

County Board approves \$7.5 million budget amendment

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DuPage County, IL -

The DuPage County Board on Tuesday finished dividing up the money the county will receive from a sales tax increase that went into effect this month.

The county expects to receive about \$20 million from the new sales tax this year. The board already has committed to spending about \$10.5 million of that money to stop massive layoffs scheduled for February.

The board voted 14-3 to appropriate \$5.5 million for a variety of personnel, commodity and contractual expenses. Of that, about \$1.5 million is earmarked to give raises of up to 3.5 percent to county employees.

The board voted to use \$1.4 million of the sales tax revenue for transportation projects and to give \$600,000 to the DuPage Convalescent Center.

County Board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom said he hopes to get raises into employees' pockets by June. "The sooner the better," he said.

The board must pass a separate ordinance to set the percentage of the raises devoted to a cost-of-living increase for all employees and the percentage for merit-based pay increases.

At a special Saturday meeting March 29, the board lowered the county's property tax levy by \$1 million, which essentially used up another \$1 million of the sales tax money. The abatement will translate to a savings of about \$2.50 for the average taxpayer.

The board plans to set aside another \$1 million in a "rainy day" fund.

On top of the raises all county employees will receive, the sheriff's office will get an additional \$350,000 to increase starting salaries for deputies.

Sheriff John Zaruba requested \$790,000 to bring starting salaries for his deputies in line with the Downers Grove Police Department, which ranks 18th in starting salary out of 31 law enforcement agencies in DuPage County. Some of that money is covered in the countywide raises, officials said.

Zaruba's office also will receive \$600,000 for overtime pay, which is necessary because of the office being short-staffed, Schillerstrom said.

The board approved \$500,000 for human-services grants that help fund a variety of programs for low-income residents throughout the county.

Division of new tax revenue

\$10.5 million to stop February layoffs

\$5.5 million Personnel, commodity and contractual expenses

\$1.4 million Transportation projects

\$1 million Property-tax Abatement

\$1 million "Rainy day" fund

\$600,000 DuPage Convalescent Center

\$20 million Estimated sales-tax revenue

County Board member Jim Healy, R-5th District, of Naperville said the board acted too soon in amending the 2008 budget.

"We're moving a little too quickly on this," Healy said. "If you're amending a budget like any corporation does, you look at your expenses and revenues up to that point, and we haven't had the opportunity to do that."

There are bills pending in Springfield that could affect the amount of sales tax revenue the county receives, Healy said, including one that would exempt groceries and medication from the new tax.

To fund Chicago-area mass transit, the General Assembly in January approved a sales tax increase of a quarter-cent in Cook County and a half-cent in DuPage and the other collar counties. The extra quarter-cent tax in the collar counties can be used either for transportation projects or for public-safety operations.

County officials have said the new revenue will free money devoted to public safety and transportation to be used in other areas. They estimate the county will bring in about \$20 million this year and as much as \$48 million annually in the future.

Sales tax surplus divvied up

\$5.5 million for raises, salaries

April 9, 2008

By Paige Winfield pwinfield@scn1.com

The final slice of DuPage County's expanding financial pie will be used for staff pay raises, congestion relief on area roads and human services programs.

County board members decided how to spend the remaining \$8.5 million from a new quarter-cent sales tax that is estimated to bring in \$20 million this year. During the last two months, they already had tagged \$11.5 million to halt dozens of employee layoffs and abate \$1 million in property taxes.

A budget revision approved 14-3 on Tuesday sends \$5.5 million to the corporate fund - to be used largely for salaries and raises - and \$1.4 million to the county's transportation division to allow planning and design engineering to begin on congestion relief road projects.

The budget also includes \$600,000 for aid programs such as Access DuPage and mental health services.

After passing a tight \$132 million budget last November, the county received the revenue boost in January. The sales tax provision was included in an RTA funding bill passed by the General Assembly.

3.5 percent raise

County Board Chairman Bob Schillerstrom said county employees may see their paychecks increase by June, depending on when the board makes a final decision on what percentage of the raises will be merit-based. Enough money was appropriated to give a 3.5 percent raise to each of the 2,200 county employees paid out of the corporate fund.

"It's just a pot of cash that we have to determine how we will divvy up," said Schillerstrom, adding that the raises would be considered by the Finance Committee before coming back to the board.

Quick decisions

Board member Jim Healy, of Naperville, was one of the three members who wanted to postpone the budget vote for another month to have a more complete picture of the county's financial situation.

Healy said that not only will first-quarter revenues be available for viewing in a few weeks, but members also will have a better idea of whether the sales tax will be legislatively amended. There is a possibility that legislators could approve a trailer bill exempting food and drugs from the sales tax.

"I don't think we have all of the elements in front of us to make that decision," Healy said.

Jim Zay, of Carol Stream, agreed, saying there is no rush to appropriate the funds.

"We can put it to the side like we used to," Zay said.

But Pat O'Shea, chairman of the Finance Committee, said members can amend the budget again if revenues come in below the \$20 million estimated for this year.

"In either event, we've been very conservative in what we estimate we'll receive," O'Shea said. "We can always amend, but we need to get something done."

New DuPage budget shows raises for workers

By Joseph Sjostrom

Tribune reporter

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A revised 2008 budget approved Tuesday will give DuPage County employees their first raises in two years.

The budget, adopted by the County Board, also provides \$600,000 to the county Convalescent Center to restore 14 nursing, recreation and laundry positions. The center had 592 authorized positions in 2007 but lost 68 of those to funding cuts that year.

Also, the budget allocates \$400,000 to the sheriff for medical services to County Jail inmates, \$500,000 in grants to social services agencies serving county residents, \$65,000 for the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, \$1 million for a strategic reserve—also being called a "rainy day fund"—and \$1.4 million for road improvement programs.

The budget provides \$3.2 million for personnel, including \$2.4 million for salary increases: about \$1 million for sheriff's department employees and \$1.4 million for 2,270 county employees. The remaining \$800,000 is earmarked for benefit costs and temporary employees.

The budget doesn't specify whether the raises will be divided evenly among employees or proportionately applied to certain groups or individuals within the sheriff's office or the rest of the county's workforce.

"The board will have to pass an ordinance defining how to allocate the raises," Schillerstrom said.

Budget deliberations in recent months have been closely followed by Wade Lederman, a resident of the county Convalescent Center and chairman of the center's residents council.

"This is funding that's really needed," Lederman said. "Staff has been doing double duty just to get their jobs done."

The funds are part of an anticipated \$20 million in extra revenue the county expects to get from a one-quarter cent sales tax increase approved earlier this year by the legislature.

The quarter-cent sales tax increase rescued county government from a "doomsday" budget for 2008 that would have led to a loss of about 240 jobs in county government, most in public safety.

The county previously allocated about \$10.5 million of the anticipated new sales tax revenue to the cost of rescinding the job cuts and another million to abating real estate taxes.

Much of DuPage tax windfall going to salaries

April 11, 2008

By Paige Winfield Sun-Times News Group

The final slice of DuPage County's expanding financial pie will be used for staff pay raises, congestion relief on area roads and human services programs.

County Board members this week decided how to spend the remaining \$8.5 million from a new quarter-cent sales tax that is estimated to bring in \$20 million this year.

During the last two months, they already had tagged \$11.5 million to halt dozens of employee layoffs and abate \$1 million in property taxes.

The \$8.5 million budget revision, approved 14-3, sends \$5.5 million to the corporate fund, to be used largely for salaries and raises; and \$1.4 million to the county's transportation division to allow planning and design engineering to begin on congestion relief road projects.

The total \$20 million DuPage expects to receive from the sales tax OK'd as part of an RTA funding bill will go toward:

- Halting more than 200 layoffs of county workers: \$10.5 million.
- Property tax abatement: \$1 million.
- Corporate appropriations, including pay raises: \$5.5 million.
- Strategic reserve (rainy-day fund): \$1 million.
- Transportation: \$1.4 million.
- Human Service Grants: \$600,000.

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He added that the raises would be considered by the Finance Committee before coming back to the board.