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## Watchdog group urges input on District 304 spending

GENEVA— About 50 people attended a forum Wednesday hosted by Geneva TaxFACTS, a local watchdog group, to discuss taxes, debt and the teachers' contract for Geneva School District 304.

This is the second forum held at the First Baptist Church of Geneva. Bob McQuillan, one of the founders of the tax watchdog group, said the purpose of the forum was to provide an open, honest dialogue among district residents and identify solutions to the challenges faced in the school district.

Don Cummings Jr. explained the district's bond structure, especially with regard to its debt. Cummings is a managing partner at Blue Haven Capital in Geneva, as well as a 2nd Ward alderman in Geneva.

"In my opinion, the way the deal was structured was correct for the time," said Cummings, referring to the district restructuring its debt after approval of the \$80 million bond issue in 2007.

But Cummings suggested the best alternative for school officials would be to refinance the debt to extend it.

"I compare it to a dual income household," Cummings said. "You buy a house and then six or eight years later, one loses their job. Now you have a cash flow problem. Maybe you can refinance into a 30-year mortgage to have less cash flow [problems.]"

Another district resident, Barry Bourdage, presented issues regarding the district's teachers, who went back to work without a new contract. At the past two school board meetings, more than 150 teachers attended to show support for an agreement.

In a statement, board President Mark Grosso said the board "is continuing to work in good faith with the teachers' association and trying to balance everyone's needs while being mindful of their responsibility to all district employees and to the taxpayers. While the board had hoped to be farther along in the negotiation process, there are two sides at the table and it is going to take time to complete the process."

Bourdage said Geneva teachers have the fourth highest average salary in Kane County, at \$72,395. His presentation noted that teachers work 181 days a year while the average private sector employee works 240 days.

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