



Sarah Kenney &lt;skenney@barringtonhills-il.gov&gt;

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## VBH BOT ePacket Planning FYI

1 message

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**Robert Kosin** <rkosin@barringtonhills-il.gov>

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To: Dolores Trandel <clerk@barringtonhills-il.gov>

Cc: Sarah Kenney <skenney@barringtonhills-il.gov>

Hoffman mayor asks lawmakers to help keep Sears

By Mike Riopell Daily Herald  
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[PHOTO] Hoffman Estates Mayor William McLeod.  
Bill Zars | Staff Photographer

SPRINGFIELD — Hoffman Estates Mayor William McLeod Thursday urged House lawmakers to consider how important Sears Holdings Corp.'s jobs are to the local economy.

And, he argued, the village needs more money to provide police, fire and other services to the Sears area than the \$5 million some proposals would allow them.

"We'll be upside down," McLeod said.

The mayor's testimony wrapped up a tense week of talks about how best to approve tax incentives for the retail giant, whose officials have said they plan to decide before the end of the year whether to move out of Hoffman Estates.

Lawmakers have scheduled meetings later this month to take the issue up again, with today likely to see little action on Sears incentives. Hearings are set for Wednesday and Friday of next week, with votes possible Nov. 29.

Officials from Community District Unit 300 have been in Springfield all week to oppose tax breaks for Sears, saying the district needs the property tax revenue the corporation generates.

That tension was on full display Thursday morning.

"I don't want to be the referee of a wrestling match here," said Rep. David Harris, an Arlington Heights Republican.

"This has become emotional at times, and we're not going to let anything get out of hand here," said the House committee's chairman, Rep. John Bradley, a Democrat from downstate Marion.

McLeod addressed school district criticisms that the new proposal would allow money generated by the Sears tax deal to be used to operate the village-owned Sears Centre Arena.

McLeod said that even if that is allowed, they wouldn't have enough money from the deal to do it.

"Whether we theoretically could or not, there's no money," McLeod said.

District 300 Superintendent Michael Bregy testified again Thursday, as well, and continued to press lawmakers to change the plans that have been outlined so far.

"Unlike a corporation, a financially strapped school district doesn't have the opportunity to leave the state to satisfy its own shareholders," Bregy said.

At one point, with the committee short on time for its scheduled meeting, Bradley tried to cut district officials' speeches short.

"We're not going to have the same speeches made at every hearing," he said.

For its part, Sears officials presented an economic study from March detailing Sears' impact on the state economy.

"Our significance to the state economy is undeniable," said Misty Redman, Sears' director of government affairs.

Later in the day, Senate President John Cullerton said the package of tax incentives Sears' plan is tied into could get broken up in the coming weeks.

In particular, CME Group might get split out. Cullerton said comparisons between CME and Sears are "really unfortunate." For CME, he said, the state was trying to fix an unfair tax policy to keep them in the state.

Sears is getting tax breaks.

"We're giving them money," Cullerton said of Sears. "We're paying them to stay here."

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