

Officials react to county budget

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Now that Lake County commissioners have passed a \$58.55 million budget for 2012, it doesn't mean that elected officials and department heads plan to go on a hiring spree.

Sheriff Daniel A. Dunlap said the \$13,272,632 appropriated to the Sheriff's Office makes him optimistic that he can avoid layoffs, but he needs to sit down with his staff first to crunch the numbers and determine what it means for his department, especially in terms of replacing laid-off deputies and other employees.

"I didn't say 'Yahoo' or that we're in great shape," Dunlap said. "At least we're not going to have to lay off people."

The sheriff said his department is down about 50 full-time and 20 part-time employees.

Much of the equipment in the Sheriff's Office is 25 years old and has never been replaced, Dunlap said. New cars haven't been purchased in five years except for what the townships have provided through agreements, he added.

"There is some catching up to do with this money that is proposed that we don't even have yet," the sheriff said. "It's still razor tight here."

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Dunlap was one of the first elected officials to advocate for a county sales tax rate increase, which commissioners raised by 0.5 percent while reducing property taxes by 1.1 mills and lowering, by \$1 million, stormwater fees that are collected from property owners in communities that participate in the county's Stormwater Management Department.

Auditor Edward H. Zupancic, also a proponent of the commissioners' plan, agreed with the commissioners' opinion that the budget will stop the financial bleeding.

"It's not going to put us back in a position where we were four to five years ago, but looking at the numbers and depending on who you talk with, the number of layoffs would have

been around 50 to 100," Zupancic said.

He also said the budget should be a positive step for the county's bond rating, which allows the county to borrow money, if necessary, at a low rate.

"As chief fiscal officer for the county, my concern is always the credit and bond rating for the county and this obviously goes a long way to stabilize the budget and allows us to operate and hopefully our bond counsel and Moody's will take that into consideration," Zupancic said.

He also said that the county revaluation of property values will conclude this year based on sales of property from 2009-2011. That process should be finished by late summer or early fall.

"We are looking at a reduction of property values across the board," Zupancic said.

"It's going to impact our general fund."

The county also will need to pay for a presidential election, which typically costs more money than other elections.

Elections Board Director Scott E. Daisher was pleased the \$1.77 million was about what his department requested.

"The main thing we will be spending our money is on poll workers for the November election," Daisher said.

The cost for mailing absentee ballots is expected to increase as the state of Ohio plans to do a statewide mailing to provide all registered voters with an absentee ballot request form, he said.

"The commissioners are very understanding that it's an election year and they understand we need to have the bodies and funds available to conduct the election," Daisher said.