

The Times Tribune, Old Forge school board must vote on budget again

OLD FORGE - The school board's preliminary adoption last month of its 2012-13 budget doesn't count because a proper public notice of the budget had not first been given, officials said Monday.

As a result, the board will have to vote on the budget again - this time after a 20-day public notice period has expired, board President Deborah DeSando said during a work session. The budget is expected to be voted on during the board's next regular meeting on Jan. 18.

Asked after the meeting to clarify why a do-over is necessary, Ms. DeSando said "it was a mistake" that was made by the board's business consultant, Brian Kelly. "Our business manager told us it needed to be on display for 20 days before adoption."

Mr. Kelly was not present Monday night, and efforts to reach him afterward were unsuccessful.

Mr. Kelly was present on Dec. 21, when the board voted to adopt a preliminary budget that proposes a 5.4-mill tax increase, the maximum allowed by the state, board members said.

At that time, the board first rejected a 2.3-mill "state index" tax increase, and then approved the higher tax rate. What then should have happened is a public notice of the preliminary budget should have been published, followed by an adoption vote after a 20-day window expired, Ms. DeSando said.

Mr. Kelly informed the board of the mistake on Dec. 22, and public notice was then issued, Ms. DeSando said.

"Everybody makes a mistake," board member Ron Stacchiotti said, adding that Mr. Kelly should have known better. "He's the one we listen to for directives on stuff like that. He was at the (Dec. 21) meeting and never stopped us on voting on it. That's why we pay these people."

A mill represents \$1 in tax for every \$1,000 in assessed value. Old Forge's current tax rate is 109.3275 mills. A 5.4159-mill increase would result in a tax rate of 114.7434 mills, or an annual tax increase of about \$65, based on a home assessed at \$12,000, officials have said.

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