

Budget battle looms as decision nears

Opposition to layoffs, cuts expected to be heard at special Friday meeting

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An special session of the DuPage County Board expected to take place Friday afternoon to discuss the budget crisis could include some fireworks.

The board is grappling with a sizable shortfall and threatened layoffs of 235 people.

Officials had hoped the Illinois General Assembly might ride to the rescue by passing legislation enabling the county to enact a cigarette tax but that option looks increasingly unlikely.

"Things in Springfield have hit a logjam and the county needs to move forward budget issues," county spokesman Jason Gerwig said.

Meanwhile, the proposed 2008 budget by Chairman Robert Schillerstrom is about \$50 million less than the 2007 version.

Reductions include firing 179 employees in law enforcement, decreases to the health department that would end a free urgent dental-care clinic and shutting down the DuPage Historical Museum.

A majority of board members have said they wouldn't vote for the budget as it stands.

"It's crystal clear no one wants cuts to the state's attorney's office or the health department or the convalescent center," board member Don Puchalski of Addison said. "I don't think the budget will pass."

Board member Brien Sheahan of Elmhurst said he wants to look at options that could include a temporary cut in salaries for staff instead of layoffs.

"That would need to be extended to elected officials as well," Sheahan said.

Another option would involve moving forward on a referendum asking voters if they'd approve a sales tax increase to pay for public safety, board member Grant Eckhoff of Wheaton said.

The special session, which was still being organized Tuesday, is expected to be held at 2 p.m.