

School districts run replacement levy proposals

■ By Jacob Bertram
Columbia Gorge News

Four school districts within Klickitat County are submitting replacement levies for voter approval at the next election.

Lyle, Bickleton, Trout Lake and Roosevelt school districts are the four jurisdictions which seek authorization to replace enrichment levies, also known as maintenance and operations levies, which are set to expire in the next collection year. The special election will be held Feb. 9, 2021.

While none of these are new taxes, some proposed levies would increase local funding for education programs, and others would keep the collection amount the same for the next two to three years.

For example, Lyle School District is proposing a collection of \$700,000 per year for the next two years, the same amount voters approved in 2019, while Trout Lake School District is seeking a 89.2 percent increase in the maximum collection amount, from \$290,000 to \$540,000 per year.

Lyle School District Superintendent Dr. Ann Varkados told Columbia Gorge News the district, like many small school districts in Washington state, are in need of local funding to sustain school operations.

The funds levied can only be used in certain ways due to Washington state's restructuring of public education financing in recent years. Varkados said such levies, now known as enrichment levies, provide support for areas of school operations

not fully covered by state and federal subsidies, such as utility costs, extracurricular activities student lunches, as well as sports equipment, salaries for support staff and coaching stipends.

"Our local funds are essential to students' success and these are things that are not paid out of our portion [by the state]," Varkados said.

While the state has attempted to remedy the situation in past years, such as allowing smaller districts to levy at a higher rate in 2019, for instance, Varkados said besides the federal CARES Act, which allowed Lyle School District to invest in technology upgrades, smaller school districts have seen little in the way of added support during the COVID-19 pandemic. With lowered full-time enrollment numbers, which serve as a benchmark for state support, and limited capacity due to social distancing guidelines, Varkados said the district is currently exceeding its allocation from the state.

Illustrating the situation of being a school district open to in-person instruction amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Varkados said that "we're running busses daily, but with smaller groups of students each day... The expenses are the same or more but we're receiving less from the state."

Varkados said the levy helps to fill gaps in equity due to its ability to spur motivation and innovation in students through extracurricular programs and sports.

"If we have thirteen percent less than our neighbor next door, than our kids would not have the same



Lyle Schools 2: Third grade teacher Dan McDonald keeps students engaged in small groups.

Submitted photos

opportunity," Varkados said.

Despite the rising costs, Lyle School District officials are seeking to keep their promise to voters not to raise over \$700,000 in total. The Lyle Schools Citizens Committee is hosting a Levy Information Zoom Meeting for the community on Jan. 21, beginning at 6 p.m. Zoom instructions will be on the district website, www.lyle-schools.org.

See below for a list of details on the proposed levies being considered for voter approval in Klickitat County.

Lyle School District

The Lyle School District is seeking to renew a two-year enrichment levy, and according to a press release, is promising that collections will not go over \$700,000 in total. District officials are thus estimating that the rate

at which taxes are levied will be \$1.64 per \$1000 of assessed value for the levy year 2021 and will drop to \$1.59 for the levy year 2022.

Bickleton School District

A three-year maintenance and operations levy collected by Bickleton School District is set to expire in 2021, which a proposal submitted by the district is set to remedy. District officials are estimating a rate of \$.90 per \$1,000 of assessed value for the next three years, from 2022 to 2024. Officials seeking a levy amount of \$300,000 each year throughout the course of the levy, if approved.

Trout Lake School District

Trout Lake School

District's two-year replacement levy is set to expire in 2021, and district officials are estimating a collection each year in the amount of \$540,000 in 2021, and \$575,000 in 2022 to sufficiently provide for the next three school years. According to the ballot title, the estimated levy rate is \$2.50 per \$1,000 of assessed value for both levy years. If approved, the district would see an increase from the expiring levy, which gathered \$290,000 in collection years 2020 and 2021.

Roosevelt School District

Roosevelt School District officials are seeking a levy in the amount of \$60,000 for three collection years starting in 2021. The proposed levy would provide for approximately the same programs as before for the school years 2021-2022, 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and 2024-202, according to the ballot measure. It is estimated to equal a rate of \$0.38 per \$1,000 of assessed value for the three collection years.

BELLS People need to be vigilant

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and churches in Parkdale, according to Ballah, director of the Hood River County Prevention program. She said locations in Cascade Locks and in Klickitat County have also been invited to participate, and the list may grow.

"It's nice when so much division seems to be going on right now in our country, that there is a unifying event that really focuses on the things that are important. It is good we can honor those and it shows we have compassion for the way it has affected everyone in our community," said Pastor Doug Massingill of Wy'east Community Church.

Ballah said the bell-ringing plan came about at the same time as the invitation from President-elect Joe Biden to communities to honor coronavirus victims with local lighting ceremonies in conjunction with a national lighting ceremony on Jan. 19 at 5:30 p.m. Eastern Time, at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The bell-ringing plan came about via Ballah's role as a member of the Joint

Information Center (JIC) of the Hood River County Emergency Operations Center.

"The idea came to mind a couple of weeks ago as I was listening to the news and heard of another community doing this," Ballah said. "The timing of it was great as we have been brainstorming as a group (the JIC) to remind people of the need to continue to be vigilant in our efforts to stay safe and keep our community safe — hand washing, wearing masks, social distancing. It struck me that we have had real loss in our community, family and friends have been deeply impacted by deaths due to COVID and perhaps the overall community is just not aware of this."

Ballah said last week that on Jan. 15 she will send bell-keepers the latest information after the weekly Friday morning Health Department conference call discussing coronavirus updates.

She said all bellringers have been asked to maintain coronavirus prevention precautions and will wear masks, keep social distance, wash their hands and resist the urge to gather together.

"We can and will get through this together," Ballah said.

Thank you banners



The Health Media Club of Hood River County Prevention Department recently placed a new and information-laden sign of gratitude to Hood River County School District, on the footbridge over the Hood River near exit 63. The sign is visible from Interstate 84, but even slowing to about 40 miles an hour, many motorists likely will need help reading all its contents: "We see you and appreciate you, HRCSD Families, Students and Staff/Los vemos y apreciamos, familias, etudiants y personal de HRCSD." Signs have also been placed at HRCSD school facilities. Sponsoring the signs are: Prevention Department, Port and City of Cascade Locks, Juanita's, Port and City of Hood River, OSU Extension, Providence Hood River, Safeway, Duckwall Fruit, Columbia Gorge Center for Living, Sign Media/Print It, Hood River County, One Community Health, Gorge Grown Food Network, Rosauers, Insitu, and The Next Door.

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