

LOCAL REFERENDUMS ON NOV. 6 BALLOTS

Referendum seeks tax levy increase for North Palos Fire Protection District

By Dermot Connolly

The North Palos Fire Protection District is hosting an Oct 27 "Coffee with the Fire Chief," where residents can talk to Fire Chief Paul Mackin about a referendum on Nov. 6 ballots in the district that seeks an increase in the tax levy.

North Palos Fire Protection District provides fire and emergency medical services for about 30,000 people in a 14-square-mile area that includes all or part of Palos Hills, Hickory Hills and Worth, as well as a large section of the Palos Division of Cook County Forest Preserves.

At the event on 9 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 27 at North Palos Fire Station 1, 10629 S. Roberts Road, Palos Hills, Mackin will share information about the referendum, which asks whether "the extension limitation under the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law for the North Palos Fire Protection District should be increased from the lesser of 5 percent or the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index over the prior levy year to 20 percent for levy year 2018?" he basis of the referendum is increase revenue and prevent reductions in service. It seeks to increase the District's annual operating levy funding \$104 for the owner of a \$200,000 home. Mackin said that simply put, the referendum is asking for approval to raise the district's tax levy. It has not been raised since 1995, and previous to that was 1975.

"We can only raise the levy by referendum," said the chief, explaining that this is a binding referendum, unlike most on Illinois ballots

that are advisory and non-binding.

If a majority of voters agree, the chief said homeowners can expect to see a \$104 increase next year on property tax bills for a home with an equalized assessed valuation of \$200,000.

"The district currently receives less than 10 cents of every tax dollar, and it is that amount that would increase 20 percent, to about 11 cents," said Mackin.

"That amounts to less than \$8.67 per month, or 29 cents a day," said the chief.

Mackin said the increase is necessary because operational expenditures have been outpacing revenue levels in the district, which provides fire and emergency medical services for the entire city of Palos Hills, the section of Hickory Hills south of 95th Street, the village of Worth, and a large portion of the Palos Division within the Cook County Forest Preserve District.

He pointed out that Worth is not actually within the boundaries of the district, but it is served through an intergovernmental agreement between the village and district. Therefore, Worth residents will not be voting on the referendum.

"The village pays us the equivalent of what residents of the district pay," said the chief.

The district operates three fire stations and handles about 5,400 emergency calls annually — about 100 per week.

"Although we do get paid for ambulance calls, our main source of revenue is the tax levy," said Mackin,

"Increases have been averaging about 20 years and we probably should have done it in 2015, but it was decided not to. We have

been cutting costs, administrative positions — anything that doesn't affect public safety and protection," said Mackin.

He noted that the issue is operational costs outpacing revenue, rather than pension payments.

The fire chief said he will also be available to discuss the referendum issue at the Firefighters' Association's Annual Pancake Breakfast being held from 7 a.m. to noon on Sunday, Oct. 14 at Firehouse 1.

"The breakfast is an annual tradition. It's not related to the referendum but people are welcome to talk to me there if they want," he said.

Because this is a binding referendum, it is probably the most important to the residents it affects. But there will be a few more referendums on ballots, depending on location.

Two referendums on Palos Township ballots will ask voters whether Cook County should reinstate the sweetened beverage tax, and whether the Illinois General Assembly should expand the property tax exemptions for homeowners, seniors and veterans in order to provide more tax relief.

Voters throughout Cook County will have three other referendum questions to answer: Should municipalities match the \$13 minimum wage set by Cook County for people over 18 by July 1, 2020; should the state of Illinois strengthen penalties for illegal gun-trafficking, and require all gun-dealers to be certified by the state; and should municipalities match the Cook County earned sick-time law, which allows all workers to earn at least 40 hours of sick time per year.

Swallow Cliff

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