

The INDEPENDENT

Serving the upper Nehalem River valley. Published twice monthly, on the first and third Wednesdays of each month, by Public Opinion Laboratory Ltd., 725 Bridge Street, Vernonia, OR 97064, as a free newspaper. Editors and Publishers, Dirk & Noni Andersen. Phone/Fax: 503-429-9410, e-mail: noni@vernonia.com

Opinion

Amount of local tax is no longer a factor in education funding

A common misconception about the role of local property taxes and school funding is raising its head once again.

There was a time when the Nehalem Valley paid a large share of property taxes toward both county and school funding because of timber severance taxes and property taxes from the Mist gas fields. That is no longer the case.

Since voters approved Measure 5 about 10 years ago, all property taxes that will be used to fund education — industry based or residential — go directly to the state and are distributed to school districts through the state school funding formula. The state formula is based primarily on the number of students in the district—not by the amount of taxes contributed by local industry or other property owners.

It makes absolutely no difference where the property taxes originate...Mist, Maupin, Manzanita, Mt. Angel...it is not a factor.

One other caution: Don't blame "the State" for this situation. This was a decision by taxpayers to eliminate local control of school funding by making it a responsibility of the state.

The only property taxes that may be directed by voters to local schools are those approved by voters for capital projects such as school repairs or new facilities. In other words, if voters approve a bond issue for new or improved school facilities, the funds raised by that approval will be used locally, only for the purpose approved.

If the loss of local control is a problem, it is a problem created by local voters, who are mostly local taxpayers, as well.

— NOTICE —

The INDEPENDENT is published on the first and third Wednesdays of each month. Four months of each year, there are five Wednesdays, but the publishing schedule is not changed.

There are five Wednesdays this month, so there will three weeks between this Aug. 15 issue and the issue of Sept. 5.

Because of the Labor Day holiday, deadlines for the Sept. 5 issue will be Aug. 31 for news items and display advertising, and Sept. 1 for classified ads.



Schools' mechanical, electrical systems are faulty

Looking at the infrastructure of buildings can be an unpleasant experience; they don't age much better than humans. How many of us are, or will be willing to closely examine what we might see in a full length mirror when we reach the age of seventy, or even fifty? Washington Grade School, seventy years old, and Vernonia High School, a mere fifty, do not fare well on close examination. The final portion of the long-range facilities plan report is the study by Interface Engineering which evaluates the condition of the mechanical and electrical systems of WGS and VHS. The mechanical system includes heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

Air quality standards require that buildings receive adequate quantities of oxygen, and do not contain excess quantities of contaminants. According to Dave Soderstrom, district architect, the most common contaminate is carbon dioxide (CO2). High levels of CO2 contribute to the "stuffy" atmosphere familiar to everyone. Other contaminants include radon, mold and "out-gassing" from glues used for flooring, wall coverings and paints.

Problems experienced by students and staff at WGS can be compared to those at Whitaker Elementary in Portland. Susan Nielsen, writing in the Sunday Oregonian, says staff at the school complained of headaches, asthma, sinus infections, and fatigue. These complaints are familiar to parents of WGS students, particularly junior high students and others who spend significant periods of time in the basement. According to Nielsen, the Environmental Protection Agency says that failure to prevent or resolve air-quality problems in schools can increase the potential for long-term and short-term health problems; increase absenteeism; reduce productivity; reduce efficiency of the heating and

cooling equipment; strain relationships among school administrators, parents and staff; and create liability problems. Attempts to mitigate the dampness and mold in the WGS basement were undertaken after the '96 Flood. While partially successful, the results of seventy years of dampness have not been eliminated.

Ventilation at WGS is provided by opening windows, which results in inadequate ventilation for much of the school year. Heating is provided by a steam boiler. According to the report, the boiler is in good condition, but the steam piping is in poor condition, has excessive corrosion and requires replacement. Similarly, the water and sewer line piping also have excessive corrosion and need to be replaced.

Ventilation in the classrooms and gym at VHS was designed to be achieved with various fan systems with duct-mounted steam coils serving classrooms and the gym with both outside and return-air ducts. The system has failed because many of the heating coils have been frozen and the outside air ducts have been closed. As at WGS, the plumbing is corroded and will have to be replaced. According to the report, hot water supply is inadequate for peak shower time.

Descriptions of the lighting systems in both buildings repeatedly state that the lighting is old, and inefficient. Also, the report notes, no emergency lighting is provided at either building. The electrical service at WGS is antique and overloaded. The service at VHS was replaced after the flood. Both buildings have inadequate receptacles in classrooms.

The report also notes the lack of intercom and telecom wiring to all classrooms. Inability to communicate directly with the outside world may pose a safety hazard to students and staff, and certainly limits educational program opportunities.

Greater danger of fire forces additional fire season regulations

Rapidly drying conditions in northwest forests have caused Oregon Department of Forestry officials in northwest Oregon to impose further public restrictions, August 8, to those already in effect. The additional restrictions prohibit the non-industrial use of chain-saws and ban all campfires. Fire officials are urging persons using forested areas to avoid any activities that could cause a wildfire. According to

Dan Logan, Protection Supervisor at Columbia City, the woods are drying rapidly and the potential for a large fire exists. "With our recent hot weather, forest areas are getting very dry. Its time for us to tighten restrictions to prevent recreation-related fires."

Fire officials emphasize that, before people go into the woods, they must be prepared to take special precautions to prevent fires. The following restrictions

apply to all lands in Washington, Yamhill, Tillamook, Clatsop, Columbia and parts of Multnomah County protected by the Oregon Department of Forestry:

1. Smoking is prohibited while traveling, except in vehicles on improved roads, in boats on the water, and at designated locations.
2. Open fires are prohibited, including campfires, charcoal fires, cooking fires and warming fires, except at designated locations. Portable cooking stoves using liquefied or bottled fuels are allowed.

3. Chain saw use is prohibited between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.

4. Use of motorized vehicles, including motorcycles and all terrain vehicles, is prohibited, except on improved roads.

5. All fireworks are prohibited.

6. Cutting, grinding and welding of metal is prohibited.

7. Possession of the following fire fighting equipment is required while traveling, except on state and county roads: one shovel and one gallon of water or one operational 2-1/2 pound or larger fire extinguisher.

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These restrictions are in addition to fire season regulations already in effect on commercial logging operations. Cable yarding, power saws, hauling and other spark emitting operations are restricted under what are known as *Industrial Fire Precaution Levels*. Local fire season regulations or current information on Industrial Fire Precaution Levels is available by calling 503-397-2636.