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Eisenhauer v. Watertown City School District

Supreme Court, Appellate Division, Fourth Department, New York - August 4, 2022 - N.Y.S.3d - 2022 WL 3096652 - 2022 N.Y. Slip Op. 04832

Homeowners brought declaratory judgment and article 78 proceeding, seeking to annul results of school district election to extent that results enacted proposition for a tax on real property within school district for purposes of constructing a public library.

The Supreme Court granted city and school district's motion to dismiss. Homeowners appealed.

The Supreme Court, Appellate Division, held that:

- City was not a proper party to the proceeding;
- Homeowners were not required to exhaust their administrative remedies before filing suit;
- School district had authority to levy, collect, and appropriate taxes for construction of public library;
- School district's proposition did not violate equal protection clause; and
- Homeowners' due process rights were not violated.

City was not a proper party to homeowners' declaratory judgment and article 78 proceeding, seeking to annul results of school district election to extent that they enacted a proposition for tax on real property to fund construction of a public library, where homeowners failed to show city had any involvement in the approval, certification, or passage of the new tax, and homeowners did not seek specific relief against city.

Homeowners were not required to exhaust administrative remedies before they brought declaratory judgment and article 78 proceeding against school district and public library, seeking to annul results of school district election to extent that results enacted proposition to tax real property within school district to fund construction of a public library; validity of school district election was not at issue, rather, homeowners were challenging legality of school district's approval and certification of tax and validity of the proposed tax itself.

School district had authority to levy, collect, and appropriate taxes as part of proposition in school district election to tax real property within school district to fund construction of public library; provisions under Education Law did not foreclose other entities from providing public library with additional funding or preclude school district's ability to submit proposition to fund public library through taxes, and proposition did not unconstitutionally shift burden of cost to operate public library to taxpayers outside city limits as public library was not a governmental service or function of the city.

School district's proposition in school district election to tax real property within school district to fund construction of public library did not violate equal protection clause of the United States Constitution; although certain residents outside city and school district could use public library without directly supporting it by way of tax, that did not render tax an example of hostile and

oppressive discrimination against homeowners, and homeowners did not demonstrate how school district's proposition treated them disparately.

Homeowners' due process rights were not violated by school district's proposition in school district election to tax real property within school district to fund construction of a public library, where homeowners were afforded opportunity to vote in the school district election as eligible voters and school district residents.

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