

PRESS RELEASE



County Council

7 November 2008

Mike Cooper
Dave Gossett
John Koster
Dave Somers
Brian Sullivan

Council Holds the Line on General Property Taxes

Even facing a minimum \$20 million budget shortfall next year as sales and excise tax revenues continue to fall, the county council decided it had to hold the line on the county's general property tax levy at approximately \$.70 per \$1,000 of assessed value, or about \$245 for a \$350,000 home.

"The whole county is in the middle of an economic crisis," said County Council Chair Dave Somers, "and as much as county government services are hurting, it would not be right to raise the general property tax levy."

A one percent rate increase, he noted, would only bring in additional \$686,800 in new revenue.

The council began piecing together the county's 2009 budget this week by setting tax and fee rates, while continuing to reduce expenditures to match the anticipated lower revenues.

"As dismal as our finances are," said Councilmember Dave Gossett, "we have to maintain some sense of balance. Family and business budgets are all straining under this economic crisis."

Attempts to raise the general by one percent failed, with only Councilmembers Mike Cooper and Brian Sullivan favoring the increase. Councilmember John Koster joined Somers and Gossett in keeping the status quo rate.

"At 100 percent [of the 2008 property tax rate], said Cooper, "we are going backwards."

"To not try to keep up with inflation," he said, "is a disservice to the public."

Unincorporated Roads Tax

The council did vote to raise the county roads property tax by one percent to bring in about \$498,000 in new revenue. The county road levy is collected only in the unincorporated county. The one percent increase in this levy would add \$12.32 in taxes for a \$350,000 home.

The additional funds, said Cooper, "will allow us to accelerate transportation projects and save money in the long run."

Sullivan noted that the road tax "is one of the few tools we have at the local level to deal with transportation."

Koster opposed the increase. "Now's not the time to be raising property taxes," said Koster. "When I get constituent calls, if they're not about land use issues, they're about property taxes."

The council postponed considering proposed changes to storm and surface water management fees, as well as solid waste disposal fees, to Monday, Nov. 10.

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