

Alton School District establishes tax levy

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Alton School District Financial Director Christopher Norman said the district always levies a "little high," but that does not mean they will receive what they are asking.

Norman said the tax assessor's office said the tax rate will be very close to, if not that same as it was this year, which was \$4.86 per every \$100 of the equalized assessed value (EAV) of property owners. Norman said that rate reflects the district's financial needs as well as the continued decline of property values within the district. This year's

rate was a few cents higher than last year's rate. Last year was the first year tax rates jumped due to the district's issuance of an estimated \$10.7 million in working cash bonds.

Previous to that issuance, the tax rate was \$4.36. Another large part of the tax rate increase was a mandated increase of the IMRF and Social Security levies, as required by statute. Norman said the district may have to look toward some future measures for revenue, such as tax anticipation warrants and lines of credit because of late payments from the state.

"We would be getting a loan against next year's tax payments," Norman said. "It's not a good place. It's not where you want to be, but it's unfortunately a reality in times like this."

Currently, Norman said the district is awaiting a categorical payment from the state, which was due on June 30. That payment of approximately \$1.7 million has no expected arrival date in the district. Combined with a second missed categorical payment in September and a promised Dec. 30 payment, the state may owe the district as much as \$5.5 million. Those categorical payments are utilized to pay for transportation and special education.

"I think everybody, if you live in Illinois, has a good idea about what's been going on in the state the last several years, and we definitely have balanced budget issues," Norman said.

On a positive note, Norman said general state aid has been paid in full this year, instead of being prorated as it was in previous years. State prorated funding resulted in the district receiving less than they were promised by the state. He said he was grateful for an Aug. 2016 temporary budget passing. Norman said some districts in Illinois may not have been able to open without that passing.

Despite state funding woes, Norman remains optimistic regarding the future of the district. A \$4.4 million deficit from two years ago was decreased to a \$3 million deficit last year with the passing of \$10.7 million in working cash bonds. This year, Norman said the district's deficit has been decreased to \$2 million.

"We've been doing the things little by little that we need to do, but when you're counting on as much as \$3.5 million in payments you may not get, it may throw things off a bit."

Norman said the district received the scheduled June 30 payment last year on July 14. He said the district was likely to receive this year's June payment as well as two of the other four promised state categorical payments. If that is the case, that \$3.5 million in

missing expected payments will cause problems for Norman and the district as they plan future budgets.