

Last-minute budget cuts thwarted

Written by Mark Jaeger

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Blasczyk fails in push to eliminate 3.8% levy hike on town tax bill

First-term Supr. John Blasczyk was going through his first budget-setting cycle with the Town of Fredonia, and he didn't like what he saw.

At last week's public hearing on the 2011 town budget, Blasczyk was the only person raising objections to the spending plan.

The town tax levy will be \$393,572 — an increase of \$14,397 from last year.

Although the levy increase came to 3.8%, Blasczyk said any tax hike in the current economy was unacceptable.

He said the results of the November elections underlined the feeling of discontent among voters.

"After (the Nov. 2) elections, it is clear the people don't want to pay any more taxes," Blasczyk said.

He said that trimming the budget by \$15,000 would allow the town to keep the same tax rate as last year.

"It looks like we could probably get by with keeping the tax rate the same as last year, even if it means driving on bumpy roads for another year," he said.

Blasczyk also suggested dipping into the town's reserves and taking a closer look at the town's contract with the Waubeka Fire Department.

Town Chairman Richard Mueller said drawing on the reserve fund would set a dangerous precedent.

Mueller said the town doesn't receive some its revenue until the end of the year and needs to keep a healthy reserve fund to cover operating expenses.

"If we use up our reserves, we just need to borrow money to cover expenses," he said.

Supr. Jim Stemper said Blasczyk needs to realize the town's portion of the tax bill is tiny.

"The reality is our budget is miniscule compared to the school district. Cutting \$1,000 from the fire department is not going to make any difference on the tax bill," Stemper said.

Supr. Lance Leider also warned against targeting the road budget for cuts.

"If you cut back on your road budget, you'll never catch up. As it is, we don't have enough to

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pave one mile of road a year," Leider said.

Town officials were relieved to learn the Ozaukee County Board narrowly defeated a measure that would have eliminated \$131,000 in matching county road aids from the county's 2011 budget. The town's portion of that money is \$26,868, second only to the Town of Belgium.

The County Board voted 16-14 to restore the road aids to towns. The program matches town money for road work, provided crews from the Ozaukee County Highway Department are used.

"The Town of Fredonia asks the County Board to look at the complete picture of how roads can be most cost-effectively maintained throughout the county, and the most effective use of county workers and equipment before removing budget money for the isolated item of town road maintenance," Mueller said in a letter to the County Board.

County Supr. Rose Hass Leider said the county fight over road aids is certain to return during the next budget cycle.

"We won this year, but I can only presume it will be an issue again next year and we'll have to fight tooth and nail again," Hass Leider said.

The town electorate endorsed the proposed town levy, with only Blasczyk voting against the plan. The Town Board then adopted the budget.