

District to vote on doubling tax

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By Dan Hinkel
Gazette Staff

FORT ATKINSON-Fort Atkinson High School might be the only place on this planet Saturday where people will consider doubling their own taxes.

The Rock Koshkonong Lake District would raise its special assessment from \$50 per parcel per year to \$100 if taxpayers approve next year's budget.

Much of the money will pay legal costs for the district's contested case hearing against the state Department of Natural Resources.

The district and other groups requested a contested case hearing to challenge the DNR's rejection of the district's request to raise the lake about 7 inches in the summer and eliminate a winter drawdown. Judge William S. Coleman heard the case this spring but has not issued a decision.

District resident and former board candidate Norbert J. Johnson is not happy. He won't make the board meeting because of a previous engagement. Clashing with people who want the lake's level raised is "futile" anyway, he said.

"They have pissed away so much money in legal fees," he said.

"All we're doing is lining some \$400-an-hour lawyer's pocket."

District Chairman Brian Christianson said the spending is necessary to vindicate a 2002 request to raise water levels that residents approved. The contested case hearing cost about \$550,000, Christianson said.

Studies and assessments of the lake during the district's fight with the DNR cost several hundred thousand dollars, Christianson said. He differentiates those costs from legal fees.

"Had we not done all of the research leading up to this year, we would never have been granted our petition for the hearing," he said.

Johnson-an accountant-estimates the spending at around \$1 million. He questioned how long a legal fight would continue.

Christianson expects a smaller special assessment next year. Any appeal to Coleman's ruling would be much cheaper than the hearing, Christianson said. The contested case hearing will be the most expensive part of the district's water level battle, he said.

"It's not only the most expensive part of the effort that began in 2002, but also it's probably the most significant case that the DNR has faced this year," he said.

Christianson's seat on the district board is up for election at the meeting. No one has announced to Christianson or to The Janesville Gazette intentions to challenge Christianson, who is also a Fulton Town Board supervisor.

The meeting is open to nominations from the floor.

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