

Vernon Township voters to decide on increased tax for mental health board



Mick Zawislak

Updated 8/5/2022 4:48 PM

Vernon Township voters will be asked whether they will pay higher taxes to support a community mental health board.

The question on the November ballot will be whether the township should levy an annual tax to provide mental health facilities and services, including for persons with a developmental disability or substance abuse disorder.

The not-to-exceed levy would increase property taxes by \$12.33 a year for a home valued at \$100,000 or about \$49 a year for a \$400,000 home. If approved, the new tax would generate \$1.2 million to \$1.3 million annually, according to township Supervisor Jonathan Altenberg.

He emphasized the township has cut the tax levy by 12% to 15% in recent years

and was acting on a request brought to the board for consideration. The board voted 5-0 to put the question on the ballot.

"We're not looking to put on another (tax) levy," Altenberg said. "This is leaving it up to them (township residents)."

Vernon Township joins several other Chicago-area entities that plan to put similar questions to voters in November. That includes Wheeling Township, where proponents last month submitted more than double the number of signatures needed to get the question on the ballot.

However, as Buffalo Grove is split between Vernon and Wheeling townships, village Trustee Joanne Johnson advocated to have the question on ballots in both townships. Having it at the township rather than village level would avoid confusion, she said.

"I thought it would eliminate a patchwork of services," said Johnson, who made the case to Vernon Township officials.

State law allows local governments to go to referendum to create community mental health boards, said state Rep. Dan Didech of Buffalo Grove. Citizens either can petition the local entity or the governing board can pass a resolution, he added.

There currently are 98 mental health boards or committees in Illinois. If approved, the Vernon Township community mental health board would be the first in Lake County.

"There's a movement now to create more of them," Didech said.

But the law prescribed specific tax rates, which Vernon Township thought would generate more funding than needed, Didech said.

He and 30th District state Sen. Adrian Johnson successfully introduced legislation allowing for a lower than the maximum amount to be sought.

Joanne Johnson said the local board will benefit residents by promoting an array of coordinated mental health, developmental disability and substance abuse services for all Vernon Township residents.

A local board, as opposed to a county or state entity, would be more responsive, provide better accountability and act in the best interests of local residents, advocates say.

"To me, it's very attractive at the local level (rather) than trying to do it in a larger jurisdiction," Didech said.

Copyright © 2022 Paddock Publications, Inc., P.O. Box 280, Arlington Heights, IL 60006

Paddock Publications, Inc. is an Employee-Owned Company