

All want a piece of new DuPage money

Spending requests quickly outpace what the county will get

By Jake Griffin | Daily Herald Staff

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The DuPage County Board members whittled more than \$20 million worth of funding requests to just under \$10 million Wednesday.

But they have only \$9.5 million to spend and the majority still seems determined to cut \$2.1 million in property taxes and sock away another \$2.5 million in a rainy day fund.

They'll gather again at 8 a.m. Saturday for a special meeting to vote on a property tax abatement and possibly amend this year's budget.

Chairman Robert Schillerstrom said he would present the board with a balanced budget recommendation at Saturday's meeting.

"I'm not going to make a recommendation that expends more than \$9.5 million," Schillerstrom said. "They want to abate property taxes, but they didn't say what they wanted to abate."

County finance officials said a full \$2.1 million property tax abatement would average out to a little more than \$5 per household.

Some board members believe the county can afford the abatement since residents will soon be paying more in sales tax.

The county will receive \$20 million in increased sales tax revenue this year generated by a quarter-percentage-point hike approved by the state legislature as part of the state's mass transit bailout package. The county will collect the additional tax for only half of this year. In future years, it's anticipated to generate around \$47 million annually.

The board has already spent \$10.5 million to retain jobs that would have been cut if the legislature hadn't passed the tax hike.

The money is earmarked for public safety and transportation needs. The state also requires detailed accounting of where the new revenue is spent.

The board gave preliminary approval to a proposal that would allow county departments to provide 4 percent pay hikes to all employees. All employees would see at least a 1.5 percent pay increase, but others could see more based on merit pay, finance director Fred Backfield said.

The sheriff's office is also requesting an additional \$800,000 to spread out among the 385 sworn deputies as part of a retention program. Schillerstrom said that may be one area to cut.

"There may be a duplication there," he said.

Naperville board member James Healy complained the group wanted to set aside more money in a rainy day fund than spend on transportation needs. The current recommendation is to put \$1.9 million toward transportation issues and save up to \$2.5 million for future use.

"We're talking about spending 10 percent or less on transportation with money from a transportation bill," he said.

Wheaton board member Debra Olson pushed for saving money.

"I think we need to get in the habit of saving and now is the time to do it," she said.