

## Town chairman tweaks her first budget

Written by Mark Jaegar

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Before her election as town chairman last April, Barb Jobs was a frequent critic of the Town of Saukville's budget preparation.

At last year's budget hearing, Jobs was so upset with a proposed 28% levy increase she prepared her own alternative budget that trimmed more than \$62,000 from the spending plan. That plan was overwhelmingly approved by a voice vote of the electorate at the hearing.

This time around, it was Jobs' turn to craft the proposed town budget.

She and town supervisors Kate Smallish and Curt Rutkowski put the finishing touches on the town's 2010 spending plan last week during a two-hour budget workshop.

After a line-by-line review of all revenues and expenditures, the Town Board unanimously recommended a \$383,070 tax levy to support town spending of \$541,870.

While town officials had little control over such line items as utility costs, there was some debate on the creation of a reserve fund.

Initially, Jobs advocated setting aside \$30,000 above the anticipated spending as a cash reserve.

"It would allow us to try to get things back in order," she told the board.

However, including the \$30,000 reserve would have boosted the town tax rate by 17 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value — to \$1.92 per \$1,000.

It would also have raised the tax levy by 9% from last year.

"I don't like the ring of 9%," Rutkowski said.

As a compromise, the board agreed to recommend a \$20,000 reserve fund that would boost the tax levy by 6.5%.

Under the proposed budget, the town tax rate would rise by 12 cents per \$1,000 of valuation. The recommended tax rate is \$1.87 per \$1,000.

The rate would raise town taxes on a home valued at \$200,000 to \$374, a \$24 increase over last year.

Jobs said the reserve fund will give the town some financial stability.

"It is not a lot of money, but it allows us to inch forward," she said.

Much of the workshop discussion turned to the road budget, which was trimmed close to the bone in recent years because of unexpectedly high snow plowing costs.

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The proposed budget includes \$50,000 for road maintenance and repair, about \$18,000 more last year.

“The problem is road construction was done, but maintenance was ignored which did not follow the concept of a stitch in time,” Jobs said.

The neglect town roads have received was not lost on Rutkowski.

“We have a responsibility to do at least the minimal amount to maintain our roads or we will eventually be passing along an enormous bill for roads,” he said.

Following the workshop, Jobs said she was satisfied with the way the process went.

“I feel we did our homework and can justify everything we did. This is my first shot at this,” she said.

Town residents will have a chance to vote on the recommended levy at the annual meeting, set for 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 24, at Town Hall.