

County levy could drop 2 cents

Written by Deb Egenberger
Thursday, 20 August 2009 21:48 -

Commissioners get preliminary look at budget

LEXINGTON—If all goes as planned and final budget numbers stack up similar to preliminary plans, property owners in Dawson County will see a two-cent decrease in the county's tax levy for the next fiscal year.

That does not mean, however, that the overall tax bill is going down.

Dawson County commissioners heard a preliminary report on the 2009-10 budget during their regular bimonthly meeting on Friday.

Finance committee member Bill Stewart said it looks as if the county will be able to drop its levy from last year's 41.8 cents per \$100 valuation to roughly 39.8 cents.

And even with a lower levy, county officials should be able to put more money into necessary road resurfacing projects and bump up the reserve fund.

The levy drop is possible, Stewart said, because of an estimated 3% increase in overall county valuation including an almost 10% hike in ag land values.

Some stimulus money and new grants will also help the county keep its tax asking to a minimum.

"We have to give some credit to county officials, though," said Gothenburg commissioner Dean Kugler, who is also on the finance committee. "They've done a good job of sticking only to what's necessary in their requests and they've come in with reasonable budgets."

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Kugler reminds taxpayers, though, that the county's portion of their entire tax bill is small at only 20%. Levies in other areas such as schools and cities may increase.

"Even though ours is lower, the total impact may not be much if anything," he said.

Putting more into the roads department, which has a sizeable carryover, and not spending out of the inheritance tax fund for the next year will help the county in the future, Stewart said.

The budget is strictly preliminary at this point, Stewart emphasized. Commissioners will continue to crunch numbers, considering the 2009-10 budget for approval in mid-September.

Officials from Lexington's Haven House may have influenced the budget.

Caroline Vickery, pastor at Lexington's First Presbyterian Church, is a board representative of Haven House, a homeless shelter in Lexington.

She asked commissioners to consider contributing county funds to help keep the shelter running.

Vickery said 33 people stayed in the shelter during the month of July and 170 have slept there since Jan. 1. Operation costs are approximately \$7,000 per month.

Vickery said some grant funding that the shelter relied on will not be available this year and because residents come from across the county, the shelter's board felt it appropriate to ask commissioners for assistance.

"We're well aware of the problem," said chairman Roger Bauer.

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Board members said they would consider the request while putting together the budget.

In other business, the county board:

- authorized deputy county attorney Kurt McBride to offer settlements to Donna White and Fidelina Mendoza Disierra in their property tax appeals to the Tax Equalization and Review Commission. Action was taken following a closed session. Another closed session to discuss a pending lawsuit and settlement with former third-party health insurance administrator Meritain was not necessary.
- heard the monthly crime report from sheriff Gary Reiber who reported 1,112 calls for service in the month of July from 1,702 total dispatch calls.
- tabled action on requests to renew two separate contracts for lack of information. A contract for juvenile detention services with Scottsbluff County and an agreement with MAXIMUS for collections management will be considered at the Sept. 1 meeting.
- approved placement of stop signs on Road 763 at the intersection of Road 442 north of Overton.
- learned an extensive grant application for federal stimulus funds to improve energy efficiency in county buildings has been filed. Funds could help replace aging water heaters, boilers, windows and doors or be used to install new energy efficient systems.
- discussed in closed session a tort claim filed against the county by former department of weeds employee Gary Flint.