

County reviews budget

By Alexa Zoellner Union staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, October 14, 2015 9:48 am

JEFFERSON — Jefferson County Administrator Ben Wehmeier presented the proposed 2016 budget to the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors Tuesday, noting a slight increase in the countywide tax levy.

“As a whole, this will be the board’s first chance to see the budget in its entirety,” Wehmeier said.

“Some may have had the opportunity by individual departments to look at specific things they oversee, but this will be a first chance to see it at a higher level.”

Wehmeier proposed an overall countywide tax levy of \$26,743,522, of which \$1,138,284 is debt service. The proposed levy represents an increase over \$26,510,891 this year.

Not included in the tax levy are \$838,207 for the Jefferson County Health Department and \$1,039,235 for the county library system. Including the noncountywide funds, the total tax levy is \$28,620,964.

The total tax levy is calculated by adding together estimated expenditures of \$72,005,446 and subtracting estimated revenues of \$39,309,217 and other finance sources of \$4,075,265.

“This year, we took a different approach with the departments,” Wehmeier said. “Last year, the departments were instructed to have a 2-percent operational reduction of their goal. We did not do that this year. We looked and worked with the departments to find ways to save money. We realize that a 2-percent, or another flat, deduction will not mathematically work without other changes taking place first.”

With Jefferson County’s equalized valuation of \$6,177,155,800, the levy calls for a countywide property tax rate of \$4.3294 per \$1,000 equalized valuation. That represents a decrease from last year of 6 cents per \$1,000.



WELCOME

WELCOME — Gregg Patrick, of Fort Atkinson, was sworn in as a member of the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday. He will finish out the term for supervisor of District 26 in place of Carlton Zentner, who resigned his position on Sept. 5. — Daily Union photos by Chris Welch.

“Our equalized values continue to grow as well,” Wehmeier said. “It was positive with over 2-percent growth (including and not including tax incremental financing). Not all communities grew at that over 2 percent. Some were higher, some were lower,” he said.

Without tax incremental financing (TIF), the growth is 2.33 percent. With TIFs, the growth is 2.26 percent. Property value is frozen for tax purposes in a TIF district and tax revenue from an increase in value, called “increment,” may be used to promote development. The governmental body can spend or lend money for a number of purposes, including streets or sewers, parking and even direct financing for a development.

“The goal is education,” Wehmeier explained. “To have that narrative and feedback in terms of how the budget lies with policies, priorities and considerations. Over the course of the next few weeks, I’m looking for some good interaction — to really have conversations on where we’re heading and move toward the final approval in November.”

A public hearing will be held Oct. 27 for public comment on the proposed budget. All amendments from county supervisors are due by Nov. 2 and will be reviewed by the Finance Committee on Nov. 6. The 2016 budget with amendments is slated to be approved on Nov. 10.

A single budget amendment, which did not affect the budget total, was approved with a vote of 25-3-0.

Supervisors Al Counsell, Blane Poulson and George Jaeckel voted against the resolution. A two-thirds vote was required to pass the budget amendment.

The resolution allowed the county to accept donations in the amount of \$28,000 from Theo Garman and \$14,000 from Charles and Joni Crave for the purpose of purchasing a 5.7- acre parcel of property for the purpose of expanding the Dr. J. S. Garman Nature Preserve in Waterloo. It also allowed the county administrator to purchase the property.

The total cost of the land parcel is \$56,000. The remaining \$14,000 portion of the purchase price will be paid for by Jefferson County through a three- year interest-free loan from the Craves, subject to potential reimbursement by the State of Wisconsin.

“It’s only if the state comes through on the reimbursement that we’ll get the \$14,000 back,” Jaeckel said. “So that’s an, ‘if and when.’ We can only hope we get it.”

Counsell commented that he had similar thoughts as Jackel. Poulson did not comment.

“This is a three-year loan, so we can apply to the state three different times (for reimbursement),” Supervisor Jennifer Hanneman, a member of the Finance Committee, said. “So if we didn’t get the grant from the state this year, we’d have two more chances the following years. There’s a 95 percent certainty over three years that we’d get the funding back.”

Patrick sworn in

Also Tuesday, Gregg Patrick was sworn in as a county board supervisor for an unexpired term ending April 19, 2016. "I talked to a lot of people in Fort Atkinson," board Chairperson Jim Schroeder, who appointed Patrick, said. "His name kept coming up as someone who was really well respected, well known and active in the community. I knew that he'd be an asset to the board."

Patrick, a native of Fort Atkinson, will be filling the District 26 seat left vacant when Supervisor Carl Zentner resigned "for personal reasons" on Sept. 5. Patrick described himself as, "familiar with the county," and said he considers Zentner a good, long-time friend.

"(Zentner and I) have shared a lot of discussions and ideas over the years," Patrick said. "We both have positive feelings about similar things. I feel strongly about the parks, farmland and solid waste and air quality."

Patrick was appointed to the Solid Waste/Air Quality and Land and Water Conservation committees in Zentner's place.

"I like to do my homework," Patrick said. "I take seriously my responsibilities and that I need to do my homework ahead of time. I have no problem what it takes — my due diligence — for the position. I want to do a good job. I think I would belittle my predecessor's efforts if I didn't. It's my turn to give back (to the community)."

Also during the meeting, the board recognized Zentner for his many years of service. His wife, Mary, was in attendance on his behalf.

A cake decorated with the words "We vote 'no,' you can't go," was served. The phrase referred to Carl Zentner's many "no" votes during his board tenure, especially on spending issues.

Other business

In other business, the board:

- Passed a resolution with a vote of 27-1-0, with Supervisor Matthew Foelker voting against, to implement an Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) with AlertSense at an annual cost of \$2,250. (Look for more in a future edition of the Daily Union.)
- Rejected two resolutions presented by the Farmland Conservation Easement Commission.

The first resolution regarded the recommendation of future allocation of funds to the Farmland Conservation Easement Commission for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements.

It failed with a rollcall vote of 3-25-0, with Supervisors Greg David, Steven Nass and Walt Christensen voting "yes."

It stated that, “if and when the former highway shop property is sold, a portion of these funds equivalent to the agricultural value of the former County Farm property, now converted to Highway Department use, not to exceed 20 percent of the net proceeds, be allocated to the Farmland Conservation Easement Commission to continue the county’s Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE) program.”

The second resolution, which failed on a voice vote, stated that “for the purpose of continuing the PACE program in Jefferson County, proceeds from the sale of all county owned farmland or land which is capable of being farmed, not to exceed the agricultural value of such land, shall be allocated to the PACE program and applied toward the purchase of farmland conservation easements as administered by the Jefferson County Farmland Conservation Easement Commission.”

- Unanimously passed a resolution establishing medical examiner autopsy transport and cremation fees. The resolution authorizes Wehmeier to enter into a contract with Thelen Funeral Services for autopsy transport services and disposition services for unclaimed or unidentified bodies for up to two years for an estimated cost of \$9,500 per year.

The Jefferson County Medical Examiner’s Office is responsible for ordering autopsies, which are performed in Milwaukee, to assist in determining cause and manner of death for deaths occurring in Jefferson County. The office also is responsible for all of the charges associated with the disposition of unclaimed or unidentified bodies, which includes transport and burial or cremation.

Currently, the cost of transport from place of death to place of autopsy is funded either by the county or the decedent’s family. Jefferson County Medical Examiner Nichol Wayd recommended that the county pay the transport cost from place of death to the place of autopsy for all county-ordered autopsies.

Wayd solicited quotes from all funeral homes in Jefferson County to determine the least-expensive services.

Of the six responses, the highest quotes were \$435 for transportation and \$1,825 for disposition. Thelen Funeral Services, located in the North Prairie Area, provided the lowest quotes at \$175 for transportation and \$525 for disposition.

“We like to have our response teams at the scene within an hour,” Wayd explained. “Thelen has met that requirement, if not in a shorter time. The next-lowest bids were approximately \$50 and \$75 more.”

The anticipated cost per year for autopsy transport services is \$8,000 and \$1,500 per year for disposition services for unclaimed or unidentified bodies. Funds have been included in the recommended 2016 executive budget.