

Dist. 181 board members identify big issues

Elected officials offer likely agenda for next few years in advance of April election

By Ken Knutson

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The residents of Community Consolidated Elementary District 181 face a choice on April 4 when they decide from among four candidates who they want to fill the three open seats on the district's board.

To get a sense of the issues those newly elected officials will face, current board members were asked via email to weigh in on the most pressing matters confronting the district. Board President Mridu Garg said curriculum concerns rise to the top of her list, including effectively implementing new Common Core standards and associated educational material to ensure students thrive.

"Related to the new curriculum and associated resources is adequate professional development for our staff to make sure all teachers and support staff are prepared to teach to the new curriculum and utilize new materials," Garg stated.

That was also on the mind of board member Leslie Gray, who noted that updates in science, social studies,

language arts and encore classes at both the elementary and middle school level are slated for next school year.

"The new curriculum will greatly enhance student learning for students of all ability levels," Gray stated. "However, the multiple changes that will be implemented next year will require a great deal of hard work and dedication on the part of staff."

Adopting and instituting a sustainable digital learning plan for the district was also a priority, she noted, specifically one "that allows for successful integration of technology into the curriculum while balancing parent concerns about increased technology use."

The successful completion of a new Hinsdale Middle School was at or near the top of the lists of Garg and Gray, as well as board members Rich Giltner and Jill Vorobiev.

"We need to complete the construction of a new HMS on time and on budget with minimal disruptions to students and the community," Gray said.

Digital learning made Vorobiev's

rankings, and she also identified pension reform as a significant issue.

Giltner submitted that attention is needed on "balancing the budget while minimizing tax impact on residents given challenges of state-level variables such as "property tax freeze, pension cost shifting and decreasing state funding."

The district, he stated, also needs to grapple with "expenses increasing at a greater pace than inflation including, but not limited to, employee wages and health care benefits."

Gray concurred.

"Currently (the salaries and benefits expense) outpaces the consumer price index — the amount we can levy — and therefore less money is available in the budget each year for student learning and facility needs," she stated.

Garg shared that sentiment, too, advising the board to craft "long-term budgets to allow for proper planning that ultimately lead to sustainable expenditures and take into account potential reduction of state funding and pension reform."

Garg also advanced the need to



think strategically about managing district facilities through the "implementation of a facility master plan that allows for current and future planning while taking into account maintenance needs as well as educational programming needs."

Giltner alluded to the turnover in the district administration office in suggesting it would behoove the new board to pursue "continuity and stability at the administrative level, but not at the expense of performance."

Gray stated that building trust among all district stakeholders is an imperative in order to achieve its goals efficiently and effectively.

"The district has a lot of balls in the air — we are trying to do a lot of things at the same time to enhance the district," she said. "The challenge is to successfully execute all outstanding initiatives in a fiscally responsible manner."

Roads, finances remain top priorities

Continuing with master infrastructure plan, managing budget will be on board agendas

By Pamela Lannom

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As village leaders look ahead to the next four years — the term the next village president will serve — they see a variety of issues that will require the attention of elected officials and staff.

The master infrastructure plan the village adopted in 2009 will continue to be a major focus.

"It is very positive that we've been able to accomplish approximately 66 percent of the work," village manager Kathleen Gargano said, adding that by this fall, all roads rated as "failed" will have been repaired. "That will be something the board will be looking to continue the forward momentum on that."

The village has other capital projects that need to be addressed, including roof work on buildings that are aging, Trustee Neale Byrnes said.

"That takes some of our money that we're setting aside for capital improvements," he said. "That stuff isn't fun

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Moving forward on the village's master infrastructure plan will continue to be a priority over the next four years for the Hinsdale Village Board and whomever voters choose to be the next village president.



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stuff to do but it needs to get done.”

Work on at least one and probably two properties will begin this year. The Hinsdale Meadows empty-nester project at 55th Street and County Line Road will come before the village board for approval Feb. 7 and work is slated to begin this spring on a new Hinsdale Middle School.

“There’s going to be a lot going on downtown with construction traffic,” Byrnes said. “It’s going to put a big load on the staff.”

The village also is working with Community Consolidated Elementary District 181 on an agreement to construct a parking structure as part of the HMS project to ease the shortage downtown.

“The shining star that is going to come out of this is the new parking deck that we are going to do,” Byrnes said.

Managing village finances has been and will continue to be a focus, especially given the uncertainty in Springfield.

“We’ve made a ton of progress, but there are threats to our revenue streams that keep popping up,” Trustee Jerry Hughes said.

Legislators are considering lowering the amount of state income tax revenue that is distributed to municipalities and freezing property taxes.

The village also would lose significant sales tax revenue if the Hinsdale oasis is eliminated as part of a tollway

expansion plan.

“No single one of these is likely devastating, but it all has to be managed and anticipated, and it’s highly uncertain,” Hughes said.

The village needs to be involved in discussions about the tollway expansion and work to bring about the best possible option for the village. Stopping the expansion might be an unrealistic goal, Hughes said. “If we can’t get everything we want, what is it that we want that we can fight the hardest for?” he said.

Other uncertainties include the fate of the Amlings property, which is the subject of an ongoing lawsuit, and the campus of the Institute of Basic Life Principles, which reportedly moved its

headquarters to Texas.

“That’s a big chunk of land that I’m sure people are going to want to do something with,” Byrnes said.

Operating in as lean and efficient a manner as possible while meeting residents needs is an ongoing effort, the trustees and Gargano submitted.

“I think we do an excellent job providing those services and we want to continue to do that,” Gargano said.

The village has gone through a period of relative peace, Hughes commented, which has contributed to a sense of stability and control, Hughes said. “History will tell us this isn’t going to last forever,” he said. “Things will come up. We’ve got to be ready for them.”