

Education | updated: 3/31/2017 5:05 PM

Millions in funds sought for school improvements in Lake County



Diamond Lake Elementary District 76 Director of Finance and Operations Eric Rogers discusses the need for improvements at Diamond Lake School in Mundelein. District 76 wants to borrow \$11.4 million for projects at all of its schools.

Gilbert R. Boucher II | Staff Photographer



Mick Zawislak

Half the eight referendum questions on ballot Tuesday in Lake County involve schools, and three of those seek authorization to borrow millions for improvements.

While some local races may be contentious, supporters of the school questions say they haven't seen organized opposition. Here's a recap:

Hawthorn District 73

The Vernon Hills-based K-8 district is asking for authority to borrow up to \$42 million to fund a 10-year improvement plan for all six buildings.

Work would include STEM additions at elementary schools and renovation of those facilities at middle schools.

Approval would add \$310 a year to the tax bill for a house valued at \$350,000. However, property owners will pay less than they do now after current debt is retired in 2025, officials say.

Enrollment has increased in the past decade and new students keep coming. The district estimates 705 additional students will enroll over the next 10 years -- most from sales of existing homes -- and all facilities are at or near capacity.

"Nobody wants their taxes raised but they understand the need," Superintendent Nick Brown said.

The \$42 million includes \$3.1 million for 12 acres near the district's southern campus as a "safety net," Brown said.

Antioch District 34

District 34 voters will be asked to allow the elementary district to establish a "debt service extension base" of \$1.4 million, capping the district's annual borrowing at that amount until 2034.

The measure would provide \$18.8 million in tax revenue for a variety of projects, including installing air conditioning where needed. The district would contribute \$6.8 million more from its reserves.

Superintendent Jay Marino said seven mailings have been sent and presentations made to many local groups during the past 18 months. There would be no change in tax bills, according to the district, because principal and interest payments would replace debt being paid off.

The district wants to eliminate 16 mobile classrooms, separate gym and cafeteria space and address other elements, such as lighting, that can affect learning.

Diamond Lake District 76

The Mundelein-based district wants to borrow \$11.4 million for improvements at its three elementary schools in the next three years.

Besides security upgrades, the to-do list includes nuts and bolts projects, such as replacing old pipes and fixing leaky roofs.

"I would say we don't have a specific plan if it fails. Things like the roofs and boilers, I don't know when we'd get to those," board President Lisa Yaffe said.

Resident Jon Hauptman organized an information campaign, including open houses at schools, stressing the funds would be used for basics.

"We can't be putting Band-Aids on problems," he said. "Even those of us who don't have kids in the district recognize it's the right thing to do."

Property bills would not change, officials say, because the cost would replace debt being retired.

Antioch High School District 117

The district wants to change an old rule, beginning with the 2019 election, that requires the unincorporated area be represented by at least two members.

District officials want school board members to be elected at large to avoid the time-consuming and difficult process of recruiting and appointing board members when no candidates run in those areas.

Others

In Wauconda, in an advisory question, voters will be asked whether village officials should approve storyboards for the Heroes of Freedom Memorial to include actions involving the global war on terrorism and conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Voters in Round Lake and Highwood will be asked whether the village clerks in those communities should be appointed rather than elected.

Also, voters will decide whether Rockland Fire Protection District should be elected rather than appointed.

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