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SATURDAY, AUGUST 24, 2019

SAVAGE PACER

BREAKING NEWS ONLINE AT WWW.SAVAGEPACER.COM



PHOTO BY CHRISTINE SCHUSTER

The Burnsville-Eagan-Savage District Board of Education unanimously approved holding the fall levy referendum at a special meeting Aug. 19.

District calls for levy vote this fall

BY CHRISTINE SCHUSTER
cschuster@swpub.com

Voters in the Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District will decide whether to pay an estimated \$1.7 million more each year in overall property taxes for the district's general fund.

The Board of Education unanimously approved holding the fall levy referendum at a special meeting Aug. 19. Board member Jen Holweger was absent.

The ballot question will ask voters to

revoke the two currently existing voter-approved operating levies and replace them with a single levy that would provide the district with the state's maximum per-student amount, about \$1,900, for the next 10 years.

A property owner of a \$250,000 property would see an estimated \$6 monthly tax increase, according to Ehlers, a district financial consultant. A property owner of a \$700,000 property would see an estimated \$18 monthly increase.

District officials say the referendum is a part of their overall efforts to address

budget shortfalls. The board expects \$5.5 million in budget cuts in 2020-2021, the latest in several rounds of cuts as enrollment falls and government aid for special education falls short of the need.

The 2019-2020 budget locked \$6.6 million in cuts and reductions, including cutting athletic programs below the high school level. Officials plan to reach a decision before winter break about whether to close several schools next year to cut costs.

"We're all trying to manage with the

Levy to 2 >

Savage Fire chief resigns, calls for change

BY CHRISTINE SCHUSTER
cschuster@swpub.com

Savage Fire Chief Andrain Roach said lack of support from city leaders, around-the-clock demands and unrealistic expectations prevented the Fire Department from adapting to today's needs and led him to resign, according to a resignation letter obtained by the Savage Pacer.

The Savage City Council accepted Roach's resignation, effective Aug. 19, at Monday's meeting and named Savage Deputy Fire Chief Andrew Slama the interim chief. Roach had taken the position May 13.

The resignation was added to the council's agenda at the beginning of the meeting, and the council accepted it without discussion.

The resignation letter calls on the city to increase staffing levels city-wide, create a more welcoming atmosphere for City Hall employees and "resist looking at the city as a rural, small town city as it was back 30 years ago," among over a dozen other policy recommendations.

He also recommended additional support staff for city departments, such as the human resources department, and developing a formal onboarding process for new employees.

He said the Fire Department needs a full time administrative assistant, operations and training assistant chief and an additional deputy chief and should add a duty crew of full time firefighters and supplement the demand with paid-on-call firefighters.

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SUBSCRIBE: 952-345-6682
EDITOR: 952-345-6376 OR
EDITOR@SAVAGEPACER.COM
ONLINE: SAVAGEPACER.COM

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LEVY

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funding that we have as best we can," board Chairwoman Abigail Alt said in an interview in June.

The levy dollars would go towards general expenses, such as teacher salaries and classroom supplies, Finance Director Lisa Rider said.

"We need to have a comprehensive approach to help us address our budget needs

so that we can deliver on our mission for students," Superintendent Theresa Battle said in a statement after the meeting.

"An increase in funding is one step we can take. Evaluating our facilities is another

major component, along with looking for alternative funding sources, continuing to find ways to right-size our spending, and focusing on program improvements that will help us best serve our students."

FIRE CHIEF

► continued from 1

"It is unrealistic to think that a Fire Chief can effectively plan and strategically move an organization forward when they are stuck performing three major day to day roles (Fire Chief, Fire Marshal, and Emergency Management Director) all while responding to fire calls and performing the daily tasks of managing all aspects of a department with over 40 employees," he wrote.

Roach said he had "a passion vision and desire to see the Savage Fire Department grow and develop into a more modern, effective and efficient department" but doesn't believe "those leading the City of Savage are ready to accept and provide those changes."

The letter also describes how Roach felt singled out because of his race when an article was left on his desk "without context or any notion of who had left it there." He said he believed the article was left with a "racially driven motive."

Roach said he communicated to the Human Resources department that he felt singled out and that it "deeply offended" him, and an investigation identified who left the article and the person's explanation. However, he wrote, "no effort was made to reconcile the misunderstanding with me after several weeks of being notified of how this had made me feel."

Roach did not attend Monday's meeting and didn't return two phone calls requesting comment this week.

On Jan. 1 of this year, Roach retired from being a captain with the Fire Department after 10 years. In May, he returned after landing the department's top job. For more than six years prior, he worked full time with the Burnsville Fire Department as a fire paramedic and



SAVAGE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Andrain Roach.

SWAT medic.

City Administrator Brad Larson declined to comment on the content of the resignation letter.

Mayor Janet Williams said Thursday the city will consider recommendations from Roach and from the next chief.

"I think we appreciate his candor and his suggestions to improve the fire structure," she said. "Personally, we wish him all the best."

**CONVERSATIONS ABOUT
THE FIRE DEPARTMENT'S
STAFFING MODEL**

In April, retiring fire chief Joel McColl thanked city leaders for their support of the department over the years in his retirement speech but said their work is not done.

"Changes are quickly occurring in the fire service that will demand tough decisions related to expected

levels of customer service from our new residents and future staffing needs due to the growth and availability of the firefighters currently serving you and your residents," he said.

Since 2000, the fire department has comprised 40 paid-on-call volunteer firefighters, and many Savage firefighters work full time as firefighters in other cities. Roach wrote the on-call model "has been proven to be not as effective and reliable as it once was due to current work and family demands, and our citizens and visitors deserve better."

Larson sought the council's input on changing the department's staffing model at a special meeting July 8.

Larson presented several options, including hiring additional on-call firefighters, transitioning to a duty crew model with a small number of full-time firefighters at

the station during the day or moving to a full time department.

If the council was interested in the duty crew model, he said staff recommended taking next year to plan before implementing the change in 2021.

No members of the department attended the meeting, but Larson told the council Roach was concerned with response times and whether or not firefighters would be able to show up to calls, especially during the day, since most work full time jobs.

"This is something where we want to be ahead of the curve," Larson said.

The council didn't reach a decision and agreed they needed more information from the department before moving forward.

"I'm not willing to go there without hearing from the chief," Council member Gene Abbott said about the duty crew proposal.

In an email Wednesday, Larson said they were working with Roach to further discuss department staffing at the Aug. 12 city council work session, but the item was taken off the agenda when Roach told Larson he would resign.

Larson said the city is currently evaluating how to fill the fire chief position.

"Again, it is with deep sadness that I say goodbye to my Savage Fire Family and its members," Roach's letter said in closing. "You are all great ambassadors for this organization and have given and continue to give a lot to this city and your community."

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