



Big Hollow district debates how to spend sale proceeds

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Should the money from a land sale be spent on students or help cash-starved Big Hollow School District 38 pay down its debt?

That's the question District 38 officials will try to answer over the next couple of months, as the sale of their now-vacant property at the corner of routes 12 and 134 in Fox Lake gets closer to being finalized.

Half of the board members said during Monday's board meeting at Big Hollow Middle School they would like to see profits from the property sale used to reinstate programs cut due to a shortage of funds.

However, the other half said they would like to reduce the district's debt.

District 38 officials decided earlier this year to go to voters with what will be the fifth tax increase proposal in six years. This year, the district is borrowing about \$3 million in short-term loans to cover bills until tax money from new residents can be claimed in June. The district pulled similar loans for \$1.2 million in 2005 and \$1.8 million in 2006.

The expected \$5 million from the sale of the 12-acre property could pay off the short-term loan from this year, and part of one that officials expect to take next year.

Or, it could be used to cover instructional programs cut from the budget this school year. Officials this summer unanimously decided to cut all art and music classes for the 2007-08 school year.

They also reduced computer instruction from twice a week to once a week for first- through fifth-graders. The course has been eliminated for kindergarten students and students in sixth through eighth grades.

Board President Vickie Gallichio said officials cannot wait to see if the tax increase proposal passes in February before they decide how to use the money from the land sale.

"The sale of that property is the No. 1 issue for residents in the district," she said. "They not only want us to sell it, but they also want to know what we will do with the money."

The district, which serves portions of Ingleside, Fox Lake, Lakemoor and Volo, has had to accommodate explosive growth in recent years. Over the past 10 years, enrollment has gone from 400 students to 1,400 students.

Gallichio said the issue will be discussed further at the district's next board meeting at 7 p.m. Monday.