

Lake OKs budget for 2013

*News Herald
3-2-13*

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Lake County commissioners have unanimously approved a \$49,779,232 General Fund budget for 2013.

The estimated revenue for the general fund in 2013 is \$49,835,086 and the carryover balance heading into the year was \$4.5 million, said county Budget Director Joel DiMare. A carryover balance of \$4.5 million is also anticipated heading into 2014.

State law gives counties until April 1 each year to approve a permanent budget, and Lake County had operated under a \$13,756,199 temporary budget approved in December. The permanent budget supersedes the temporary one.

Commissioner Robert E. Aufuldish said Thursday during discussion and approval of their plan that it reflects a change in accounting with \$10.3 million dedicated to health care spending as a separate fund rather than part of the General Fund.

If health care expenditures exceed what is budgeted, the money would be transferred from the General Fund to cover the expense, Commissioner Daniel P. Troy said.

In 2012, commissioners had approved a \$58,551,886 budget and during that time health care was included in the General Fund.

Commissioners said the 2013 budget will now have a full year of collection from the 0.5 percent increase in the county's sales tax rate that took effect April 1. It is anticipated to bring in an additional \$14 million to \$15 million.

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However, commissioners also approved a 1.1-mill reduction in property taxes dedicated to the General Fund that takes effect this year and will decrease those revenues by about \$6 million.

"The sales tax and everything else has given us revenue to make this a nice, balanced budget," Aufuldish said. "As we talk about the sales tax everybody realizes we did this in an election year. We wanted to make Lake County a strong county and not let it get weak or become a part-time county."

Troy said the county will also see about \$2 million less in state funding because of cuts in the state Local Government Fund and a decrease in reimbursement for tangible personal property reduction.

The county stormwater department will also see about \$1 million less, or a 50 percent reduction, in stormwater fees collected from property owners in communities that participate in the

county's Stormwater Management Department.

That reduction was part of the sales tax increase and property tax reduction plan.

"We feel this budget has stopped the bleeding and we feel we'll be able to provide the services to residents as efficiently as possible," Troy said. "We're not going to regrow employee bases and we have had discussions with officials during budget hearings."

Commissioner Judy Moran, who began service in January, said the budgeting process was a great experience and thanked department heads for their cooperation.

"Just because the county seems to be in better shape than the last couple years, nobody treated it as a free-for-all with their requests," Moran said. "I think the focus now should be on the aging infrastructure that we've kind of let go for the past few years."

Troy said the budget sets aside about \$2 million to address capital repairs such as deteriorating parking lots and building upkeep.