

Town road budget comes under fire

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Residents have no problem with 7% rate hike, ask whether more should be spent on paving

After holding the line on taxes for several years, Town of Saukville officials may have expected some protest at Monday's public hearing on the proposed 2014 budget which called for a 7% tax rate hike.

Those objections never came.

About a dozen residents attended the meeting, and the only criticisms voiced were calls for more town spending on road maintenance.

"When was the last time we did a major road reconstruction for our deteriorating roads?" asked Mike Paulus, a Town of Fredonia resident who farms land along Meadowlark Road in the Town of Saukville.

That road is maintained jointly by the towns of Saukville and Fredonia. When the pavement began to fail several years ago, Meadowlark Road was converted to gravel.

"I have been grading Meadowlark Road out of the kindness of my heart, but I am done," Paulus said.

Paulus said the stop-gap measures the Town of Saukville has used on roads is not a long-term solution.

"You can't keep patching. You end up spending good money on bad roads," he said.

"I think the Town Board needs to look into raising taxes and do something about its roads. You haven't done anything with roads. You have to address the problem."

Paulus suggested the town set aside at least \$100,000 a year to catch up on road maintenance.

"I drive farm equipment on these roads and I always obey the load limits, but I can see I am tearing the roads up. You are holding us hostage with these roads," he said.

Town officials noted that \$60,000 is included in the budget for road construction. The town is also looking to do a major road project next year using state Town Road Improvement Program funds.

Town Chairman Barb Jobs said it costs an estimated \$150,000 to repave one mile of town road.

Shady Lane Road farmer Jeff Opitz also warned town officials that brush cutting along the roads needs to continue or the overgrowth will get out of control.

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“After a couple wet springs like we have had, you are going to need a chain saw to clear the brush,” Opitz said.

Several residents took issue with the Ozaukee County Highway Department’s practice of charging the town \$805 a month for equipment storage. The fee was one of the reasons town officials chose to hire a private firm for snow removal next year.

There was no suggestion about areas where the town should consider cuts in spending.

Town electors unanimously approved the proposed budget of \$576,370, a 5.6% increase. That budget approval was immediately echoed by the Town Board.

A tax levy of \$431,570 will be needed to support that spending plan.

The tax rate will rise 14 cents, to \$2.11 per \$1,000 of assessed value. For a home valued at \$200,000, town taxes will increase \$28 — to \$422.