

School taxes may rise slightly for Pownal

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POWNAL — While not all figures are in, it appears that cuts in the elementary school's budget will reduce the elementary school's contribution to the education homestead tax rate by about 11 cents.

However, a drop in the town's common level of appraisal (CLA) will result in the overall tax rate increasing slightly, according to the school district's business manager, Richard Pembroke Jr., who attended a budget work session Wednesday.

'A work in progress'

Board member Gudrun Hutchins said the Pownal budget is very much a work in progress, and the exact numbers won't be known until later in the month when the district receives cost figures from Mount Anthony Union High School District.

She said the cost of special education is also an unknown at this point.

The town's CLA on real estate has dropped 9.44 percent, bringing it to 79.11 percent. The number is set by the state and is applied to the tax rate so each town pays an equal amount based on the actual assessment of property values. The closer to 100 percent, generally speaking, the less of an effect there is on taxes.

The Pownal Select Board recently voted to begin a townwide reappraisal, which when completed in 2011 would bring the CLA up again.

Board member Jon Peaslee asked what the effect on the CLA would be if Pownal were to consolidate with other school districts. Pembroke said it was his understanding that the state would combine their grand lists for tax purposes, and Pownal might benefit from Bennington's commercial grand list.

It's also possible, Pembroke said, that more money would be available through the secure rural schools act, which compensates towns with national forest land that is removed from the tax base.

Some of the alterations the school board made to the budget draft included cutting the amount of money spent on printing copies of the final draft to be distributed to voters for town meeting day. Pembroke said that to spend less, the town could put the budget online and send out postcards informing people how to get a copy upon request.

He said that normally the school prints about 2,000 copies, but uses far less.

The board did decide to increase the building maintenance/repairs line item from \$23,000 to \$40,000, citing that the known cost of repairs, such as the boiler, the roof and the gym ceiling, would exceed the \$23,000 allotment.

Chairwoman Cynthia Browning said it wasn't wise to put off the cost of building improvements for a year, saying the window replacements should continue.

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