

Wilson teachers won't get large pay increase this year

By Angie Mayes

Wilson County Schools teachers will not be getting a proposed raise next year. The raise for the teachers equaled monies from \$1,000 to \$5,000, based on years of experience.

According to WCS Finance Director Mickey Hall, the teachers will get a raise of 1.8% of their salary. That is a raise given every year. The proposed raise which failed was aimed at bringing their salary up to surrounding counties' teacher salaries.

The budget has been whittled down to include only items the county could afford during the next fiscal year. Those items could fit into the budget and be paid for revenues and growth money without raising property taxes, Commissioner and budget committee vice chairman William Glover said.

Growth money is an increase in property tax based on new development. The growth money equals funds that increased from one year to the next.

Among the things the county can fund out of the general service fund are some EMTs, fire fighters, and deputy positions for the Wilson County Sheriff's office.

None of the county's commissioners would state that they wanted to raise taxes for the raises and other items on the various department's needs lists. The departments within the county were tasked with noting which areas they could do without this year.

Most of them came back with items such as fewer Emergency Medical Technicians, deputies and fire fighters.

A pay schedule for new teachers is in the budget and has been since 2014, Hall said. It will allow incoming teachers to get a starting salary based on years of experience and degrees.

"I don't know why everyone is blowing this out of proportion," Hall said. "This has been in the budget since 2014. We just adjusted it this year."

At the budget committee meeting on July 30, County Mayor Randall Hutto said that just to fund the school's request of \$3.9 million to pay for a hike in teacher's salaries would take a nine-cent property tax increase.

Glover said he is against raising taxes this year.

"I asked for the needs of the school system (to prioritize their 14-item needs list), so that we as the budget committee and county commission could look at the needs from the school system and come up with the most-fair way to pay for our tremendous growth over the next year."

He said there are different ways to help fund the school's needs. He wants to revisit a sales tax increase from 9.25% to 9.75%, which is the maximum allowed by law. He also wants to consider raising the wheel tax and adequate facilities tax increase for new construction.

The wheel tax is paid by every resident who owns a vehicle within the county. The adequate facilities tax is fees brought in, based on new development.

The wheel tax could be increased by referendum. The amount of the adequate facilities tax could be raised by the full commission without a referendum. However, that tax could not be used for recurring costs such as salaries.

"When the new high school opens next year, we will be obligated \$4.1 million, we will be working on teacher raises and trying to meet other school needs for (the 2020-21 school year)," he said.

Because of that, he said he is, "asking the teachers to hold on for one more year. I want to get a pay study from the school system on teacher pay from surrounding areas."

He added that he wants to "look closely at the school budget and make sure we are getting the most out of the money we give them to operate. We gave the school system approximately \$1.7 million in growth this year for them to use as they needed."

He said that, "we are finished with the budget process and have sent it to the full commission vote at our next commission meeting. I want our citizens to know that we take very seriously their confidence in us. We work hard to manage the responsibilities that we have representing the county."

On Facebook, parent Renee Zaremba said she was disappointed with the results of the budget meetings.

"My primary reason for moving to Wilson County and paying property taxes in this county was because of what I believed to be a superior school system and a community that supports education," she said. "The school system and teachers here are exemplary."

She added that "what I am dissatisfied with (is the community not supporting education). I do not see enough of the community demanding a living wage for the educators who make this community such a desirable place to call home."

The budget will be voted on by the County Commission Aug. 19 at the Wilson County Courthouse, 228 Main Street in Lebanon. A public hearing begins at 6 p.m. and the meeting will begin at 7 p.m.