

DuPage sheriff wants \$1.8 million to cover overtime, deputy pay hikes

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DuPage County Sheriff John Zaruba is requesting an extra \$1.8 million this year to cover overtime costs related to staffing shortages and raises for deputies who haven't had them in two years.

Officials from all of the county's public safety departments are seeking budget increases in the wake of the county's \$20 million sales tax increase windfall this year created by the state legislature's mass transit bailout package. The sheriff's request is the largest of any single department.

The county board will consider all the extra funding requests at a special committee-of-the-whole meeting today. Officials from several departments laid out their requests to the board's judicial and public safety committee today.

James Mendrick, administrative chief at the sheriff's office, said the department is down roughly 40 deputy positions. It will cost \$765,000 in overtime between June 1 and Nov. 30 to cover those vacancies.

In addition, Zaruba is seeking nearly \$800,000 for raises for the 385 sworn officers as part of a retention and recruitment plan. That works out to a little more than \$2,000 for each sworn officer.

Mendrick and Zaruba presented a list of starting salaries for 31 law enforcement agencies in DuPage County. The sheriff's office starting salary of \$41,697 was only ahead of the College of DuPage police department's starting salary on that list. Aurora was at the top with \$59,113 for rookie officers.

Sheriff's officials said they want to bump the starting salary by \$7,000 to match Downers Grove, which came in at No. 18 with starting pay of \$48,546.

"We're bleeding out," Mendrick said. "We can't get people to walk through the front door, and we can't keep them."

The department's pay and benefits pale in comparison to other area agencies, Mendrick said. Kane County sheriff's officials are openly poaching some of DuPage County's veteran jail officers to work in Kane's new corrections facility, he said.

Meanwhile, DuPage State's Attorney Joseph Birkett is requesting nearly \$800,000 more this year to fill 14 open full-time positions.

The public defender's office is seeking a \$100,000 increase to cover a variety of budget shortcomings. Some county board members suggested the office hire two more attorneys, but Public Defender Robert Miller said he wasn't ready to make that recommendation yet.

The county has the money to spend due to the quarter percentage-point sales tax hike that is expected to bring in more than \$40 million annually, but only \$20 million this year because collection won't begin until June or July. However, some board members want more of the sales tax windfall to go toward transportation initiatives.

The county board is also considering abating a property tax rate increase that will generate an extra \$2.7 million this year. They are expected to make that decision Monday.