

Town residents demand tax break

Written by CAROL POMEDAY

Wednesday, 07 December 2011 19:47

Electors trim \$38,665 from proposed tax levy during hearing; supervisors approve \$542,000 budget

About a dozen Town of Belgium residents told the Town Board on Monday to tighten its belt, then approved a tax levy that was \$38,665 less than the board requested.

The electors approved a levy of \$395,335.

Following the budget hearing, the board adopted a \$542,000 budget, with Supr. Bill Janeshek the lone dissenter.

The tax rate for town expenses will be \$1.40 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation, which means a taxpayer with a property valued at \$250,000 will pay \$350.

However, the town tax is a small portion of the total property tax bill that also includes county, state, vocational district and school district taxes. The township is divided into three school districts and two vocational districts, Lakeshore Technical College and Milwaukee Area Technical College.

Residents in the Random Lake School District will pay the least taxes with a tax rate of \$12.65 per \$1,000 of valuation. Those in the Cedar Grove-Belgium School District will pay \$13.01 per \$1,000 of valuation and those in the Northern Ozaukee School District will pay \$14.60 per \$1,000 of valuation. The rates are 1% to 3% less than last year.

Residents were upset that the town tax levy hadn't reverted to what it was prior to last year when a handful of residents approved exceeding the levy cap to pay the town's share, \$162,000, for a new fire truck rather than borrow money. At the time, the board promised it would be a one-year hike.

However, the town faces cuts in county road paving aid, state shared revenue and recycling and transportation grants that total \$48,200, Town Chairman Tom Winker noted.

While the proposed budget called for a 12.6% decrease in the levy, residents said it wasn't enough despite the other loss of income.

"You're asking for this in a year that's economically painful," resident Jeff Coeur said.

Using the 2010 levy and calculating 2.5% cost-of-living increases for two years, he and others in the audience came up with the new levy.

When Winker asked where residents believe the cuts should be made, he was told that was the

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board's job.

"If it's my home and I lose income, it's a matter of cutting back on everything, shaving a little here and a little there," resident Kevin Wolfe said.

The largest town expense is roads, for which the board budgeted \$367,000, including \$182,000 for paving two miles and \$25,000 for culverts and drainage. That's \$50,000 more than this year.

Cutting the budget means roads will continue to deteriorate to the point it could cost more in the long run, Janeshek said.

"If you don't put a two-inch overlay on when it starts (deteriorating), it works its way to the sub-base and now a \$125,000 paving job goes to \$400,000," he said.

"Some things we can't cut. If it snows, the roads have to be plowed."

A new culvert is needed on Jay Road that could result in a sink hole if it isn't replaced, Janeshek said.

The board must also decide if it should spend \$18,900 on blue reflective fire number signs. Belgium Fire Chief Dan Birenbaum urged the board to install the signs similar to those in other townships, noting it is difficult to find addresses at night.

Winker told residents they may see some decrease in services with the budget cuts.

"The five of us sitting up here feel your pain," he said. "We all get tax bills just like you guys. Obviously, we would like it (the tax levy) to be a little bit more because we're looking at it through different glasses."