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(Neb)-Chadron School Board Finance Workshop Issues Carry Over To Board Meeting  [Listen](#)



By: John Axtell Posted at: 07/16/2017 02:05 PM

CHADRON - Chadron School Board members put in a long day Monday, meeting for more than 90 minutes in a workshop session on finances that started at noon and then putting in nearly 3 hours in their regular meeting starting at 5:30.

The workshop was open to the public, but drew no takers. Board President Tom Menke said later that all 6 board members were very pleased with the workshop, even if it didn't result in a consensus.

Other board members said during the regular session they felt the workshop was very useful although the descriptions of the proceedings differed. Jim O'Rourke referred to arguments while Sandy Roes characterized them as discussions.

Roes said she felt there was a lack of trust by some of her fellow members when it came to the recommendations made by board committees, and some of those other members admitted varying levels of unfamiliarity with the dynamics and issues faced by committees they aren't on.

All agreed it would be a good idea to have similar workshops each quarter on each committee, allowing them to learn more about all the committees over the two years between board elections.

During the workshop, Boone Huffman, elected to the board last year, offered a 5-year budget plan based on an unexpected additional \$271,000 in state school aid for the coming year and what he calculated would be additional \$360,000 in property taxes as a result of increased valuation.

Huffman proposed using his expected \$630,000 for the coming year to pay for renovation and upgrading 3 of 4 "pods" of the HVAC system at Chadron High School and \$1.4-million in additional property tax over the following 4 years to complete the HVAC system and pay off all existing bonds and loans.

Huffman said his plan would save \$185,000 in interest over the next 5 years, and that trimming the current budget by one-half of 1% would leave another \$50,000 a year - \$250,000 over the next 5 years - for building and grounds projects. He said it would allow the district to meet its capital project needs without taking loans, which he called "the easy way out to short-sighted budget planning."

Menke says the problem with plans such as Huffman's is that the school district's revenues can swing wildly from year to year.

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During the board meeting, Huffman's approach on loans won out as the board approved 2 contracts totalling about \$156,000 to go forward with the upgrade of the HVAC system in the newest portion of the high school, the western side that includes the district offices.

Superintendent Dr Caroline Winchester proposed using a \$100,000 state energy loan at 1% interest to fund most of the up-front costs, but a majority of the board decided instead to pay for the full project with the district's cash reserve - currently about \$2.7-million dollars. While he voted for the loan approach, Menke says Huffman's position is one he's heard from some patrons in recent days.

One goal of the board since Winchester became superintendent was to increase the cash reserve from less than \$1-million to as much as \$3-million to reach the auditor's recommendation of enough money to cover 3-to-4 months of operations should problems arise with tax collections or state aid. Menke says that priority has obviously changed.