

Jobs says town's times will stay lean

Written by Mark Jaeger
Wednesday, 13 April 2011 15:44

Chairman outlines how state budget crisis will put community in even more precarious financial position

Saukville Town Chairman Barb Jobs used Tuesday's annual meeting to paint a grim financial picture for the times ahead.

When she took office two years ago, Jobs said the town's spending habits put the community in a precarious financial position.

Last year, thanks to a self-imposed austerity program, she told residents the town budget finished in the black by about \$100,000.

That progress is all but certain to change, Jobs said, because of cuts in revenue linked to Gov. Scott Walker's budget-repair bill and the proposed biennial budget.

"As it is, we are barely holding on," she told an audience of about a dozen residents.

Although final numbers haven't been calculated, Jobs said she estimates the town will lose about \$20,000 in state shared revenues and aids next year.

That loss will be significant, she said, in a community with an annual tax levy of less than \$400,000.

One of the first programs that will have to come under scrutiny will be the recycling program.

Jobs said the town has already been told it will lose \$13,000 in recycling aids. Last year's state recycling grant was \$31,000.

How the town will cope with that reduction is uncertain, but Jobs said all approaches will be considered to save the program.

"We are not going to just drop the ball. I think recycling is important to town residents, but everything will be on the table," she said.

Jobs said lean financial times will force town officials to take a closer look at how they use county services.

The town contracts with the county's highway department for snow plowing and road maintenance, but she said the service is getting costly.

As an example, she noted that \$80,000 was budgeted for winter road clearing, and the town was billed \$60,000 for plowing in January and February alone.

"We haven't gotten the March bill yet, and still have all of November and December to worry

Jobs says town's times will stay lean

Written by Mark Jaeger
Wednesday, 13 April 2011 15:44

about," Jobs said.

Even worse, she was critical of the county's policy of charging the town for storing its equipment and for billing.

"We got billed \$5,000 for the county having to prepare our bills last year. This has become unsustainable," Jobs said.

The picture got worse when County Board members said this is likely the last year the towns will receive matching road aid payments.

With road replacement work by county crews costing \$400,000 a mile and the town responsible for 39 miles of roads, Jobs said paving work will have to be eliminated.

"It may come to the point where we have to consider having gravel roads, making our rural roads truly rural," she said.

"I am willing to pay our fair share to the county, but we have no bargaining power. We have been as cost-efficient as we can be. I don't think we can pinch any tighter."

Despite the dire budget scenario, several residents said the town needs to pay attention to the overgrowth that is clogging roadside ditches.

Residents backed a motion from the floor asking the town to look into contracting to have brush cleared along rural roads.

To have money for such programs, Jobs said residents may have to vote to authorize the town to exceed levy limits during the fall budget hearing.

"You are going to have to come to the budget hearing and demand that we raise your taxes. We can't sustain those kind of services on a \$400,000 levy," she said.