

Budget proposal to call for restoration of past cuts

ADVISORY COMMENT

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DuPage County, IL -

DuPage County Board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom will have some good news Tuesday when he announces his budget plan for the coming year.

When he made his proposal last October for the 2008 budget, Schillerstrom called for hundreds of layoffs and a large reduction in spending. This year — due in large part to a sales tax increase approved by the state legislature — he will propose a balanced budget that increases spending by 12 percent and restores many programs and services that were cut or reduced in previous years.

Overall, the plan calls for spending about \$462 million in the 2009 fiscal year, which begins Dec. 1.

“Last year was the toughest budget I’ve ever had to present or be a part of in all my years here,” Schillerstrom said Monday while previewing his speech for the media. “It was a very difficult year. So it’ll be much nicer to go with a positive message and with adequate funding to address the needs that there are in this county.”

In January, after lobbying from Schillerstrom and with the support of three DuPage state senators, the General Assembly approved a half-cent sales tax increase. One quarter cent of the new tax is used to fund Chicago-area mass transit, while the other quarter cent goes to the county to pay for transportation projects and public-safety needs.

The increase kicked in April 1 and spared the county from having to make most of the proposed cuts.

Fred Backfield, the county's chief financial officer, said the new tax is expected to bring in about \$48 million in new revenue for DuPage in the coming year. Despite the struggling economy, overall sales tax revenue is expected to grow by about 2.5 percent next year, he said.

While Schillerstrom's spending plan calls for rolling back many cuts that have been made, the overall budget is still about 1.5 percent less than in 2004, when the County Board began reducing spending and eliminating jobs to combat rising costs and stagnant revenue.

“We are still going to be running a lean government,” Schillerstrom said, “one of the leanest county governments in the country, and certainly in the region.”

Schillerstrom declined to give specifics of the spending plan prior to his address to the board, but said it will focus on public safety and infrastructure needs without raising property taxes. The overall number of county employees will increase, with the largest growth in public safety departments, which include the sheriff's and state's attorney's offices, he said.

The county will continue to set aside money for job-training programs and to help retain and attract businesses, Schillerstrom said.

There will also be a continued focus on providing health and human service programs, he added.

“In many ways ... we are the government of last resort; we are the safety net,” Schillerstrom said. “We recognize that and we will continue to work to meet that need.”

Budget by the numbers

\$462.6 million Total budget for '09

\$51 million More than last year

12 percent Increase in spending

\$48 million Estimated revenue from new sales tax

DuPage budget proposal targets traffic congestion

By James Kimberly

Chicago Tribune reporter

September 17, 2008

A massive, locally funded public works project aimed at easing traffic congestion and improving county facilities was at the center of a proposed \$462.6 million budget that DuPage County Board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom presented to the board Tuesday.

In the 2009 budget, which must be approved by the board, Schillerstrom proposed setting aside \$12 million as a debt service payment for a five-year, \$220-million capital project dubbed DuPage 2013. The county would pay for the program by issuing bonds, and it would create 5,500 jobs and be an economic stimulus for the region, Schillerstrom promised.

DuPage 2013 would put \$157 million toward road construction projects such as adding lanes to 75th Street and an interchange at Eola Road and the Reagan Memorial Tollway (Interstate Highway 88). The program also calls for the construction of new bike trails and \$31 million worth of improvements to the county complex, convalescent center and jail.

"We need a capital plan. We cannot wait for personalities and politics to eventually do what is right. We must act now," Schillerstrom said, although he added the local projects will not diminish the need for a state capital spending bill. The lack of a bill can be blamed on "the failure of leadership at the very top of our state," he said.

Finance Committee Chairman Patrick O'Shea said the county can afford to borrow the money that Schillerstrom has proposed, but it will be up to the County Board to approve the construction projects.

O'Shea called the proposed budget aggressive.

"It is a budget we had to be aggressive in because of the problems that we had last year," O'Shea said.

This year, the state legislature passed a quarter-cent tax hike for DuPage County, including it in an RTA funding bill. The tax increase allowed the board at the last minute to call off plans to lay off 120 employees as part of a reduction of 240 county jobs.

The sales tax increase is expected to generate an additional \$48 million next year.

Overall in 2009, Schillerstrom has proposed a 12 percent increase in spending. The money will pay for raises for the county's 2,300 employees as well as more sheriff's deputies and probation officers.

Because of the sales tax hike, Schillerstrom did not propose an increase in property taxes but said the county would levy the \$66 million, as collected in 2008.

Much of county budget devoted to capital projects

But board member says spending plan is lean

September 17, 2008

By Paige Winfield pwinfield@scn1.com

A new \$220 million capital plan headlines a robust 2009 budget presented Tuesday by DuPage County Chairman Bob Schillerstrom.

After four years of cuts, next year's proposed \$462.6 million budget raises county spending back up to 2004 levels. Along with funding new initiatives and hiring more staffers, Schillerstrom wants to create a five-year program to relieve congested roads, repair county buildings and replace technology.

The county can't wait for bickering state legislators to pass a long-needed capital bill, Schillerstrom said. While he said he'll still advocate for a state bill, the county is going ahead with its own plan that Schillerstrom has dubbed DuPage 2013.

"While Springfield still debates and delays on passage of a state capital bill, there is clearly something we can and must do," he said.

The plan will be funded almost entirely by bonds, which could be purchased next year with \$12 million Schillerstrom appropriated for debt service. It includes a long list of tasks from improving 75th Street to replacing fire alarms in the jail.

"These are all projects that were previously determined to be important for the future of the county," Schillerstrom said. "This will allow us to frontload some of those projects."

More funding for the county sheriff and state's attorney is a significant part of Schillerstrom's budget, which represents a 12 percent increase over last year's budget. The \$96 million allocated for public safety agencies provides for equalizing deputy salaries, hiring more officers and reinstating SWAP - an alternative sentencing program.

At least 56 more staff members could be added under the proposed budget, setting head count at 2,486. All employees would receive a 1.5 percent wage increase and be eligible for a 2 percent merit raise.

The budget also funds a new office of green initiatives, \$4.5 million for the Stormwater Department and doubles the Human Services Grant Fund to \$1 million. The entire budget, along with Schillerstrom's presentation, can be viewed at www.dupageco.org.

Even with the spending increases, the 2009 budget falls significantly below the county's \$571 million budget in 2003. Board member Jim Zay, Carol Stream, said the budget was quite lean, considering the revenue from the new quarter-cent sales tax instituted in April.

"For the \$45 million we're bringing in sales tax, I think it's very conservative," Zay said.

The comfortable budget may be approved several weeks before the Nov. 30 deadline, Schillerstrom said. Hearings will be held in October, after the committees have a chance to give it a review.

"My guess is if a budget is ever going to go over early, this would be it," Schillerstrom said.