

Garbage fee to make tax bill debut

Written by CAROL POMEDAY

Wednesday, 09 November 2011 18:16

Budget hearing is chance for residents to respond to charge for waste service

Village of Belgium officials expect people to ask during the annual budget hearing Thursday why their tax bills will contain a charge for garbage collection.

On Tuesday, the Village Board reviewed the proposed 2012 budget and discussed the charge prior to the 6 p.m. hearing Nov. 10.

The \$1.02 million budget calls for a \$700,100 tax levy, a 1.1% increase from last year, the maximum allowed by the state. In addition, homeowners will see a charge for garbage collection, estimated to be \$100, on their tax bills.

Faced with a \$182,000 difference between revenues and expenses and unable to increase taxes due to the state's levy restrictions, the Finance and Personnel Committee proposed balancing the budget by removing garbage collection from operating expenses.

The committee recommended the \$95,000 cost for residential pickup be charged as a fee to property owners, which will amount to about \$100 for owners of single-family homes and \$100 per unit for owners of duplexes and apartment buildings.

Beginning Jan. 1, the village will no longer provide garbage collection for businesses. Currently, the village pays for one dumpster pickup every two weeks, which costs \$42,000. Businesses will have to contract for private garbage collection.

Trustee Clem Gottsacker said he has already been confronted by unhappy residents who read about the proposed garbage fee.

"I heard comments the other way," Public Works Director Dan Birenbaum said. "People told me they expected it a couple years ago."

The board approved switching from its current auditor, which costs \$60,000 annually, to Baker Tilly, which will charge \$19,000 for the annual report and between \$6,000 and \$9,500 for quarterly reports. The new accounting firm, which handles many municipal accounts, will provide training so quarterly reports will not be needed in 2013, Clerk Kaity Olsen said.

Among the items cut from the budget were \$5,000 to create a dog park and \$2,300 from the Tree Committee budget, including \$2,000 for trees.

The village will pay \$55,400 for fire department operations. The village pays 40% and the Town of Belgium pays 60% of the fire department's budget.

Street maintenance is expected to cost \$78,300 with \$14,050 allocated for snow removal.

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The budget includes a 3.5% pay increase for public works employees and incentive bonuses for the treasurer, village clerk and office assistant.

The village will receive \$45,690 in state shared revenue, a 23.8% decrease from last year's \$60,000. Officials also expect to get \$47,450 in state transportation aid.

The budget includes \$188,678 in debt service for previous borrowings, including new water and sewer lines.