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County board OKs 1 % tax levy hike, new Round Lake dam

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By Terrell Boettcher News Editor

The Sawyer County Board on Nov. 13 approved a 2013 county government budget with total expenditures of \$28,099,260 and a tax levy of \$9,937,743, an increase of \$97,679 (0.99 percent) from last year's levy.

A homeowner will pay a county tax rate of approximately \$2.94 per \$1,000 of property value (full market value). The tax is levied on an equalized property value of approximately \$3.383 billion, which is down 5.52 percent from last year's value.

County Clerk Kris Mayberry said "A lot of work went into this budget. It's a plan, a forecast, a blueprint" for next year.

Kathy McCoy said the board applied \$419,000 from its 2011 surplus to balance the budget, but also made many cuts. She moved that the board levy an additional \$45,000 to go into the contingency fund for emergencies (bringing the total tax up to the state-mandated limit, an increase of 1.46 percent). She said there's no money for computer backup equipment, vehicle breakdowns or economic development.

"We keep spending money out of reserve accounts and not replacing it," McCoy said. "Sooner or later, the pot runs dry."

Finance Committee chairman Warren Johnson responded, "We're doing a good job of using resources

and we can do that again. We have people struggling to pay their taxes and we've held the line (no tax increase) for two years. I think we're still in good shape."

Dale Thompson said, "We've done a good job of cutting where we can cut."

McCoy's motion failed on a vote of seven in favor and eight against.

The board then passed the budget as proposed on a voice vote, with McCoy opposed. The budget includes special fund revenues from the federal and state governments totaling \$18,161,517.

Round Lake

The board approved the recommendations of a Round Lake Water Task Force, which include removing the existing

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dam and bridge on Carlson Road at the outlet of Little Round Lake, replacing the dam with a concrete box culvert structure, and petitioning the Department of Natural Resources to rescind the 71-year-old order that set an operating range for the water levels on Round, Little Round and Osprey lakes.

The water issues have been discussed by the task force for more than 10 years.

Board member Walt Jaeger asked the board to postpone acting in order to give the task force a chance to consider new water level information from the DNR's dam section chief, Meg Galloway. The motion to table failed on a voice vote.

Round Lake Property Owners Association (RLPOA) member Jim Purdin said the language in the current water level order "has been interpreted differently by different people, especially as to what the county can and must do to keep water levels from exceeding the maximum. Rephrasing the order could provide more clarity as to what the county is required to do to maintain water levels."

Galloway agreed there is precedent for approving water orders with prescriptive language rather than specifying water levels or a range, Purdin said. It would state who's responsible for specific actions.

This would "provide a contingency plan" and minimize the county's liability, Purdin said.

A washout of the Osprey Creek beaver dams would lower water levels in Round Lake by a foot and Osprey Lake by two feet, which would be "problematic for many property owners and people who use the lake for recreation," Purdin said.

Chuck Gundersen urged the board to approve the task force's recommendations in order to "return this watershed to as close to a natural state as we can." He said Galloway "cannot guarantee anything that can be resolved."

The estimated cost of the task force's recommendations is \$29,250 for design and legal work, and \$100,000 to \$120,000 for replacing the bridge, removing the dam and related construction. The recommended source of funds is the Resource Development Fund — derived from timber sales revenue.

Jim Bassett said, "No matter what we do, that dam (at Carlson Road) will only affect Round Lake 1 to 2 percent of the time. That's not worth spending very much money."

County Conservation and Zoning Director Dale Olson said that rescinding the 1941 order would take at least six months and would involve a public hearing. The hydrology for a box culvert at Carlson Road is in place, he added.

Dispatchers

The board also approved adding two new dispatcher positions to the sheriff's department budget in 2013 so there will be two dispatchers on duty at all times. "Our county is very, very busy," said 911 dispatch center supervisor Rose Lillyroot. "We're one of the few counties with only one dispatcher on duty. We need to have two on duty to make sure all the calls are answered and responded to."

The public safety committee also is considering adding a part-time emergency management coordinator, and revamping the 911 communications center coordinator position to include ambulance billing duties.

Other business

In other actions, the board:

- Approved an addition to the county's animal control ordinance that will require a \$50 annual permit for an individual to keep exotic or vicious animals such as alligators, snakes longer than six feet, bears, cougars, tigers and rabies-carrying animals such as raccoons. These permit-holders will be inspected annually. Zoos and game farms that require state and federal permits are exempt.
- Approved increases in annual dog license fees from \$5 (current) to \$8 per year for a spayed/neutered canine and from \$10 to \$15 for a dog that is not neutered or spayed. Licenses must be renewed before March 31 each year, or late fees will be charged: \$10 from April 1-30, \$20 from May 1-31 or \$30 on June 1 or later.

Also, multiple dog licenses, which now cost \$50 per year for up to 12 dogs, will increase to \$75 if received on or before March 31, plus \$5 per dog for more than 12 canines. If the fee is paid late, there is an \$25 extra charge (April 1-30), or \$50 (May 1 or later). In addition, there will be a late fee of \$10 for every dog over 12 whose fee is not paid prior to March 31.

- Voted to make office space available in the courthouse for a state drug enforcement investigator.
- Approved renewal of liability insurance with Wisconsin County Mutual Insurance Corporation for a premium of \$168,744 and a deductible of \$5,000.
- Approved a software system maintenance agreement for 2013 with New World Systems for \$18,560.

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- Approved a 2013 agreement with KD Consulting (Ken Hebbe) for courthouse office programming. It includes a daily base rate of \$240 plus 52.5 cents per mile and any other expenses approved by the county.
- Extended the employment of a limited-term employee in the clerk of courts office, Ricki Briggs, for 20 hours per week through March 31.
- Waived the residency requirement for highway department employee Travis Reinke, who resides about 11 miles from Hayward.
- Approved filling a sheriff's patrol deputy position which is vacant due to a resignation.
- Approved the annual agreement with Northern Waters Library Service for an annual fee of \$22,264.
- Reappointed Lyle Swanson of Hayward to the County Veterans Service Commission.

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