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## Sunset Ridge responds to senator's FOIA request

*Schoenberg questions district's Willow Road spending*

by [Laura Michaels](#)

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Sen. Jeff Schoenberg has made another request for records of money spent on "matters related to the configuration and expansion of Willow Road," this time of Sunset Ridge School District 29.

In a Freedom of Information Act request sent to the district Oct. 29, Schoenberg asked for documents relating to "all monies [spent] on legal fees, lobbyists, public relations consultants, political consultants" and others, the same request he made of the Northfield Park District on the same day. In his letter, Schoenberg questioned Sunset Ridge's financial contributions to what he termed Northfield's "failed obstructionist strategy for Willow Road," calling the arrangement "highly unusual" and outside the scope of the school district's mission.

Sunset Ridge Superintendent Linda Vieth updated school board members Tuesday, Nov. 9, on the status of the district's response and said the "extensive nature" of the senator's request necessitated a five-day extension. The district submitted its response Nov. 12.

Board President Phoebe Raymond didn't address the FOIA request during the school board meeting except to say she thinks "the community will appreciate our solidarity" with the Village and park district. But in a phone interview Nov. 11 Raymond defended the school district's spending.

"It's for the safety of our kids who cross that road every day," Raymond said. "That's what we're watching out for.

"These schools are one of the prized assets of this community."

Raymond said school board members unanimously approved an intergovernmental agreement with the Village on Oct. 6, 2009, and the spending of up to \$50,000 on engineering studies and public relations related to Willow Road.

"It did not detract from education at all," Raymond said of the approved expenditure.

"Our constituents are happy and agree with what we're doing. I have not received one complaint."

The Illinois Department of Transportation is studying a 1.2-mile stretch of Willow Road between Waukegan Road and the Interstate 94 interchange for possible expansion. Northfield is pushing for a three-lane configuration which officials have said would be the safest option and, coupled with modernized, interconnected traffic signals, and left turn lanes, would alleviate traffic congestion.

Northfield's two schools, Middlefork and Sunset Ridge, are both located near busy Willow Road intersections, and Raymond said while safety is the top concern, the additional pollution and noise of more lanes would "impact education quality as well."

George Alexoff, executive director of the Northfield Park District, received an almost identical FOIA request on Oct. 29. He said the district has nothing to hide and is purely concerned with the

safety of those who cross Willow to get to one of the district's three parks located along the road. In 2009 the park board approved a contribution of up to \$10,000 to the Village's efforts for engineering and public relations, and in September gave the go-ahead for an additional \$5,000 to be spent. Alexoff said the park district will be reimbursed a portion of those funds.

"Bottom line, we want to make sure [Willow] is a safe road and we believe a three-lane plan will accomplish that," Alexoff said.

The next Community Advisory Group meeting to discuss Willow Road is scheduled for 6 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 18, at New Trier High School's Northfield campus, 7 Happ Road, in Room C234.