

## LOOKING AHEAD AT 5 TOP DOWNERS GROVE STORIES

# State budget, new facilities plan headline 2016

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DOWNERS GROVE – 2015 was a busy year for Downers Grove, though a number of its largest issues are far from resolved and many more will no doubt arise.

Here is a list of the five biggest stories to watch in 2016:

### 1. State budget looms over local government

Last year ended without the state government passing a fiscal year 2015 budget. When a budget is adopted, most municipalities are expecting a decrease in state funding.

Municipal taxing bodies such as the village of Downers Grove and the local school districts receive a majority of their revenue from local property taxes. However, a sizable cut in state funding could further tighten their budgets, which have already been cut in response to the recent economic recession.

The village of Downers Grove put off plans last year to renovate its facilities because of an uncertainty in state funding. At a December Downers Grove Village Council meeting, Mayor Martin Tully said the village's 2016 budget would be unsustainable if the state reduces municipal funding and that cuts would need to be made to

future budgets.

Besides state funding, taxing bodies also are facing possible state mandates to increase their contributions to municipal and statewide retirement funds.

Tully said it was such a mandate that made the village increase its property tax levy for 2016.

### 2. Village to propose new facilities plan

The village is in the middle of a yearlong process that it hopes will result in a plan to renovate the Village Hall and police department.

Voters rejected a referendum for a \$46 million facilities plan during the April election, but the village has maintained that it needs to renovate or replace its outdated facilities.

Restarting the facilities plan discussions in September, the council proposed a \$16 million project budget that would work within existing revenues and assets.

Sometime between January and June, the village will review its options for either renovating the facilities or building new facilities. Town hall meetings also will take place during this time period.

The village will finalize the plan in July and August, in time to add it to the fiscal year 2017 budget.

Village officials hope that by

having numerous public discussions on the facilities plan residents will feel more involved in the process and more likely to support the plan.

### 3. District 99 weighs facilities plan

Community High School District 99 is discussing renovations as part of its facilities plan that, once finalized, may require the district to go to referendum.

The most recent plan, proposed in October, would cost \$69.9 million and would include installing air conditioning and renovating the bleachers, libraries and various instructional spaces at both schools.

The district's referendum bonds issued in 2000 will expire in 2018-19, and the district may look to go to referendum to issue new bonds around that time.

The most recent budget was cut down from \$100 million, partially because the tax impact from issuing bonds for \$69.9 million would be close to the tax cost of the current bonds.

However, the board of education is still discussing whether it wants to add other projects to the plan and if that would mean increasing the budget or cutting another project out of the plan.

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**4. New businesses coming to Ogden Avenue**

During the Dec. 15 village council meeting, Downers Grove Economic Development Corporation president Michael Cassa talked about several business developments on Ogden Avenue, which he expects to be able to announce soon.

A real estate company is redeveloping the site of the former Marathon gas station at 1201 Ogden Ave., with one tenant secure and negotiations close with a national restaurant tenant.

The Downers Grove Market shopping area, on Ogden Avenue between Cumnor Road and Williams Street, will construct a building in an open lot that can hold three businesses.

Cassa said a national restaurant chain that the village has long been chasing is a possible tenant.

A company has also been looking at purchasing a 9-acre property at Ogden Avenue and Lacey Road, which Cassa said is the largest vacant commercial property in the village.

He said the site could be difficult to develop but would serve as a badly needed anchor for the central part of Ogden Avenue.

**2016 WATCH LIST**

**5. Fresh leadership coming to District 99, library**

District 99 superintendent Mark McDonald and Downers Grove Public Library director Rick Ashton are retiring this year.

McDonald's last day will be June 30, after which he will be replaced by Henry Thiele.

The district board hired Thiele in December, touting his background in implementing new technology.

The district will also need to replace Downers Grove North Principal Scott Kasik, who is retiring.

Ashton will retire March 31. The library has yet to name its next director but will hold a public forum on the topic at 7 p.m. Jan. 20.



**Rick Ashton**



**Mark McDonald**



**Henry Thiele**



**ABOVE:** Downers Grove is in the middle of a yearlong process that it hopes will result in a plan to renovate the Village Hall. Restarting the facilities plan discussion in September, the council proposed a \$16 million project budget that would work within existing revenues and assets.



**LEFT:** Community High School District 99 is discussing renovations as part of its facilities plan. The most recent plan, proposed in October, would cost \$69.9 million.

Shaw Media file photos