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INDEPENDENT

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Serving the Communities of Belleville, Sumpter and Van Buren

FREE

School Board gives Supt. Lazaroff 1 more year – to June 2009

By Rosemary K. Otzman
Independent Editor

The Van Buren Public Schools Board of Education held a two-hour, closed-door evaluation of School Supt. Pete Lazaroff on March 19 and last Monday it voted, 5-1 to give him an additional year on his contract.

Trustee Toni Hunt voted no. Treasurer Keith Johnston was absent.

Hunt, who had clashed with Lazaroff about the controversial transfer of assistant principal Mike Van Tassel last year, is a longtime supporter of the band program which Van Tassel ran for many years.

"We've had some really good things and we have some concerns," Hunt said at Monday's meeting while discussing the school district's last year under Lazaroff.

She said she was going to vote no on the *third* year of a contract for Lazaroff, but Lazaroff said his contract currently ran to 2008 and the proposal was to extend it one year.

"It's not like I'm trying to kick him out the door," Hunt said.

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All the Belleville High School concert bands performed at Hill Auditorium in Ann Arbor on Thursday. Above is the BHS Symphony Band. Director is Nick Taylor.

Photo courtesy of Phil Hecksel

VBT officially places 4-mill tax question on Aug. 7 ballot

By Rosemary K. Otzman
Independent Editor

At its March 20 meeting, the Van Buren Township Board of Trustees voted unanimously to put a 4-mill tax question on the Aug. 7 ballot.

The 4 mills will bring in \$5,275,000 when first put on the tax bill in December.

The levy would include 3 mills renewal and 1 new mill, in one package, to support police and fire operations.

Clerk Joannie Payne pointed out that the elections are now called "Consolidated Elections" not "Special Elections" because of the recent changes in state law. Elections are now authorized only for dates in February, May, August, and November in an attempt to save money for taxpayers.

Supervisor King said the 3 mills now being levied pays about half of the cost of police and fire, with the rest being picked up through landfill money and the general fund.

The 4-mill question, which had not been before the Public Safety Committee before it was announced, now has been recommended by that committee.

King said that the citizens committee discussed that 6 mills of taxes would have funded the police and fire operations as they are, with no improvements. But, they decided, not to seek 6 mills because of the economy.

Public Safety Director Jerry Champagne said each mill brings in about \$1.3 million. The police and fire

need the extra money, he said, to reduce response time, decrease crime, install a special investigative unit, fill in the four-hour gap in the 20-hour fire department duty crew, and put a duty crew at station #1, which is under construction.

Trustee Jeff Jahr questioned the use of the words "enhanced emergency response" in the ballot language and King said the committee struggled over the language, but, "It is not our intent to run an ambulance service."

King stressed that the township would continue to fund the police and fire departments with landfill and general fund revenue and the extra mill would go into public safety for improved service.

Resident Paul White pointed out that

15 of 19 recent public safety millage elections in the tri-county area did not pass.

"Because of the growth in the township, this is an absolute necessity," White said of the ballot proposal. He said the extra mill would add from \$75 to \$125 to a resident's annual tax bill, depending on the value of his property.

At a recent meeting, King said the committee that came up with the 4-mill proposal decided not to divide it up so voters could decide on whether to renew the 3 mills that is expiring and then whether to approve 1 mill more.

It is now in a one question, take-it-or-leave-it proposal.

King said now the project is to sell the proposal to the voters.