

Valuation drop blamed for village tax hike

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Despite spending cuts, increased Hwy. 33 debt leads to boost in local tax rate of 36 cents per \$1,000

There was very little uncertainty when the Saukville Village Board was asked to approved the 2012 budget on Tuesday.

The only unresolved issue going into the budget hearing was how much the village's assessed valuation would change, a number that is critical in determining the final tax rate.

When the assessment came in from the Wisconsin Department of Revenue earlier in the day, it turned out the 4% decline provided by the village's assessor, Accurate Appraisal, was virtually dead on.

As a result, the projected village tax rate of \$6.76 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation will be the number local taxpayers see on their tax bill.

That 5.63% increase in the tax rate is 36 cents higher than village taxpayers faced in 2011.

For a home assessed at \$250,000, the village's portion of the tax bill will increase \$90 under the new budget.

Although no residents attended the hearing, held prior to the Village Board meeting where the general fund and debt service budgets were unanimously approved, officials still used the time to explain how the spending plan was put together.

"Putting this budget together was not an easy task," said Village President Barb Dickmann.

"All we can do is thank the staff, recognizing that they responded when we came in asking that they submit zero-increase budgets."

With the certainty of challenging budget times ahead, the 2012 capital budget was reduced \$34,270 — a decrease of 20.6% from the 2011 spending plan — and the operating budget was trimmed 2.4%.

Combined, those components of the general fund budget dropped by nearly 3.3%. The \$3.3 million operating and capital budget is \$113,000 lower than last year.

However, that close-to-the-bone approach to spending was necessary because village officials knew that debt payments — largely linked to the village's share of the payments for the Highway 33 reconstruction — where going to hit taxpayers hard.

The 2012 debt charges increased more than \$100,000, or about 12%. Total debt service will come to about \$933,000.

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Although not part of the budget, the 2012 village tax bills will also include a \$5 hike in the garbage and recycling charge. That new rate will be \$164 per residential unit.

Dickmann was philosophical about the fact that no residents showed up asking for more detail on the spending plan, or demanding further cuts.

“I believe the people of the village know that we take this job seriously, and that we have prepared a budget that is well within the state’s levy limit requirements and the expenditure restraint program,” she said.

“And driving through the village every day, they are aware that we are spending money on Highway 33. It is also important for residents to know that even with the approval of the budget, we are not done with looking for operating efficiencies and ways to reduce our costs.”