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Rep. Schneider, community representatives discuss 2020 census

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The United States has taken a census every 10 years since 1790. With 2020 two months away, Congressman Brad Schneider (IL-10) and Highwood mayor Charles Pecaro held a briefing at the library on the matter with the objective of educating and encouraging community members to respond, especially now with all the modern options of completion.

The importance of the census needs no introduction.

“The census is what determines how the country allocates its representatives, firstly,” Schneider

said, “and second, resources.”

In Illinois, there are currently 18 representatives, the peak was 24 in 1950. Schneider said that projections show that in two years, it will drop to 17.

“We’re trying to make it as easy as possible for everyone to get counted. They’re used to be someone who’d knock on your door and record the information, that’s still the case,” Schneider said. “We also send it in the mail, still the case. We’re also providing ways to do it electronically. There are others who want to undercount. Every time there is a miscount, there’s winners and losers. We will be on the losing end in that case.”

On the panel was also Anita Banerji, from Forefront, who has worked with grant makers and nonprofits with 1,100 members state wide. Recently, Forefront has initiated their Count Me In 2020 program.

“We’ve been literally traveling the state since last year to start making inroads in communities so folks understand the importance of a fair and accurate census count,” Banerji said.

Banerji has said that for every person not counted, there is a loss of \$1,400 in federal sent funds. In 2010, more than one million people went uncounted in Illinois. Undercounts typically happen with “traditionally” and “historically” hard to count populations. They aren’t just the lower income parts of the neighborhood, but people like renters, seniors, children up to the age of five and the homeless.

Highwood is in this special case with the renters

population making up 60 percent, according to Pecaro.

Hesitation to participate in the census is based on concern for privacy. Everyone on the panel acknowledges a fine of \$250,000 and jail time that accompany any breach of privacy regarding the census on the government’s part. Numerators visiting homes also wear unique badges only they could get.

Bobbie Hinden, center director of Family Focus, said that the task they face is overwhelming.

“We need to get the message out that it’s just a count,” Hinden said. “We’re not looking for who you are or what you are, we just need to count you.”

Some families are fearful and suspicious of people coming to the door.

However, if there’s two things the census won’t be asking is for, it’s social security numbers, a common scam for people posing as

numerators, and the question regarding citizenship.

“There are some legal entities in the advocate world that are all looking at the various avenues. There’s now a lawsuit in the advocacy community to try to find a loophole and find a way so that doesn’t happen,” Jai Johnson, of the Census Bureau said.

“Getting an accurate count isn’t a partisan question,” Schneider said, “It’s an interest in our entire state and our entire country.”

At the same time, Carmen Patlan, the executive director of the Highwood Public Library, recently got back from a library conference in Washington. Highwood was one of the two Illinois public library selected to go to the meeting, only 40 in total were there. They had come together to create a census toolkit for all libraries across the country.

“We, as librarians, can’t go in and fill out the form

for anyone, since were not census employees, but we can guide people through the process and also diminish that fear for families,” Patlan said.

The Highwood Public Library would, in a sense, become a “census station,” a place where people can go to complete the census process as opposed to staying at home or dealing with numerators on one’s own.

Looking at the year ahead, invitations to respond online will be sent out March 12-20 with a reminder letter coming around the 16-24 and reminder postcard on March 26-April 3. A third reminder and questionnaire goes out on April 8-16 and the last reminder on April 20-27.

“My message is stop being invisible,” Patlan said, “because a lot of individual families want to stay invisible and my message is ‘no’, you have to be counted. You count and you matter.”

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to over 18 million dollars.

“This is something we are really proud of,” Kanapareddy said.

Joel Fontane, director of Community Development, presented to the council next, and began by addressing 2019 accomplishments within the department, like the comple-

tion of 14,345 inspections, transition of 10 new staff members and proposal of new policy developments.

His powerpoint noted the installation of street lights in the Ravinia District, but he told the council that the installation was not complete yet, though it would be by the end of the year. This news induced groans from the council. Several members, includ-

ing Rotering, expressed frustration for how long it has taken to complete the project.

Community Development’s proposed 2020 budget is \$4,187,2000, which is a 24 percent increase from this year’s budget. The budget is broken up into three categories: total general fund, total other government funds and total fiduciary funds.

The total general fund would see a nine percent increase and total fiduciary funds would see a 30 percent increase. Total other government funds is planned to decrease 91 percent.

The department’s 2020 objectives range from recommending and implementing code changes and increasing efficiency of FOIA response to a 5-year action and outreach plan for historic preservation, among other things.

Their budget breakdown and goals can be found here.

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