

Dist. 64 Committee Thinking Of New Ways To Save Money

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During the last two years, Park Ridge-Niles School District 64 convened a Community Finance Committee to help it manage its finances and find new ways to control or reduce spending and to increase revenues.

A Spend Management Subcommittee chaired by Diana Stapleton came up with several suggestions for reducing spending and saving money. One of them included some alternate ways to interact with law and consulting firms that the district frequently hires when it needs specialty expertise.

A staff committee has recommended that the district engage the services of three law firms, not just one, after a study of legal costs that lasted several months. The board of education is expected to take the matter up at its Nov. 13 meeting.

Back in June, a request for proposals from Chicago-area legal organizations was mailed to 13 firms. Proposals were received from eight of them. Six firms were interviewed during the summer

regarding their qualifications, billing rates, legal experience, and range of services.

Four firms were interviewed again, and on Oct. 15, a staff committee recommended that three firms - Franczak Sullivan, Hodges Loizzi, and Seyfarth Shaw - be engaged for a period of two years. The board typically works with professional service firms for two-year periods.

"Seyfarth Shaw is the firm we have worked with in recent years, and we will continue to do that," said Supt. Sally Pryor. "We believe there are definite advantages to this multiple representation, including the ability to request different opinions on specific cases. We also were able to significantly lower the average hourly rate by looking at multiple firm representation, and also by requesting all the firms to bill in one-tenth of an hour increments and to charge for reimbursements based on actual costs. They have agreed to do that.

"We were also able to obtain changes in the minimum time increments from existing counsel. We believe this process will result

in a reduction in the cost for legal services without sacrificing quality. It has allowed us to expand the scope of legal opinions."