

Referendum on GFD goes to voters on Tuesday

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
Wednesday, 31 October 2012 17:05

Village, town residents will decide on \$410,085 spending plan to upgrade department

Presidential, congressional and state legislative offices will occupy the attention of most local voters when they go to the polls Tuesday, Nov. 6, but Grafton residents also face another important decision.

Voters in the Village and Town of Grafton will be asked on a referendum if they are willing to spend \$410,085 annually to upgrade their all-volunteer fire department.

The money would provide \$105,000 for a full-time fire chief and \$305,085 for part-time emergency medical technicians to be on call from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays, per-call payment of \$20 for firefighters and emergency medical responders, and training.

The referendum also calls for the department to be changed from private, nonprofit status to a village department that would be hired by the town for service.

The referendum — which has been discussed at several public meetings, including an informational session Oct. 18 — will include separate questions in each municipality, each asking voters for permission to exceed state-imposed levy limits to pay for increased personnel costs.

Village residents will be asked to spend \$246,051, or 60% of the proposed cost, and town residents will be asked to pay \$164,034, the other 40%. Those shares are based on the current proportions of the department budget paid by each municipality.

If the referendum passes, the owner of a house assessed at \$250,000 in the village would pay \$55.46 more in taxes per year. In the town, the owner of a \$250,000 house would pay \$77.08 more annually.

To pass, the referendum must be approved in both municipalities. The changes would go into effect Jan. 1, 2013.

The village and town boards agreed to hold the referendum at the request of the department. Fire Chief John Place said the upgrades are needed for the department to attract and retain members and maintain a high level of service in a growing community.

If the referendum fails in either municipality, the department will receive the same funding in the 2013 budget that it received this year.

The fate of the referendum has forced both municipalities to delay finalizing their 2013 budgets.

The village will hold a public hearing on its budget at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 7.

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A public hearing on the town budget will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 21.