

MATC draws heat at budget hearing

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Village 2012 spending plan approved without comment; technical school blamed for rising tax rate

Last week's public hearing failed to generate a single comment on the Village of Fredonia's proposed 2012 budget, at least not on the spending plan itself.

Bill Richards, the only resident attending the hearing, did however, ask officials if they would consider switching affiliation from the Milwaukee Area Technical School District.

Despite reductions in the tax rate from all of the other taxing units appearing on the village tax bills, the resident complained of the increases that continue to support the technical school.

Trustee Don Dohrwardt agreed with the objection, saying the MATC Board seems oblivious to the tax-cutting mood of state voters.

"Academia feels itself to be exempt from common sense," Dohrwardt said.

"I believe the MATC Board will eventually become more conservative in its spending if we keep our current governor. It will take some time for the present administration to clean up that board, but I see better times ahead."

Officials estimated that MATC will account for about 12% of the bottom line on the village tax bills, roughly the same as the county. The technical school's impact on the 2012 tax bill is not known yet.

While other taxing units have made a painstaking effort to hold the line on taxes, Trustee Jill Bertram said MATC's "spending is way, way out of control."

Although there may be strong sentiment toward joining a more cost-conscious technical school district, Dohrwardt — who is also an Ozaukee County Board supervisor — said making such a move would be difficult for the village.

"It is not an easy process, especially for a community our size, but it could be done. It would be harder for the county to withdraw, because we have MATC facilities in Mequon," he said.

Trustee Scott Ehaney said there could be strength in numbers if municipalities spoke out in a single voice against the spending of the technical school district.

"If we could build a coalition we would have more clout with them. Maybe we need to see if neighboring communities like Belgium are also unhappy with their rising tax rate?" Ehaney said.

Although he too was critical of MATC bucking the trend of reduced taxes, Village President

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Chuck Lapicola said he is not sure most village residents are dissatisfied with the services provided by the technical school district.

“I know a number of our residents attend classes through MATC, and I don’t know that we should take the objections raised by a single residents as being representative of the entire community,” Lapicola said.

The village component of the 2012 tax bill was far less contested, largely because the spending plan maintains the same “no tax increase” philosophy that has been in place for the last three budgets.

The village tax levy will increase 2.6%, to \$476,261, essentially representing the amount of growth that has occurred in the tax base.

Final numbers are not available yet from the state to calculate the local tax rate, but Village Clerk Jo Ann Wagner said based on the estimate the levy would result in the tax rate rising “a fraction of a percent — probably no more than a penny.”

Holding the line on village taxes was not easy, because state and county revenues are expected to drop by about \$29,000.

State recycling support will decrease by 27%, from \$9,000 to \$6,600; highway aids will tumble 10%, from \$107,300 to \$96,600; and state shared revenue will fall 7.5%, from \$213,000 to \$197,000.

One of the few additions made to the village budget is funding to cover the out-of-town fees village residents would have to pay to take part in programs as the Port Washington Senior Center.

The board unanimously adopted the budget.