

Replacement health levy recommended

By REUBEN MEES
Examiner Staff Writer

If a health levy does not pass in November, Logan County residents will not only lose services such as mass flu vaccinations and having an agency to contact for property health nuisances, but they could see fewer municipal or township crews on the roads plowing snow in the winter, spraying for mosquitoes in the summer or patching potholes.

Those were some of the main reasons a group of elected officials, primarily from six of the county's 13 municipalities, and supporters of the Logan County Health District voted overwhelmingly Thursday to recommend the district pursue a 1-mill property tax replacement levy that would generate between \$900,000 and \$1 million a year for the district for 10 years.

The recommendation will be discussed by the health board at Wednesday's monthly meeting, but ultimately must be approved by the Logan County Commissioners, who said they want to see a diverse contingent of local-level leaders spearheading the effort to pass the levy.

Those in attendance tossed around the pros and cons of a renewal levy, which would be based on old property values and generate considerably less revenue, but decided the replacement levy, which is based on newly assessed property values, would allow the district to continue to provide services without dipping into municipal and township funds. Only Don Bradley, the lone representative of any of the 17 townships asked to attend, voted in favor of the renewal in accordance with a previous vote by the Monroe Township Trustees. Bellefontaine Mayor Adam Brannon, who is chairman of the Friends of the Logan County Health District levy committee, did not vote but made comments generally supporting a renewal levy.

One of the main topics discussed at the meeting was if the levy does not pass, the health district will have to dip into money that is already going to townships and

municipalities to provide services such as street and road repair and maintenance, recreation programs or public safety. Health Commissioner Boyd Hoddinott said to maintain a bare bones health department, the district would likely have to take at least \$600,000 from the townships and municipalities, which would impact Bellefontaine's budget to the tune of about \$130,000 or a large township like Stokes by almost \$90,000. Smaller townships and villages would stand to lose a few thousands dollars each a year.

"Two things people haven't put together yet are, one, they are going to lose programs the health department provides, and two, they are going to lose services like snowplows and pothole repair," Dr. Hoddinott said.

Former health commissioner, Dr. William Verbsky, who is treasurer for the levy committee, said when the health district first passed its levy, one of the main selling points was that townships and villages would be able to keep money the health department was using out of the baseline property tax rate for the county.

Logan County is still one of the only counties in the state to be funded entirely by a levy, both he and Dr. Hoddinott said.

"We were the first district in Ohio to say if you would help us pass a levy, we would not ask for another dime so long as we were able," Dr. Verbsky said.

The district currently offers 49 programs that include mandated ones like the Women, Infants and Children program and retail food establishment inspections, and programs they have voluntarily taken on to address public health concerns such as mass flu vaccinations and the school nurse and immunization programs.

If the board and commissioners approve the replacement levy, the measure will appear on the Nov. 4 ballot.

The levy committee meets again at 6:30 p.m. July 17 in Bellefontaine City Council Chambers.