

Lake Koshkonong vote draws more than 500 residents to meeting

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Commissioner Marty Walsh asked people to remain calm.

Chairman Brian Christianson asked people to keep their emotions in check.

In the end, however, all people wanted to do was vote.

At Saturday's Rock Koshkonong Lake District meeting, more than 500 district residents voted overwhelmingly to raise the special assessment fee from \$45 to \$50. The vote on the budget was symbolic-it wasn't so much about the money, but rather a vote of support for the district's ongoing battle with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources over lake levels.

The lake district has done studies showing that raising the water level a little more than 7 inches and eliminating the winter drawdowns would not harm the area's ecology. The DNR disputes the findings and has refused to change its operating orders.

The \$5 increase will raise about \$200,000 and allow the lake district to pay for its legal battle with the DNR.

"Passions are pretty high on both sides of the issues," said Brian Christianson, lake district chairman. "We-the lake district-tried to be very transparent. We tried to put all the information we had out there. In the end, we had a very informed group of people."

Still, Christiansen acknowledged that the board was prepared for a hostile environment at the meeting. It hired an off-duty Fort Atkinson police officer, who appeared at the meeting in uniform.

The meeting opened with a review of the lake district's activities. Treasurer Jerry Richardson presented a \$200,000 budget for 2006. About \$140,000 will be used for budget items such as accounting, consulting and legal fees.

During the budget debate, people asked questions about the lake district's liability for the dam, made a motion to add \$10,000 to the budget for a dredging study-it was turned down-and suggested that the district's legal fees would continue to mount. But no one was willing to make the motion to take the extra money out of the budget.

People in the crowd began to call out, "Let's vote." A motion was made to call for a vote and was passed.

The budget passed by an overwhelming show of hands.

The lake district also elected officers for the board of commissioners.

Frank Micale was returned to office, and Jeff Folk won the other seat. Both men support raising the water level. Norbert Johnson lost. Johnson ran on a platform of fiscal responsibility.

The final vote tally was Folk, 507, Micale, 475, and Johnson, 112.

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