

D161 orders traffic study for Western Avenue School

BY BILL JONES

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Flossmoor School District 161 knows it has a traffic backup problem at Western Avenue Elementary School during pickup and drop-off times. A recently approved traffic study could help administrators and the school board learn more about what it's going to take to fix it.

The school board voted 5-1 on Monday, Jan. 24, to pay Eriksson Engineering Associates Ltd. \$7,500 to complete the Western Avenue traffic study. Board Member David Linnear cast the lone dissenting vote, while Board Member A. Janelle Scharon was absent.

Associate Superintendent Frances LaBella, noting the goal is to improve traffic flow during peak arrival and dismissal periods, as well as consider parking supply. EEA is to make a field visit and observations, including pedestrian and bicycle circulation, bus operations and nearby intersections impacted by the school's ingress/egress, in addition to the aforementioned drop-off/pick-up as well as parking utilization and patterns. Traffic data collection would also be done before identifying issues and opportunities, estimating future traffic projections, analyzing intersection capacity and evaluating on-site circulation,



Marilyn Thomas/H-F Chronicle

A driver heading south along Western Avenue squeezes between cars parked waiting for children to be released from Western Avenue School and a school bus about to turn into the school driveway.

then reporting and meeting with the project team.

Linnear in December questioned why the district was focusing on Western Avenue, when there are traffic pattern issues at other schools, too. LaBella then said that Western Avenue is a priority because it is located on a major thoroughfare versus schools such as Heather Hill Elementary, which is surrounded by a local neighborhood, or Parker Junior High, which backs up through the neighborhoods rather than Flossmoor Road.

Linnear also questioned the district spending money on someone telling the district it has a problem officials already know it has. LaBella called the study a scientific approach to give administrators and board members a better idea of how to fix the issues there.

EEA noted it can complete its traffic impact study in 6-8 weeks. LaBella said the district, EEA and Wold Architects are working on plans for when the study will begin.

Staff hires

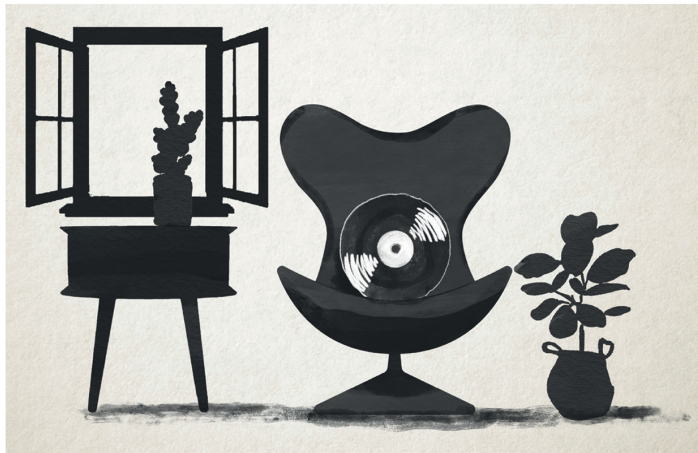
The school board voted 6-0 to approve the hiring of a full-time placeholder teacher, three full-time elementary specials teachers and one part-time speech/language pathologist for the 2022-2023 school year at a total of \$320,000.

Eric Melnyczenko, the district's director of human resources, noted in his report to the board that the new hires allow the district to place a full-time specials teacher in each of its elementary schools. The current teachers have been in traveling positions moving between schools, and added sections have made schedules tight over the course of the last school year, Melnyczenko wrote.

The part-time pathologist is to work in the early childhood classrooms at both Western Avenue and Flossmoor Hills elementary schools. The placeholder position is to reduce class size in a grade level being watched for enrollment, in case a class exceeds the district's recommended levels.

"If the placeholder [full-time equivalent] is not needed to reduce the class size of a grade level, it would not be utilized," Melnyczenko said.

The full-time positions each pay \$70,000 annually, while the part-time position pays \$40,000 a year.



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