

County, state officials ready for work in 2013

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The slow-growing economy and tightening budgets have many segments of our community facing daunting tasks in 2013. For a look at how officials expect to meet those challenges in the new year, The News-Herald is running a weeklong series that focuses on sectors ranging from government to social services to Cleveland's professional sports.

Local and state elected officials in Lake and Geauga counties are ready to get to work in 2013.

Lake County Commissioner Robert E. Aufuldish said there is a long list of items for the county to get to next year.

"We're working on our budget right now," Aufuldish said.

He said he thinks department heads and other elected officials will likely ask for funding to fill positions that haven't been replaced after employees left in the past few years.

"We'll have to be very careful on how we honor those requests," Aufuldish said.

The county also will look to make capital improvements at several facilities, including the county jail and the Clerk of Courts office.

"The Clerk of Courts had some major problems with water over there," Aufuldish said. "We're looking at solving those or maybe taking a big step to relocate her from over there, off the basement floors."

Because of recent water

damage, most operations have moved and are now scattered around the courthouse, some in makeshift areas, including the main hallway on the first floor.

Lake County Commissioner Daniel P. Troy said the county will take in more revenue next year from a 0.5 percent increase in the county sales tax rate, though there will be less in property taxes paid because of a 1.1-mil reduction in property taxes dedicated to the county's general fund.

"One of the things we're going to be able to do in 2013 is concentrate on things we had to put aside for a while, and that includes our capital improvements for county facilities," Troy said. "We have some things that have wear and tear. We are stewards of taxpayers' property."

The Lake County Jail is about 25 years old and needs attention, he said.

"Unfortunately it has some serious physical problems in terms of whether it was the way it was designed or constructed, that predates all three commissioners in office now and next year," Troy said. "We have to make some long-range decisions in terms of the use or does it make sense in terms of a new facility?"

He said the Juvenile Detention Center is more than 30 years old and may have needs as well.

The county's debt service is relatively low, so it may be time to look at these concerns, Troy said.

"The question is do you address it now or later when it

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expectations will be," Rogers said.

Some of his initial issues to work on are education funding and the loss of funds historically shared with local governments.

Rogers, whose last day serving as Mentor-on-the-Lake mayor is Friday, said finding a way to take care of infrastructure will be important.

"As a mayor, we had no infrastructure projects this year because of a loss of funding," Rogers said.

He said he hopes there will be a greater spirit of bipartisanship.

"I'm excited about what I'm going to do and hopefully have some input on what's going to happen," Rogers said. "I'll give everybody the benefit of the doubt and have no reason not to work with people. Hopefully, together we can work together to get things accomplished. It's going to be an eye-opening experience."

"I'd like to work with Democrats. Both parties have to get past this idea that every day is an election day," Young said.

"We need to work together, but at the same time, my goal is to pass the best possible legislation for Ohio. If Democrats have good ideas, we have to make them be part of the mix."

He also said there needs to be an emphasis on workforce development training at high schools and community colleges.

State Rep.-elect John M. Rogers, D-Mentor-on-the-Lake, said the first thing he'd like to accomplish as a new state legislator is to have the ability to work with everyone.

Rogers has expressed interest in serving on the Ohio House of Representatives Education, Local Government, and Finance and Appropriations committees.

"Ultimately, once I'm assigned to committees that will give me direction to what my

safety forces radio system, Jemison said, adding that project should be completed by the end of next year.

State Rep. Ron Young, R-Leroy Township, said he plans to introduce a state bill to nullify parts of the National Defense Authorization Act that he says incarcerates citizens indefinitely without charging them.

Young also wants to see a workable state funding formula for Ohio schools.

"That's critically important. We need to do that without breaking the bank," he said. "There's the rub."

Young also wants to work to eliminate or significantly reduce Ohio's income tax because he said the state needs to do everything it can to be competitive and not lose residents to other states.

He said he hopes there can be more bipartisanship in the Ohio General Assembly in Columbus.



Maureen Quiggle and Kathy Russo, left, work in their makeshift office on the first floor of Lake County Common Pleas Court while repairs are done at the Lake County Clerk of Courts offices. The area they're working in now used to be a security area.

More from the Clerk of Courts Office at News-Herald.com

will recover and what the U.S. Congress does.

But his main focus is the local economy for Geauga County, he said.

"We want to continue to foster an environment that allows businesses to grow and hire new pay down debt."

will cost more?" he said. Troy said commissioners will continue to work with the Lake County Port Authority on economic development issues.

"With (federal Community Development Block Grant) money or casino money, we're now able to bridge the gaps with smaller businesses for loans," Troy said. "These are loans, not handouts, and need to be paid back."

He said a strength of the county is it is fairly diversified — meaning it isn't dependent on any one business as the main supplier of employment.

"We don't have a concern if one business went down that it would be a concern for the stability of the county," Troy said. Geauga County Commissioner Tracy A. Jemison said commissioners will keep their