

Latest serving bids could save \$1.5 million

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Neshaminy

The board will have to make a decision on outsourcing before approving the budget in June.

Add another \$1.5 million to the \$30-plus million Neshaminy could save by outsourcing support staff jobs over the next five years.

The latest bids for grounds keeping and food services released Monday would provide more than \$1.5 million in savings over five years, according to administrators.

Officials previously stated the district could save more than \$30 million over the next five years if transportation and custodial services are outsourced.

And even though board members have said their goal is to negotiate with the district's support staff labor union, they're looking at a June deadline to make a decision on outsourcing before the budget's approved.

"We're keeping the public informed so, hopefully, the community and the unions have an idea what the district has in front of it," said board President Ritchie Webb. "Our first obligation is to continue to negotiate, but we're also thinking about the \$7.6 million deficit facing us and our commitment to the community to stay under Act 1 limitations and our own personal goal of a zero tax increase."

While outsourcing would not cover the entire budget gap, Neshaminy could still see between \$4 million and \$5 million in savings the first year alone, Webb added.

The newspaper was unsuccessful in reaching Mindy Anderson, the support union president, for comment Monday.

Townscapes Inc. offered Neshaminy \$273,641 in savings on grounds-keeping services in the first year alone with a \$686,485 total cost compared to the district's \$2.2 million price tag, officials said.

Even though food services is cost-neutral to the district since it's subsidized through the revenue it generates, Metz & Associates guaranteed Neshaminy \$55,000 in annual revenue, which could be used to offset other operational costs, administrators said.

If the district decides to privatize, officials would need to give notice to the vendors. But Webb was unsure how much time they'd need.

Members of the Neshaminy Educational Support Professional Association, which includes 270 full-time and 282 part-time positions for jobs ranging from bus drivers to janitors to food service workers, have been working off an expired contract since July, administrators said.

While school board directors have said Neshaminy can't keep paying for a top tier health insurance plan, union members have said they can't afford to contribute what the board is asking.

The board is proposing annual wage increases of 1 percent in the first year and 3 percent in the second and third years of a three-year contract. The union, though, wants a five-year deal with no wage increase in the first year - provided there's no employee contribution to health care premiums - and a 3.5 percent wage increase for the middle three years plus a 4 percent increase in the final year of a five-year contract, according to Neshaminy's Web site.

The board also is asking the support staff to contribute percentages of 10, 11 and 12 over three years. The union wants to pay percentages of 0, 2, 3, 4 and 5 over five years, administrators said.

The board and the support staff had been scheduled to meet with a fact-finder twice in February, but those meetings were canceled due to snowstorms. Another session is tentatively scheduled for March 15, said Webb.

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