

W. Aurora eyeing tax increase

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AURORA – A 50-cent tax increase is being eyed to shore up West Aurora School District's finances and address student growth.

School board members are considering whether to put the proposed rate increase on the April election ballot. They are expected to make a decision by their Jan. 8 meeting.

The district projected a \$1.9 million deficit for its 2006-07 fiscal year. Board members approved the budget in June.

“Without a voter-approved rate increase, that deficit will swell to approximately \$2.9 million by 2008 and go even higher in future years,” school Superintendent James Rydland said.

A proposed 50-cent tax increase would boost the district's operational tax rate to \$3.53 per \$100 of assessed valuation, from its current \$3.03 per \$100 of assessed valuation.

The owner of a \$100,000 home would pay an additional \$166.67 next year in taxes if the referendum was approved.

As proposed, the operational tax rate would remain at \$3.53 through 2010.

Assistant superintendent for finance Kevin Wegner said that even though the district continued to see growth in its equalized assessed value, it could not collect all of that growth because of the tax cap. The Illinois General Assembly passed the tax cap in 1991.

The tax cap limits the amount a taxing body can raise taxes to 5 percent or the consumer price index, whichever is less.

Along with addressing the school district's financial situation, the additional funds would pay for various building projects throughout the district as well as the timely replacement of buses and equipment.

The proposed tax increase would fund the cost of four mobile classrooms to help ease overcrowding at Fearn Elementary School in North Aurora. The mobile classrooms are estimated to cost \$150,000.

A recent study estimated that enrollment at Fearn would increase from 636 students this year to 656 next year and 698 in 2008.

“Our preference would be to have them ready for this fall because the kids are here now,” Rydland said.

Eventual plans call for the school to get an eight-classroom addition.