

'Doomsday' DuPage budget OKd

DuPage officials delay layoffs until February ballot measure

By Joseph Sjoström

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The DuPage County Board voted Tuesday to adopt a "doomsday" budget that calls for cutting 240 jobs, but passed a moratorium that will prevent any layoffs until the results of a Feb. 5 ballot referendum to add one-quarter percent to the county sales tax.

The board voted 12-6 to pass the budget as proposed by board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom after defeating a series of amendments by Board Member James Healy of Naperville to restore about \$6 million in spending, which would have provided for no job losses. Healy contended that the county's actual revenue would cover all but \$2.5 million of the \$6 million in added spending and that the rest could be taken from other departments.

However, the county's finance director has said repeatedly that Healy's revenue estimates exceed what the county will receive. The board also rejected amendments to restore funding to field traffic courts and the county historical museum.

The 2008 county budget of \$375.9 million calls for cutting spending by about \$52 million and laying off about 190 county workers, with an additional 50 open positions going unfilled.

Schillerstrom and finance officials have said increasing expenses and stable revenue in recent years have left no alternative to cutting staff.

After two days of hearings last week, some County Board members, seeking to save jobs by scouring the budget for potential cutbacks in spending for supplies, equipment, travel and contract services, said they found \$794,945 in revenue that had not been counted earlier. Healy estimated that the county undercalculated income by as much as \$3.4 million, possibly as much as \$7 million.

Department heads disagreed, however, saying expenses already were reduced to rock-bottom in most cases.

Because about 130 of the proposed 190 layoffs from the 2008 budget would come from public-safety jobs -- such as in the sheriff's office, probation department and state's attorney's office -- the County Board voted Nov. 17 to put a question on the Feb. 5 ballot asking for a one-quarter percentage point sales tax increase.

If voters approve the measure, the sales tax increase would raise an estimated \$40 million per year for spending on public safety. However, officials have said that if the tax is approved, revenue from other sources now applied to public safety would be spent on other departments.

That vote came a day after the County Board delayed a vote on an annual \$50 vehicle sticker tax, also proposed to stave off layoffs.

The 2008 budget had to be approved by Nov. 30 as fiscal 2008 begins Dec. 1.