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Greenburgh frees \$439G in WestHELP funds

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The Journal News

(Original Publication: October 13, 2006)

GREENBURGH - To diffuse a dispute over funding from its WestHELP Partnership with the Valhalla school district, the Greenburgh Town Board early yesterday morning voted to let the district spend \$439,000 of the money from the WestHELP homeless shelter for educational enrichment programs for the 2006-07 school year.

But the panel's members withheld approval for an additional \$440,000 until they are satisfied that the 10-year agreement is legal.

The partnership between the town and the schools, established three years ago to woo the neighborhood group to back WestHELP's bid to continue operation for another 10 years, has been under investigation by state Comptroller Alan Hevesi since 2004.

The \$439,000 proposal will go before the Valhalla school board at 6:30 tonight for ratification.

That leaves Valhalla's annual grant of \$650,000 still pending before the Town Board, which voted at the same meeting not to release this year's money until it is "fully satisfied" that the partnership complies with state law.

Funding decisions

The Valhalla Schools Committee sought town of Greenburgh approval to spend \$879,000 this year. Greenburgh let Valhalla spend \$439,000.

What gets funded

Districtwide: Curriculum mapping, \$20,000; math consultant, \$6,000; author-in-residence, \$20,000.

Virginia Road School: Class trips, \$12,000; classroom technology, \$20,000.

Kensico School: Nature's classroom, \$6,000; musical infusion, \$10,000; science/enrichment teacher, \$78,000.

Valhalla Middle/High: Revolutionary War re-enactment, \$2,000; drama programs, \$30,000; science research, \$13,000; SAT prep, \$50,000; literary magazine, \$5,000.

Special education: After-school program, \$10,000; incentives program, \$5,000.

Center for Enrichment and Equity: administrator, \$50,000; Valkyrie community program, \$40,000.

Grants: Valhalla Foundation, \$24,000; Valhalla International Fund, \$6,000.

What gets cut

Districtwide: Facilitator to set and

"It's not even half, but it's a start," said Valhalla school board President Grace Stone. "That's OK. Let's move forward and work out whatever differences we have."

The Town Board reached an accord about 2 a.m. yesterday, almost seven hours after it convened at Town Hall in a meeting room packed with more than 100 people urging the panel to allow spending of the funds. Supervisor Paul Feiner wanted to release the funds while the remaining four board members wanted more time to review the program.

To get access to the \$439,000, Valhalla must agree to financially cover Greenburgh in case any resident sues the town over the program, said Greenburgh Town Attorney Timothy Lewis. Lewis said he was protecting the town against anyone's attempt to seek reimbursement for up to \$1.8 million given to the Valhalla schools since 2004 out of the \$4.6 million in rent Greenburgh has received from the county for the shelter.

Lewis, in an opinion issued Wednesday, said the WestHELP Partnership may violate the state Constitution because it provides the grant to residents living in the town's northeast corner served by the Valhalla schools. Lewis argued that such a grant must be for a townwide purpose.

Feiner said the townwide purpose was to provide homeless housing, which occurred by convincing residents in the Mayfair-Knollwood neighborhood, which abuts the WestHELP shelter and is in the Valhalla district, to go along with a 10-year renewal. The \$650,000 annual payment to the Valhalla schools was the "social dividend," Feiner said.

The Fairview Fire District also receives \$100,000 a year through WestHELP, but the Town Board has not questioned that payment.

The \$439,000 in partnership funds that the Town Board authorized represents funds that Valhalla had received in previous years but never allocated to specific programs. In August the Valhalla Schools Committee, which coordinates the partnership, sought approval for programs that would cost \$879,000, so it had to make significant cuts until the Town Board is confident the entire program is legal.

monitor district goals, \$3,000; videographer, \$15,000; Family University, \$10,000; literacy and math consultants, \$34,000; author-in-residence, \$10,000.

Virginia Road School: Classroom technology, \$61,495.

Kensico School: Nature's classroom, \$4,000; Albany and Franklin Museum trip, \$10,000; drama workshops, \$4,400; classroom technology, \$24,000.

Valhalla Middle/High: Environmental science elective, \$42,000; Caramoor program, \$4,550; Ellis Island trip, \$3,000; drama program, \$8,000; summer school scholarships, \$16,000; SAT and PSAT Prep, \$12,000; after-school clubs, \$6,800; summer leadership institute, \$7,000; classroom technology, \$79,436; innovative math and science programs, \$50,000; aide training academy, \$8,000.

Easter Seals: performing arts programs, \$16,000.

Center for Enrichment and Equity: Valkyrie, \$40,000.