

Some residents launch protest of planned 2 percent utility tax

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Olympia Fields residents turned out to Monday's Village Board meeting to protest plans for a new 2 percent utility tax.

Although the board did not plan to take any action regarding the tax on Monday, about a half dozen residents indicated they are against the measure plan to seek support from their neighbors.

"We residents need to fight this," resident Julia Mann told the board.

"I think the board will see more residents at the next meeting opposing the tax," Mann added.

At the Sept. 11 board meeting, trustees passed the first reading of an ordinance that will tax the use of electricity, natural gas, interstate telephone calls and cable television.

The utility tax ordinance passed 4 to 1. Trustee Michael Monteleone was the sole dissenter, claiming the village does not need the money. Trustee Robert Henn was absent from that meeting. The tax was proposed after the board decided to do away with village vehicle stickers because the program required too much office time.

At Monday night's meeting, Mann was among the more vocal residents to speak out against the tax.

"I wish the board to reconsider this tax," Mann said.

"We as a community do not have the beautification, or the school programs of a northern suburb, yet we will be paying higher taxes" than some of those upscale communities, Mann said.

"My family lives in a 25-year-old home and my taxes are over \$6,000 a year, as if this is not enough, the board plans to tax more," she added.

Mann said such actions by the board to create an unnecessary tax could prompt some to leave the area.

"People need an incentive to stay here; higher taxes may drive us out."

Monteleone, who was instrumental in eliminating vehicle stickers, also does not agree with the tax because he says the money is not needed.

"The village has had between \$90,000 and \$100,000 in surplus revenue for the past five years," Monteleone said.

"To reduce this revenue I believed we could reduce taxes and paperwork by eliminating vehicle stickers," he said. "I did not want to get rid of vehicle stickers to replace it with new taxes."

Other trustees believe the utility tax will regain the surplus created by the vehicle sticker revenue and still reduce paperwork.

Furthermore, Monteleone said he believes the Park District, schools, churches and non-profit organizations should be exempt from paying the tax.

"The state gives tax breaks to some organizations and I think to tax them is going against the idea of the state," Monteleone said.

He believes taxing schools causes a circle of taxes.

"We're going to be taxing to pay taxes," Monteleone said. "This is how bureaucrats think, not businessmen."

However, Village Attorney Thomas Thanas said such exemptions are not allowed under the law.

"It is illegal to exempt any other body than municipal bodies," Thanas said. (This is why the Village bi-Laws states that there must be Village (Municipal) Attorney in attendance at every Trustee meeting to insure that all that is legislated is legal!!!!) Monteleone moved to have the Finance Committee study any options and make a recommendation before the board takes any more action on the issue. The motion passed unanimously.

Monteleone said any taxing done by the village should be in the form of property taxes, which can be written off on annual income tax forms, instead of a utility tax.

Residents should have every advantage to recover tax dollars spent, Monteleone said.

Meanwhile, Mann said she plans to draw up a petition to get more residents involved in the issue.