

# County Board weighs funding requests, property tax cut

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DuPage County, IL -

The county hasn't received a cent of the new sales tax that will start being collected Tuesday, but the County Board has gotten requests for funding that outstrip the revenue officials expect to bring in this year.

Officials estimate the quarter-cent sales tax increase will give the county about \$20 million in new revenue in 2008. The County Board has already committed to spending about \$10.5 million of that money to stop massive layoffs that were scheduled to take place in February.

That leaves about \$9.5 million to be spent on other needs, but at a special meeting Wednesday afternoon, the board was presented with a little more than \$20 million in requests from County Board committees and county departments.

Most board members at the meeting showed support to reducing the county's property tax levy, which could reduce the money the board has to spend by as much as \$2.1 million. The board also favored setting aside as much as \$2.5 million in a "rainy day" fund.

The board spent a little more than three hours going over requests from the sheriff's office, the DuPage Convalescent Center and numerous other county agencies. Board members were able to whittle the requests down to about \$10 million by the end of the meeting. That leaves a gap of about \$500,000 between the requests and projected revenues without taking into account the tax cut or the "rainy day" fund.

The debate centered around which requests were critical and which could be addressed in the 2009 budget, when officials expect to bring in about \$40 million in the first full year of the new sales tax.

The board agreed that raises are necessary for county employees who have weathered budget cuts and small to nonexistent raises over the last few years. The board plans to give an average raise of 4 percent to county employees, which would cost about \$1.6 million.

"This raise needs to come (as soon as possible)," said board member Bob Schroeder, R-5th District, of Naperville. "We keep praising our employees; we need to reward them."

Board members also showed support for increasing salaries in the sheriff's office. At a Judicial and Public Safety Committee meeting Tuesday, Sheriff John Zaruba presented a list of the starting salaries of law enforcement officers throughout the county. Of the 31 agencies listed, the sheriff's office ranked 30th — ahead of only the College of DuPage Police Department. Zaruba wants to raise starting salaries to the same level as Downers Grove, which is near the middle of the pack at \$48,546.

Zaruba has said that Kane County regularly hires away veteran DuPage County Jail employees for its new jail facility.

"Critical need, I think, is for the sheriff's office," said board member Patrick O'Shea, R-2nd District, of Lombard. "He's losing people all the time."

The office also has trouble attracting new employees due to low pay and the uncertainty caused by years of budget cuts, O'Shea said.

County Board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom will prepare a proposed budget amendment to present to the board at a special meeting Saturday. If the board is going to lower the property-tax levy, it must do so before 4:30 p.m. Monday.

"I'll sit down with everything we went over," Schillerstrom said after Wednesday's meeting. "I think I made it clear that I'm going to come back with a balanced budget."

While Schillerstrom said he didn't know exactly where he would make additional cuts to the requests, he plans to present a proposal that includes additional funding for some areas, a property tax cut and a "rainy day" fund.

Comments (1)

[www.BobForDuPage.org](http://www.BobForDuPage.org)

The sales tax increase that takes effect on April 1, 2008 was supposed to be 0.25% for mass transit only. However, DuPage County Board Chairman Schillerstrom convinced Springfield to add another 0.25% in the collar counties for "public safety." Three state senators from DuPage County - Cronin, Dillard, and Millner - were the deciding votes in favor of the additional increase.

And now it's a feeding frenzy at the taxpayer trough for all this new money.

We cannot afford this "tax and spend" philosophy of government. Voters need to remind DuPage County Board Members that we are not Cook County, nor do we want to be.

Robert "Bob" Brandt

Candidate for DuPage County Board - District 3

## County board split on use of millions in new revenue

March 27, 2008

By Paige Winfield [pwinfield@scn1.com](mailto:pwinfield@scn1.com)

Whether to abate property taxes divides DuPage County Board members as they discuss how to spend a new influx of funding.

Their task is to divvy up the \$9.4 million in revenue from a new quarter-cent sales tax approved within a Regional Transportation Authority funding bill in January. That amount equals the revenue left over after the board used \$10.5 million to halt dozens of layoffs last month.

Relieved board members say the new tax saves them from slashing budgets for public safety and human service agencies.

But demands for the additional revenue have multiplied above and beyond what is available. After committees submitted their own funding requests, the county's wish list added up to \$13,400 more than the new revenue will bring in this year.

The wish list also includes a \$5 million strategic reserve and a \$2.1 million property tax abatement that would reduce levies to 2006 levels, suggested by Chairman Bob Schillerstrom.

Eight of the 18 board members either partially or fully supported the abatement, while others said the county should save as many funds as possible. Don Puchalski of Addison said he thought abating taxes sounded good at first, but decided the money should be saved to avoid funding shortages that have gripped the county for the past two years.

"Now I think you gotta save and get our financial resources back in order," Puchalski said. "I think that means saving instead of abating now."

Jim Healy of Naperville agreed, saying the estimated tax revenues could change if the RTA bill is amended in Springfield. If approved, proposals to exempt food and vehicles from the tax could lower the county's anticipated funding.

"I just don't think it's the prudent thing to do because we don't have all the information and we don't know what's going to happen in Springfield over the next few months," Healy said.

But Pat O'Shea of Lombard favored the abatement, saying property taxes are "indiscriminate."

"They tax those who are least able to pay, so I believe it's the right thing to do at this time," O'Shea said. "I think we should let people know we do have their interests at heart."

The board will meet Saturday morning and Monday to vote on the property tax abatements.