

# Schillerstrom has ideas for new sales tax money

By Jake Griffin | Daily Herald Staff

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DuPage County Board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom may have more plans than money when it comes to amending the county's budget with the \$20 million windfall expected this year from a sales tax increase.

Schillerstrom outlined Tuesday a series of initiatives for board members' consideration as they mull over budget changes in the coming days.

He suggested earmarking \$5 million for transportation issues, up to \$5 million be set aside in a special reserve for future public safety funding needs, abating the county tax rate increase that would have generated \$2.7 million, and restoring county staffing levels to the 2007 mark at a cost of \$10.5 million. He also suggested restoring funding to a bevy of county programs, but didn't include any dollar amounts.

"First and foremost, we must stabilize and protect our county services and programs by bringing staffing levels back to 2007," he said. "Our most immediate need this week will be to stop the proposed layoffs and critical reductions scheduled to take place Feb. 15."

The board will meet at 8 a.m. Friday where the members are expected to vote to keep the layoffs from happening.

Other budget amendments likely will be discussed at special meetings next week. Schillerstrom's proposal to abate the property tax rate hike may be one of the fiercest fights.

"This just seems to be more of the same from Bob in terms of fiscal management," said board member Brien Sheahan. "The first thing out of the box is, to spend every nickel of this tax money plus even more is outrageous."

Schillerstrom said he's not suggesting implementing every budget amendment suggestion he outlined at Tuesday's meeting. Rather, he was giving the board bullet points for future discussion.

Board member James Zay urged fiscal caution.

"We need to be very careful (with spending) that we don't get us in the same position as we were before," he said.

The money comes from a quarter-percentage-point increase to the county's sales tax instituted as part of the state's recent transit bailout package. The county's sales tax rate is actually going up a half percentage point, but half of that is going to the Regional Transportation Authority.

It is anticipated the county will see an extra \$48 million a year. But the county will only get about \$20 million this year because the tax won't begin collection until around July, county officials said.

Revenue projections may decrease because state legislators may restrict some retail sales from being affected by the tax increase. Some local legislators have suggested exempting groceries and prescription medications. Others have even discussed exempting titled properties like cars, boats and trailers.

Mass transit advocates also spoke at Tuesday's meeting, requesting the board set aside more money for transportation programs that benefit the elderly and disabled.

"I'm here to remind you this money came to you through a mass transit bill," said William Waldack, chairman of the Inter-Agency Paratransit Coordinating Council. "You should consider public transit money for public transit programs."