

Jefferson County Board OKs budget

By Alexa Zoellner Union staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, November 11, 2015 9:46 am

JEFFERSON — Jefferson County's 2016 budget, which reflects a slight increase in the countywide tax levy, was approved Tuesday by the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors.

The budget carries a countywide tax levy of \$26,743,522, of which \$1,138,284 is debt. The 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 non-countywide funds, the total tax levy is \$28,620,964.

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

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 is a 6-cents-per-\$1,000 equalized valuation decrease from last year.

"We had another smooth process this year," Chairperson Jim Schroeder said. "We did last year and I believe that is a reflection on our county administrator. He has improved our process 1,000 times from what it was before."

Prior to final approval of the budget, the board was presented with a single proposed budget amendment written by Supervisor George Jaeckel. The amendment failed to pass on a vote of 9-18, with Supervisors Mike Kelly, Ron Buchanan, Al



MANY THANKS

MANY THANKS — During Tuesday's Jefferson County Board of Supervisors meeting, the Solid Waste/Air Quality Committee presented a resolution thanking the Jefferson County and City of Watertown Health Departments for their partnership in the implementation of the Jefferson County Drug Take Back Program at Clean Sweep events. Sharon Ehrhardt, Solid Waste/Zoning Program assistant, presented representatives of the two Health Departments with plaques. Shown above, left to right, are Carol Quest, RN-BSN and director of the Watertown Department of Public Health; Ehrhardt; and Gail Scott, RN-BSN and director of the Jefferson County Public Health Department. — Daily Union photo by Alexa Zoellner.

Counsell, Donald Reese, Jim Schroeder, Jim Mode, John Kannard, Blane Poulson and Jaeckel voting for approval. Supervisors Greg David and James Braughler were absent from the meeting.

Jaeckel proposed eliminating \$27,000 from the Jefferson County Parks Department capital funds. The funds are planned to be used for replacement of the restroom at Cold Spring, \$15,000; and new pavement at Pohlman Park, \$12,000. The tax levy would have been reduced by \$27,000 and the funds transferred to the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office to help offset its proposed capital costs for 2016. (For more information on the direct impact the amendment would have on the budget, see the Nov. 9 Daily Union.)

Jefferson County Administrator Ben Wehmeier explained why the projects were part of the Parks Department's planned capital projects.

"As part of our capital improvement projects, we do a five-year plan and update it annually," Wehmeier said. "These were two of the projects that were put in capital improvement projects — in some cases before I even started here — and (doing these now) is part of the natural progression of capital projects as they move forward in the annual cycle."

Parks Department Director Joe Nehmer also commented on the reason for scheduling the projects.

"The restroom was proposed to be replaced due to the fact that it is not ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act)-accessible," he said. "It doesn't function well (in general) and it doesn't smell very good either. The new designs are really very different."

Nehmer said he was here when the restroom was constructed, as cheaply as possible, in 1984. He feels it is time to put in a new building that is "more typically to the standards people expect."

Pohlman Park has a new park pavilion and a new playground, he explained. It is seeing increased use and is right on the Department of Natural Resources Glacial Drumlin Trail.

"The gravel parking lot is small and it's difficult to park enough vehicles in there to accommodate even a small function that might take place at the pavilion," the parks director said. "Events do take place. It's difficult to park cars logically when it's gravel because you can't mark (parking spaces)."

Jaeckel explained why he believes the projects are not necessary.

"I actually went and stopped in, and looked at the (Cold Spring restroom)," Jaeckel said. "It's in very fine repair. I would say it's downright immaculate for as old as the building is. It looks to have a fairly new roof on it (and) the doors are in pretty good shape. The only thing I can see is that, like Mr. Nehmer pointed out, it's not ADA-compliant."

Later in the discussion, Jaeckel responded to comments on the bathrooms' "smell," saying he does not believe people are using the park restroom daily, so "the stink shouldn't be that big of a problem."

In regard to paving at Pohlman Park, Jaeckel said he does not see it as a necessity for a county park that "very seldom has more than one vehicle in it when I drive by." He described gravel as "very earth-friendly," that lets water seep through, and that pavement requires maintenance.

Supervisor Walt Christensen, who voted against approving the amendment, later pointed out that gravel is considered an impervious surface.

Those speaking in favor of the amendment included Supervisors Al Counsell and Blane Poulson, with Poulson calling the projects "a want, not a need." Counsell expressed similar feelings.

Several supervisors spoke against the amendment, citing various reasons the projects should take place. Many expressed the opinion that Jefferson County parks are "the face of Jefferson County." They called the parks valuable assets and said it was the county's duty to provide regular maintenance to its properties.

"When you (take the approach) that 'this is not totally crumbling down, so why are we even looking at it?' eventually it all does come falling down on us in one big bill," Supervisor Dick Schultz stated. "The fiscally responsible thing to do is (pay) smaller amounts each year and maintain (projects). Maybe it's not totally deteriorated, but let's do it while we can because if we don't, some time down the road it's all going to come down on us."

Supervisor Steven Nass said there is a responsibility of committees to prioritize capital projects and that, when those projects come to the surface, they need to be taken care of.

"Back when I was on the Parks Committee, we went through and prioritized (capital projects)," Nass said. "Slowly they come to the surface and these have finally come to the surface."

"We have a responsibility to gradually do these capital improvements and replace things as we go along," he added. "It's no different than the Highway Department saying they have to replace 'X' amount of roads a year or the sheriff's department saying they have to replace a certain amount of vehicles."

Also Tuesday, the board unanimously approved amending supervisory district boundaries to reflect annexations.

Ordinance No. 2011-11, adopted Sept. 13, 2011, and last amended Nov. 12, 2013, established 30 supervisory districts for the purpose of electing the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors. To assist election administration, past county boards have amended supervisory district boundaries to

conform to new corporate limits when the annexed territory is in a different supervisory district than the ward to which it was assigned by the city or village.

Annexations that are in a different Assembly, state Senate or Congressional district than the adjoining city or village ward necessitate the creation of new wards to comply with state law prohibiting wards from crossing district boundaries.

Since the last amendment, five annexations and one detachment have occurred, necessitating the creation of City of Jefferson Ward 11 in District 18 and City of Watertown Ward 19 in District 3.

Annexations and detachments from November 2013 to October 2015 include:

- Town of Cold Spring, Ward 1, District 25 to the City of Whitewater, Ward 11, District 24.
- Town of Aztalan, Ward 2, District 11 to the City of Jefferson, Ward 11, District 18.
- Town of Koshkonong, Ward 6, District 30 to the City of Fort Atkinson, Ward 1, District 26.
- Town of Palmyra, Ward 1, District 22 to Village of Palmyra, Ward 1, District 22.
- Town of Watertown, Ward 1, District 3 to the City of Watertown, Ward 19, District 3.
- Village of Palmyra, Ward 1, District 22 to the Town of Palmyra, Ward 1, District 22.

Assignment to an existing ward by the annexing municipalities necessitates a change of the supervisory districts in the Town of Aztalan, Town of Cold Spring and Town of Koshkonong to make districts conform to the municipal boundaries.

Meanwhile, in other business, the council:

- Unanimously approved an ordinance amending various zoning ordinances. Not part of the approved ordinances was the rezoning of 3.2 acres of land, owned by Philip and Sandra Bittorf, in the Town of Lake Mills. After the Oct. 27 county board meeting, the Bittorfs' rezoning request was sent back to the Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Committee. As of Tuesday, the committee had not met.

An ordinance regarding the Bittorfs' request is expected to be part of the Dec. 8 county board meeting. (See the Oct. 28 Daily Union for further information.)

- Unanimously approved an ordinance repealing and recreating the Federated Library System Board. The ordinance follows the May 12 withdrawal of the county from the Mid-Wisconsin Federated Library System and joining the Waukesha County Federated Library System. The new combined system has been named the Bridges Federated Library System.
- Unanimously approved Wehmeier's appointment of Michael Clish, of Fort Atkinson, to the Veterans Service Commission for a three-year term ending Dec. 10, 2018.

- Unanimously approved an ordinance amending the wording of the access to public records and document receipt time ordinance to reflect electronic media.
- Unanimously approved an ordinance amending personnel ordinances HR0310 and HR0690 to provide pay incentives and vacation to new hires.
- Approved two resolutions. The first supports a Constitutional amendment prohibiting nonfiscal matters in the state budget. The second opposes 2015 Senate Bill 294, Dismantling the Government Accountability Board.
- Unanimously approved a resolution from the Human Services Board providing commendation to Darlene Schaefer for 29 years of service.

Schaefer began volunteering for the Human Services Department in 1986 and “retired” in August 2015 at age 95. Throughout her tenure, Schaefer was recognized as an exemplary volunteer who was committed to service, coming to work on time and never missing a day.

She provided the Representative Payee Program with more than 40,000 hours of service and in 2012 was awarded the Presidential Lifetime Service Award.

- Unanimously approved a resolution from the Jefferson County Solid Waste/Air Quality Committee recognizing the Jefferson County and City of Watertown Health Departments and their staffs for their partnership in helping implement the Jefferson County Drug Take Back Program and Clean Sweep events.