Written by Mark Jaeger
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Even without public protests, Dohrwardt refines village spending plan

No residents showed up for last week's public hearing on the Village of Fredonia's 2011 budget, but that didn't keep Trustee Don Dohrwardt from doing some last minute tweaking.

The recommended budget called for a village levy hike of $9,796, or 1.24%.That increase was brought on largely by a 10.5% increase in capital spending.

According to the village, the proposed budget would have boosted the taxes due for village spending by $10.50 on a $175,000 house.

Dohrwardt, however, insisted officials needed to work the numbers a little harder to avoid any levy hike.

He said the village anticipates a budget surplus of more than $68,000, created by deferred projects and savings when actual bids were received.

By using some of that unspent money and the nominal increase in taxes to be collected because of new construction in the village (an additional $1,094 in tax revenue), Dohrwardt said the levy increase could be eliminated.

"That would result in a tax levy increase of .01% and a tax rate that would add six cents to the tax bill of a $200,000 home, which is about as close as you can get to a flat tax rate," he said. "You should be able to write out the same check as last year to the village."

Such a conservative approach will be welcomed by village taxpayers this year, Dohrwardt said.

"This is not a smoke-and-mirrors or paper chase solution to bringing down the levy," he said.

"It is the least we can do for the taxpayers. We already know they are going to get hit hard by the school district and there isn't anything we can do about that, but we can avoid that $10 increase in village taxes."

Trustee Chuck Lapicola worried that using any of the budget surplus funds might put the village in a financial pinch when the focus turns to the reconstruction of Fredonia Avenue.

"I'd love to see a flat rate but with the Fredonia Avenue planning coming up … eventually we are going to have to pay for that. Do we raise taxes $10 this year or $20 the following year?" Lapicola asked.

Dohrwardt said the village's debt load will ease in the years ahead, putting it in better financial position to borrow for things like Fredonia Avenue.

The board endorsed Dohrwardt's budget amendment, with Lapicola and Village President Joe Short opposed.

The budget was then unanimously approved.

Last year, village officials adopted a no-increase budget, saying the dire economy warranted such an austere spending plan.

As the 2011 budget was being crafted, trustees had considered backing a nominal hike to support some additional capital spending.