

Lauderhill may borrow \$44 million for citywide improvements

By Susannah Bryan
Staff Writer

July 12, 2004

LAUDERHILL · City commissioners are considering borrowing up to \$44 million to pay for a wish list of capital improvement projects designed to bring the city up to par with others throughout Broward.

The bond issue would require a voter referendum in November that would raise the taxes of property owners citywide.

Commissioners had four meetings with residents over the past month to gauge support for a \$25 million bond issue. When residents were told the entire wish list was closer to \$50 million, many said they would support borrowing up to \$44 million, Mayor Richard J. Kaplan said.

"Most of the people who have attended these meetings have said, 'Why not go for a higher number and get this done right?'" Kaplan said. "That opened a whole new door I hadn't even thought about."

In a meeting last week, Commissioner Dale Holness asked residents how many would support a \$25 million bond issue. A couple hands went up. When asked how many would support borrowing \$44 million, more than half raised their hands.

If the \$44 million bond issue were to pass, the owner of a \$150,000 house with a \$25,000 homestead exemption would pay an additional \$214 annually for 20 years to pay off the debt. If the city were to borrow \$25 million, the same homeowner would pay \$135 for 20 years.

Commissioners plan to debate the amount of the bond issue today during a 10 a.m. workshop at City Hall. At a 7 p.m. meeting, they will decide whether to put the bond issue on the ballot.

In the meantime, the city will try to win federal, state and local grants to help pay for the city's park and road projects, said Kennie Hobbs, the city's finance director.

Some wish-list items include \$4 million for landscaping and irrigation along State Road 7 and \$4 million for privacy walls in neighborhoods throughout the city, similar to those in Sunrise and Plantation.

"Right now, people have gates of different colors," Hobbs said. "Some are maintained well, some are not. We'd replace the gates with walls. It sets a standard throughout the city."

Commissioners are promoting the bond as key to the city's overall development -- and a way to boost property values. "The money is a direct investment in our community," Kaplan said.

If the bond issue doesn't pass, several projects will be postponed for 10 to 15 years, Kaplan said.

Susannah Bryan can be reached at sbryan@sun-sentinel.com or 954-572-2028.