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4-J seeks new tax base

By Stephanie Mencimer
Emerald Reporter

On Tuesday, University students will have the chance to help determine the fate of Eugene's 4-J school district.

Ballot measure 20-08 asks voters to approve a new tax base for the school district that



would raise Eugene property taxes an average of \$142 for a \$60,000 home.

An increase in the tax base will balance 4-J's 1990-91 general budget fund of \$97.9 million.

David Mandelblatt, president of the Eugene Education Association, said if the ballot measure does not pass, the school district will lose about 50 teachers and may fall into the state safety net to prevent shutting down the district entirely for lack of funding.

The tax base would restore programs cut last year, such as

\$150,000 in programs for at-risk students, and provide for additional textbooks, equipment, classroom furniture and building improvement.

According to a 4-J employee newsletter, more than 65 percent of the district school buildings are between 21 and 40 years old, and 11 percent are more than 61 years old. According to the newsletter, many of these are in need of renovation and repairs over the next two years, for which the increased tax base would help provide.

Mandelblatt said the problem with school finance needs to be solved by the Legislature trying to find another way to fund public education rather than through the controversial property tax.

However, he said because the Legislature only meets every two years, the district needs to raise the tax base now to continue providing quality education for Eugene students.

Mandelblatt encouraged University students to support the ballot measure.

"At some point when you're retired, today's kindergartners will be paying for your social security," he said. "Today's high school students will be your colleagues, and you want them to be competent."

A loss of 50 teachers would

mean a major increase in class size, Mandelblatt said, as well as a negative effect on other programs such as the budget proposal for a teacher recognition incentive to help set goals toward improving instruction.

Property taxes are the major source of school revenue, making up 70.9 percent of district revenue. The state places a 6 percent limitation on the school tax base, requiring any additional funding needed by the district to be approved by the voters.

The tax base requested in measure 20-08 would be \$4,475,000 above the 6 percent limit, and would be in effect for at least two years.

If the measure does not pass, Mandelblatt said the district will have to ask voters for a one-year tax levy next month to supply the additional funding.

The district is also developing a plan to reduce the school budget by \$3.8 million if a funding measure is not approved by the voters. This year, the district balanced its budget by eliminating 127 staff positions and support services. The employee newsletter suggests that if no funding measure is approved for the 1990-91 school year, it will be necessary to reduce about the same amount of the budget as was reduced this year.

Ballot asks for downtown tax

Eugene voters are being asked to approve a ballot measure dealing with downtown development.

Measure 20-03 asks voters whether the city should tax owners of property in the Downtown Development District to continue providing for marketing, parking and business recruitment for the area.

The tax was originally created in 1973 when downtown businesses asked the city for help in staying competitive with suburban shopping malls. The businesses essentially

asked for permission to tax themselves to create a pool of funds to provide free parking within the business district, as well as to pay for marketing and holiday events that would draw people downtown.

The proceeds from the district tax contribute to a fund of which 60 percent goes to downtown parking.

Another 25 percent is used for downtown management such as mall security, public information, recruitment of new businesses and administrative costs. The remaining 15

percent pays for downtown marketing and promotion.

Jerry Gill, a development analyst with the Eugene Planning Department, said most businesses are supportive of the tax.

The tax requested in 20-03 is the same as the rate approved last year.

Gill said some businesses on 11th Avenue between Willamette and Pearl Streets are probably less satisfied with the services provided by the tax because quite a bit of the money is centered around mall events.

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