

## County Highway Department budget at \$5.69 million

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JEFFERSON — The Jefferson County Highway Department is seeking to spend approximately \$3,719,363 in tax levy on road projects in 2017.

As budget hearings continued Wednesday, the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors Finance Committee approved the Highway Department's proposed budget, advancing it to the full county board.

The Finance Committee is recommending a countywide tax levy of \$27,068,827, of which \$1,134,343 is debt. The proposed levy represents a slight increase over \$26,743,522 this year.

Not included in the tax levy are \$838,207 for the Jefferson County Health Department and \$1,070,311 for the county library system. Including the noncountywide funds, the total tax levy is \$28,977,348.

The proposed budget, if adopted, would result in a countywide property tax rate of \$4.2969 per \$1,000 equalized valuation, translating into a 3-cent-per-\$1,000 decrease from last year.

The Highway Department's recommended 2017 budget, the third largest departmental portion of the budget, provides \$5,694,096 in tax levy, representing a \$114,441 decrease from the 2016 amended budget.

"They came in under their tax levy goals operationally," Jefferson County Administrator Ben Wehmeier said. "We talked through a lot of their projects and a lot of their capital looking ahead."

Approximately \$5,172,000 is proposed for projects such as highway paving, road rehabilitation and construction. Funding will come from the tax levy (\$3,719,363), a local road improvement grant from state funding (\$192,000) and the Fund Balance (\$1,260,637).

"The long-term goal of the department is to replace pavement every 20 years," Highway Commissioner Bill Kern said. "This is accomplished with a 12 - to 13 mile-per-year pavement turnover."

In 2017, there are 11 miles of highway paving and construction scheduled. Projects include 1.25 miles of construction along County Highway A; two miles of Phase I construction along County Highway P, and 4.75 miles of resurfacing and three miles of rehabilitation along County Highway Y for a total of 7.75 miles.

The average cost per mile to resurface a road is \$300,000; for road rehabilitation, \$500,000, and for reconstruction, \$900,000.

“Doing the resurfacing also is an investment, because then it doesn’t become a reconstruction project,” Wehmeier said. “A reconstruction project is going to be a reconstruction project versus, if it’s a resurfacing project, it can become a reconstruction project or rehab project and significantly more dollars have to go into it if we don’t deal with it in a timely fashion.”

Resurfacing a road can extend its life by about 20 years.

“Every year, you have projects that need more construction work before we pave them and other ones that just need a new surface,” Kern said. “We really have to balance that. We really only have the budget — to balance our program properly — to reconstruct a couple miles a year. So we have to kind of take a balance of the worst ones to do construction on and some that are a little bit better that we only need to resurface or put asphalt on.”

The Highway Department also is facing staffing challenges, according to Kern, particularly when it comes to seasonal help.

The department contracts with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) for maintenance work.

“Over the last year or two, we’ve actually had the DOT increase our budget by a significant amount,” Kern said. “On that side of the equation, we’re struggling to get that work done. A year ago, we left almost \$500,000 on the table of work we could have had done. It was set up in the budget with a routine contract and it came down to the staffing.”

This year, the department struggled to find seasonal help in the summertime.

“We haven’t had that in the past, but in the last handful of years, it has been getting to be more of a struggle,” Kern said. “This year, we had all of our summer help from the previous year leave at the same time.

“We wanted to hire up to six this year, which is a little higher than normal, and we basically couldn’t find anybody,” he continued. “We had a couple people we brought in and they didn’t work out, so we had to let them go after a week or two. Over the course of the whole summer, we wanted to have up to six seasonal help and we were basically sitting on zero.”

Kern said he believes part of the problem is the starting wage of \$8.75 an hour.

“As we look at the budget for next year, we’re in the same position — the DOT money’s there, but this year, we’re falling behind again on our DOT work,” Kern said. “Now it’s looking like a good chance, looking at the state budget that rolled out a few weeks ago, that they may increase more funding to our state maintenance work.”

In the 2017 budget, the Highway Department is recommending to raise the pay and split the seasonal employee into two categories and to match the pay to the skill and experience of the potential employee.

The suggested pools are \$10/\$12 per hour starting wage or \$18/\$20 per hour starting wage.

“We’re talking about doing the higher-level pool,” Wehmeier said. “In the past, we’ve done pools in the summertime for seasonal help on Highway Department focus, like flaggers and that kind of stuff. But what we’re looking at is, can we also offset our needs for project time — get people who can function law mowers or have a CDL (Commercial Driver’s License) to do the trucks — keep projects moving.”

Also on Wednesday were the budget hearings for Central Services, the Clerk of Courts, Treasurer and Corporation Counsel. All recommended budgets were approved by the Finance Committee.

### Central Services

The recommended 2017 budget for the Central Services Department provides \$677,699 in tax levy, which is a \$23,311 increase in tax levy from the 2016 amended budget. The primary reason is an increase in salaries and fringes.

There are five capital projects proposed totaling \$274,000.

“Capital items, one that I would really like to make a priority is the remodel of the second floor north bathrooms (in the courthouse) to make them ADA compliant,” Mark Miller, Central Services manager, said. “That’s been ongoing and that’s my concern, my priority for capital projects.”

The project would cost an estimated \$163,000.

“It’s all original equipment,” Miller said. “It’s 50-plus years old, the ceiling’s falling apart and if we do anything to the sink, stools or anything, we have to make everything (ADA) compliant. I really highly recommend that we move forward with that project in particular.”

Wehmeier said the intent is to have an RQ ready to go for architectural services, get that out by the end of the year and try to get the initial designs done in January of 2017. The plans then would have to be approved by the state before going to bid for construction purposes. The goal would be to have the project completed by summertime of 2017.

The first floor restrooms in the courthouse previously were remodeled and now are ADA compliant. The project took about two months.

### Clerk of Courts

The recommended 2017 budget for the Clerk of Courts provides \$1,519,489 in tax levy, which is a \$42,424 decrease from the 2016 amended budget. A portion of the decrease was due to salaries and fringe benefits and also an anticipated increase in public charges.

Capital items include \$50,000 to update technology in Branch 2 of the courthouse via use of Fund Balance.

“A key highlight is the technology up in two of our (courtroom) branches right now are still in the older analog technology,” Wehmeier said. “We have one scheduled as part of this budget. ... We may need to accelerate one of them to this fiscal year.

“It’s causing some operational considerations that aren’t good that we need to adjust,” he continued. “We’re making do, but we want to approve that to accelerate it a little bit more. The price that we’re quoting is based on an actual price we received for updating those rooms. In the past, that number has been closer to about \$90,000.”

#### Treasurer

The recommended 2017 budget for the Treasurer’s Office provides \$732,238 in tax levy savings, which is a \$89,426 decrease in levy savings from the 2016 amended budget. The reason is a reduction of interest on taxes.

“The Treasurer’s Department doesn’t take the levy,” Wehmeier said. “Because of the collections and how we do the revenue sources, it gives it back.”

#### Corporation Counsel

The recommended 2017 budget for corporation counsel provides \$361,341 in tax levy, which is a \$10,350 increase in operating levy from the 2016 amended budget. The primary reason was an increase in salary and fringes. There are no capital items proposed.

In addition, budget hearings for Human Services, the Health Department, Child Support, the University of Wisconsin-Extension and Land and Water Conservation took place Wednesday.

(See related stories on A1 and in Friday’s edition of the Daily Union.)

Budget hearings were to continue today and Friday, both starting at 8:30 a.m.