

## Oak Park River Forest League of Women Voters Eyewitness Report

Observed by Mary Haley

Date: October 25, 2018

Meeting Length: 4 hrs.

Meeting Name: District 200 School Board

**Headline:** Board and Community Consider Changes to OPRF Graduation Practices.

**Events and Testimony:** For nearly two hours, the board listened to public comment that focused primarily on proposed changes to D200 graduation practices. Students, parents and other community members presented their thoughts on whether or not graduation attire and the venue should be changed. The majority of speakers supported the change from dresses and suits to caps and gowns. Their reasons included issues of equity, cost and the celebration of academic achievement. Other speakers spoke in favor of continuing the suit and dress tradition citing its uniqueness from other schools, the importance of tradition and the lack of student input in the decision-making.

The questions of whether to move the ceremony from the high school to the UIC pavilion also drew mixed opinions. Those in favor pointed out that at UIC there would be enough seating for all to attend and an indoor venue in case of rain and/or heat. Speakers who preferred keeping the event at the high school want the graduation to take place at the place where memories were made. Possible solutions to the problem of adequate seating were proposed.

The other major topic of public comment was the report from IMAGINE OPRF. Six members of OPRF Pragmatic Solutions spoke against the proposal. An emphasis to spend money academic needs as opposed to the physical plant was suggested, as well as reconsidering OPRFHS's swimming requirements. The group believes that the proposed pool serves the needs of a small number of students who compete in IHSA events. Lynn Kamenitsa, co-chair of IMAGINE OPRF, and several other speakers asked the community to visit the group's website and get the facts rather than relying on what they said was misinformation being spread about the plan.

**What Did the Board Decide:** The board voted to make caps and gowns the attire for graduation. The vote was 6-1 with Fred Arkin voting in the minority. Mr. Arkin suggested tabling the vote in order to get more student input. Before voting, board members said that this decision was more properly that of the administration since it was not a matter of policy. Mr. Iseli said that when the

board voted on the district's equity policy it implicitly authorized the administration to make future decisions on the basis of equity. Other members agreed with this statement, saying that this decision was based on weighing tradition against social justice. The board voted unanimously approved keeping the ceremony at the high school. The administration was asked to find ways to accommodate more people at the school.

**What Did the Board Discuss:** A presentation was made on the impact of several approaches to the 2018 levy. Option 1 is to keep the levy at its current level. Option 2 is to increase the levy by 2.1%. 81% of the district's revenue comes from property taxes. The board will vote on this decision at the November board meeting.

David Pope, chair of the Taxing Bodies Efficiencies Task Force, presented its key findings to the board. Oak Park tax increases are substantially higher than those of surrounding communities. Suggestions to address this problem include staying with the CPI through 2030, reduce fund balances, keep compensation packets competitive but reasonable and fund capital improvements through available fund balances.

**What to Watch For:** A decision on the 2018 tax levy will be made next month. Further discussion and a vote on IMAGINE OPRF is upcoming.