Written by Mark Jaeger
Wednesday, 09 December 2009 18:21

Groups' funding wishes slashed as revenue from motel guests drops $19,000 from two years ago

In most years, the Saukville Village Board's distribution of room tax money is an exercise in community philanthropy.

As any economist or unemployed worker will tell you, 2009 has not been a typical year.

Trustees took a miserly approach last week while doling out where money from the tax should go.

The discussion began when Village President Barb Dickmann told the Finance Committee that revenues from the tax — a 7% fee charged to guests at the Saukville Super 8 motel — are projected at $36,000.

Revenue collected last year came to $42,332, and nearly $55,000 was collected in 2007.

That downward trend in income ran counter to the escalating requests for funding from 16 groups and projects.

"People, we need to find $13,000 to cut from last year," Dickmann said.

By ordinance, the first allocation from the collected tax has to go to the general fund to offset property taxes.

This year, that general fund transfer was limited to $9,000 — $1,000 less than in past years.

Most of the groups requesting funds were hoping to maintain this year's rate or even eke out a slight increase.

The Saukville Area Historical Society took the biggest hit from its initial request.

The history group sought $4,000, which it intended to use to purchase materials for the ongoing restoration of the Crossroads Museum on North Mill Street.

Although the restoration work is being done with volunteer labor, Society President Anne Kertscher said the group hoped to install oak plank flooring and a tin ceiling in a renovated display area.

When the museum work is complete, Kertscher said, regular hours will be scheduled to make historic artifacts and documents available to the public.

At that point, the museum, she said, will become a cornerstone of tourism activity.

“Who better to tell visitors where to shop or where to get a good cup of coffee in the village than the volunteers who live here?” Kertscher asked.

Dickmann advocated cutting the request in half, asking the Society to find an outside funding source, or do only some of the work in the coming year.

Trustees accepted Dickmann’s suggestion, and approved a $2,000 allocation to the Society.

The largest amount of room tax money, $5,000, was allocated for Fourth of July fireworks. This year’s contribution was $6,000.

In the past, Dickmann has been an advocate of improving the fireworks display to draw more people to the community. She said competitive bidding could get a better display for less money.

Funding for the July 4th parade also took a hit, from $3,000 this year to $2,200 for next year.

Despite the huge success of this year’s Saukville Fire Department Car Show, the fund-raiser took a $500 hit — with an allocation of $4,000 for next year.

Another successful community event, National Night Out, also took a major funding hit, receiving only $500.

The evening, which introduces county residents to law enforcement and protective services, received $1,000 this year. Organizers had hoped to increase that amount to $1,250 next year.

“That isn’t going to happen. We host this event for the entire county. For this event

to be self-sustaining, we should talk to the other departments that bring vehicles and displays and ask them to also bring money," Dickmann said.

When it comes to bang for the buck, trustees put their money on the Live at the Triangle concert series. The program received $1,000, the same amount as this year, but the concert offerings are expected to be expanded from four to six performances.

Corporate sponsorship had been a big part of the success of that series.

The board also approved spending $1,000 for advertising the availability of land in the village's business park.

A similar amount was authorized this year, but Community Development Director Brian Biernat was told to withhold spending the money because of the economy.

"If we don't get some industry coming in, it won't matter much what we do," Dickmann said.

Other allocations approved by the board: Riverfest, $800, down from $1,000; Saukville Family Fun Day, $2,000, down from $2,500; 9/11 Memorial Ceremony, $750, down from $900; employee recognition banquet, $3,000, down from $4,000; Christmas decorations,
$1,955, down from $2,532.

As Dickmann presented the resolution for the tax allocations to the Village Board after the Finance Committee's trimming session, she commented on how difficult the process had been.

"The blood is still dripping on this resolution," she said.