanimously to apply a larger portion of the district's \$1.7 million fund balance to this year's \$17 million tax levy, producing a savings to taxpayers of less than one percent from last year.

"I know it isn't going to be much ... but I think it would be a start," said board member Margaret Laurie.

The administration proposed a tax levy of \$17.2 million for 2001-2002. The proposed levy would have produced the same tax rate as last year — \$21 per \$1,000 assessed property value.

Board member James Leighton moved to amend the proposal, suggesting \$144,345 earmarked for the district's capital reserve fund be used to lower the tax levy and give home and business owners a break.

The \$144,345 was added to more than \$1 million in fund balance money already set aside by the administration to reduce the tax levy. The administration intended to use the \$144,345 to boost the district's capital reserve fund, which currently contains about \$104,000.

Louis Palmeri, who seconded Leighton's proposal, said he had concerns about the conditions of the district's sports fields, but did not believe forgoing a break for taxpayers was the best way to fix those problems.

"If I have a choice to give a tax break to taxpayers or improve the fields, I'd rather do this, this way," he said.

Assistant Superintendent Don Rappold said the exact amount of the tax rate reduction would be calculated and made available at an upcoming meeting.

In other matters, the board:

■ Issued a public notice soliciting qualified applicants for the board position left

vacant by Mark Shea. Interested applicants are being asked to send qualifications to board President Edward Lilly by Sept. 5.

Lilly attempted to fill the post earlier this month, but his resolution appointing former board member William Spry of Youngstown was tabled amid questions about the length of the term.

Those questions were not resolved Tuesday. Lilly again contended Shea's replacement should be allowed to complete his term, which would have ended in June 2004. School district attorney F. Warren Kahn and Olsen disagree, saying the new member could serve only until the next election in May,

when that person would have to run to be elected for the full balance of the term.

■ Received a report from Superintendent Walter Polka on the Niagara County Health Department's assessment of lead and arsenic levels on school grounds. Polka said Health Department officials found the levels of both on campus to be acceptable. He said their findings concur with those of the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers. Higher than normal levels of arsenic and lead were discovered recently on the south corner of the grounds, causing residents to express concerns about the situation during a board meeting in July.