

Property tax slashed for DuPage County Board postpones vote on remainder of budget

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The DuPage County Board on Saturday put three more dollars into the pockets of property owners.

Members approved a \$1 million property tax abatement - half the size considered earlier last week. That works out to a savings of \$3 for the average county household. The original proposal would have pulled property taxes back to 2006 levels.

The decision gave ground both to members who supported the full \$2.1 million abatement and to members who said that money should be given to county agencies instead. Don Puchalski, of Addison, said the abatement was a fair compromise.

"I think it's reasonable ... I look at this as a settlement," he said. "We should abate something and we need to provide those services."

The abatement is part of a larger budget amending process, as the board decides how to allocate an extra \$20 million in revenue from a new quarter-cent sales tax. After using \$10.5 million to halt dozens of layoffs last month, members had \$9.5 million left over.

Faced with \$10.7 million in funding requests from committees representing agencies like the county sheriff, state's attorney and Convalescent Center, members also considered putting money into a strategic reserve and issuing some sort of tax abatement.

Board member J.R. McBride, of Glen Ellyn, said the board should fully abate the property tax increase now that the county has been rescued from its funding woes. Working with a cash-strapped budget last fall, the board had decided to levy \$67.4 million - the maximum allowed by law.

"We did this in trying to minimize the problem with the doomsday budget," McBride said. "I have had calls from senior citizens and other people and most are saying, 'let me decide how I'm going to spend it.' I also think this is double taxation ... we've got the sales tax coming."

Chairman Bob Schillerstrom had included the \$1 million abatement in his proposal for how the extra \$9.5 million should be spent. He also supports spreading out \$4.7 million among county agencies, giving employees an average 3.5 percent pay raise and putting \$1 million into a strategic reserve.

Although members had originally planned to vote on the rest of the budget on Saturday, they postponed the decision until April 8. Schillerstrom said he was disappointed they didn't take immediate action on his proposal, saying it would have allowed them to stabilize county operations.

"I think it was a fair and equitable distribution of the \$9.5 million," he said. "I started with a figure that I feel very confident we'll collect and I considered what we need to stabilize and protect programs to keep operations going."