

OUSD board to talk priorities Saturday

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Friday afternoon brought a pleasant surprise to Ojai Unified School District (OUSD) administrators — they received a swell of applications for the Measure J Citizens' Oversight Committee. "We went from three (applicants) to 13, and now 14," said OUSD Superintendent Hank Bangser.

State law requires at least seven community members to sit on the committee, which will, among other things, make sure the district is properly expending the construction and renovation funds granted by the passage of the \$35 million bond last year. California law also has specific requirements for the committee; it must, for example, include parents, seniors and representatives from a taxpayer group. With that in mind, the OUSD has extended the application deadline from last Friday to Feb. 6, to ensure the district has all the members it needs (see www.ojai.k12.ca.us for the application).

The OUSD board will have until its March 11 meeting to finalize the committee, but Bangser and his staff aren't waiting till then to continue the implementation of Measure J. Last week, the OUSD board asked Bangser to begin the search for an architect and a construction manager. Bangser will narrow the field of firms, then chair a committee of administrators and faculty members who will make a final recommendation to the board. "We agreed we would do local advertising (for the positions) — which speaks to one of the commitments I made in my Measure J presentations," Bangser said. "We'll look very seriously at local firms." In this case, local would mean Ventura County, he added, "but if people in San Diego could (best) provide us with these very specific services, we would strongly consider (them)."

OUSD financial advisor Jon Isom told the board last week that, typically, a superintendent would select the architect and construction manager him or herself. But Bangser and the board acknowledged that, "We're a small community, and we have three new board members, and a lot of people interested in Measure J," Bangser explained, "and we thought we'd all benefit by having a more open process."

Another reason: longtime OUSD assistant superintendent of business, Danni Pusatere, recently announced her resignation after 19 years with OUSD. "It is rare these days that someone with Danni's professional and personal skill set would stay in a

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district leadership role for almost 20 years, especially in a small district, starting in her mid-20s," Bangser told OUSD staff in an e-mail. "We have been beyond fortunate that she did so." Pusatere will leave Ojai for a similar position with the Encinitas Union School District, a bigger district with more financial resources, headed by former OUSD superintendent Tim Baird.

Bangser announced the vacancy at last week's meeting, and he and the board are in the process of selecting a replacement.

Also discussed at last week's meeting is the upcoming special meeting, which is slated for Saturday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The purpose, Bangser explained, is for the new board to "talk about planning priorities for the upcoming year and years ...

and optimal working relationships among the board and the superintendent and the district staff." In addition, they'll discuss possible approaches to things like declining enrollment (especially in the elementary schools), the budget, the sale and/or lease of part and/or all of the district offices and Chaparral High School property, and other issues. Bangser emphasized that no decisions would be made during the meeting. However, the public is encouraged to attend the meeting, which will be held in the Board Room at the district offices. The meeting will also be available on Channel 10 and online at www.ojai.k12.ca.us sometime in the next week. See the website for more information.