Written by Mark Jaeger
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Although 2011 spending to be held in check, officials say needed borrowing driving increase

Village of Saukville officials know residents are not likely to be too thrilled with a 7.2% hike in village taxes, but they insist the increase is not because of a casual approach to preparing the budget.

Driving the 2011 budget increase are debt service on the new police station and the local share for the pending Highway 33 reconstruction.

According to Village Administrator Dawn Wagner, the village's operating budget will increase just .6%.

Capital spending is slated to increase $31,600, with most of that amount attributed to the purchase of a new police squad car.

"We have a schedule for replacing vehicles and were supposed to get a new car last year. The board put that off and we were actually supposed to get two new cars next year," Wagner said.

She said department heads submitted their budget requests this summer, and the Finance Committee has been working on ways to reduce costs since then.

Village President Barb Dickmann said the committee started the budget process with the challenge of keeping spending as flat as possible.

"I don't believe in setting limits like a zero-increase budget. You know you are going to have increases in utilities and insurance right off the bat," Dickmann said.

"I honestly feel good about coming forward with this budget. We justified every thing. Artificially setting a budget too low is not a responsible way to prepare a budget and ends up harming the community in the long run."

Dickmann said the Finance Committee looked at the village's needs, rather than using the state's levy limit formula as a starting point for the budget.

"According to the state's Expenditure Restraint Program, we could have increased our general fund budget by 3.4% — and that is the number a lot of communities use when setting their budget — but we didn't want to go that way," she said.

The proposed tax levy, excluding debt and the TIF increment, would increase 2.5%.

However, Dickmann said scheduled borrowing will make the budget look considerably worse.

More than $833,000 in debt payments are scheduled for 2011, an increase of nearly 18% from

this year.

“We planned for the police building for three years, so people have to know it is there, and the state has said it is going through with rebuilding Highway 33. There is nothing we can do about that,” Dickmann said.

The proposed total levy, including operating expenses and debt payments, is $2.6 million. This year’s levy is $2.4 million.

The state also said the village’s tax base shrank by $12 million this year, pushing the local tax rate even higher.

According to the village, the spending plan would require a tax rate of $6.40 per $1,000 of assessed valuation. That represents a 43 cent increase from the 2010 rate of $5.97 per $1,000.

For a property assessed at $200,000, the new rate would result in an increase of $86 for village taxes.

The separate fee for garbage and recycling will also rise $5, to $159 in 2011.

A public hearing on the budget will be held at 7:45 p.m. Monday, Nov. 29, at Village Hall, 639 E. Green Bay Ave.