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D153 puts tax hike question to referendum vote Nov. 8

BY MARILYN THOMAS
mthomas@hfchronicle.com

Voters in Homewood School District 153 will be asked to approve a Nov. 8 referendum to put more money into the school budget by increasing the limiting tax rate.

At the District 153 board meeting July 11, board members approved a resolution calling for the referendum because they wanted to find a permanent solution, rather than coming to voters yet again for the OK to sell bonds.

The district won support from voters in 2011 and 2016 to sell working cash bonds to pump money into the district's coffers. Rather than consider another short-term fix, the board decided to go for a tax rate increase because it's considered a long-term solution.

The current rate of \$4.40 per \$100 assessed value of property was set in 1992. The referendum question will ask voters to approve a new rate of \$5.60.

Superintendent Scott McAlister said the district is classified as one of the school districts in Illinois at the bottom quartile for local financial support, according to the Illinois State Board of Education's Evidence Based Funding Formula. That is not a good place to be, he said.

McAlister explained the district's funding in simplified terms as education costing \$1, but the district collecting just 64 cents.

"That's 36 cents we have to make up. That's the gap that we're trying to control," through the referendum, he said.

Alex Bosch, chair of the district's finance committee, said board members knew they were getting down to the last months of having working cash revenues available for school finances.

"The last couple of months we've been talking about what our options are. We don't take this decision lightly, by any means. We think it's an important decision and something that we weighed all our options for," Bosch said. "This time around we are able to present a permanent solution."

"This is expected to last for decades and would allow us to address our revenue stream, and it puts the district on a better financial path moving forward."

"There's never a good time to ask for money," said Shelly Marks, school board president. "And every time we've done this we thought 'This is a terrible time to be asking,' and I think we could say that again. This is a terrible time to be asking, but it would be an even worse time to tell children we cannot provide them the education that they so deserve."

Member Deb Havighorst said, "During both of the last referendums, we were challenged by many of our constituents to find a permanent fix." This is the solution that can satisfy that request from citizens and satisfy the needs of the district, she said.

Member Ron Zinnerman said "this allows us to bring clarity," so the district can continue to be a competitive district. He recognized that people are moving to Homewood, in part, for the schools. He said the district should be recognized "for maintaining the level of service in this community (that) is phenomenal."

"There is no question, we have an excellent district, and we are the envy of most of the districts around us. But to maintain that, we have to be able to afford it," Marks said.

The district is organizing a referendum committee to help spread the word about the referendum and the district's finances.

"One of the things I always look forward to when we do a referendum, it gives us a chance to get out and talk about all the good things that we're doing," said Marks, "and to listen not only to our families but people in the community who no longer have children in the district but are passionate about our schools and are passionate about keeping them good for future generations."

"And that's exactly what this referendum will do: It will keep our schools excellent for future generations."

New Franciscan Health CEO

BY CHRONICLE STAFF

James chapel.

Raymond Grady was officially recognized and installed as Franciscan Health Olympia Fields and South Suburban Chicago Division president and chief executive officer at a missioning ceremony presided by Franciscan Alliance Inc. chairwoman Sister Jane Marie Klein.

The ceremony was held on Monday, July 18, at the Olympia Fields hospital St.

Sister Jane Marie presented Grady with numerous symbols of the health system's mission, including a San Damiano crucifix, Franciscan Alliance's articles and bylaws, the day's roster of patients, a clock symbolizing the time and energy involved in fulfilling his mission and a lighted candle signifying Christ's healing ministry. Prayers were offered during the presentation of each symbol.