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## Machine errors could lead to new school vote

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PEQUANNOCK -- From triumphant victory, to exasperation, to confusion.

The roller-coaster ride in the township's school district continued Wednesday with talk of voting machine irregularities and a possible second election.

After voters turned out in overwhelming numbers to pass the two-question budget tax proposal -- and the celebration that followed -- questions about the voting machines arose.

"We were all sitting around after the results came in and I said, 'Here's a funny story,'" said Bob Friedman, who lost his bid for a three-year term. "I almost didn't vote for myself."

Turns out he wasn't the only one.

The Morris County Board of Elections said Wednesday that a programming error in the voting machines, supplied to the township by the county, may be grounds for repeat voting.

"There was a problem, in my opinion, with the technician who programs the machines," Morris County Clerk Joan Bramhall said Wednesday. "[Friedman] has every right to challenge this."

Bramhall said the machines in all four Pequannock polling locations were affected.

Officials said the problem involved the following:

If a resident voted for Friedman -- the last candidate listed on the ballot as running for a three-year term -- and then voted for a candidate for the one-year unexpired term, the light on the machine turned off.

When the screen lights reappeared, the vote was counted, but the mark next to Friedman's name was gone. If that resident re-selected Friedman, thinking the machine hadn't accepted the vote the first time, the vote for him was canceled, the clerk said.

There is a message on the screen telling voters if their vote was accepted, but she acknowledged voters could have ignored that.

A similar problem was reported in two other Morris towns -- Long Hill and Florham Park -- but they were uncontested races, Bramhall said.

To contest the results and call for a revote of the four open seats, Friedman must write a formal letter to Superior Court Assignment Judge Theodore Bozonelis.

Friedman said he was writing that letter Wednesday when he realized that a new election could cost the district thousands of dollars and threaten a revote on the two-question budget tax proposal. Friedman finished last in the field of five candidates for the three three-year seats.

"I'm going to sleep on it," he said Wednesday evening. "I'm certainly pleased the budget passed and wouldn't



want to see that jeopardized. And I don't want to cost the district thousands of dollars."

County officials said they didn't know who would be responsible for covering the cost of a new election.

That possible expenditure and the prospect of a revote on the tax proposals make school administrators nervous.

Business Administrator Steve DiGeronimo said he budgets \$15,000 to \$20,000 for an election for such costs as worker salaries and transporting the machines.

The machines are made by California-based Sequoia Voting Systems, but spokeswoman Michelle Shafer said Wednesday that since the issue is a programming one, the company is not responsible. She said the county contracts technicians from New Jersey-based Election Graphics Inc. to program the machines. That company couldn't be reached for comment Wednesday.

According to the clerk's office, the judge would rule on whether a new election is warranted, if a revote should be taken just for the candidates or the tax proposal as well, and who would pay for it all.

"It's the judge's call," DiGeronimo said. "That's the scary thing."

Voters approved a general fund tax levy of \$26.65 million and an additional \$622,844 in taxpayer-funded spending to provide for existing staff and programs including extracurricular activities.

Five candidates ran for three three-year seats and one candidate ran uncontested for a two-year unexpired seat on the nine-member board. Glen Forrest, Megan Hollberg, Jacqueline Stivala and Jeannette Andreula defeated Friedman and Ron Prol.

Hollberg said Wednesday she would support a new election but worried about a revote on the budget tax proposals.

Forrest, Andreula and Stivala couldn't be reached for comment.

Prol said he wasn't sure about holding a new election.

"Right now, I don't know if I'm on an emotional high or emotional low," he said. "I feel like Al Gore."

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