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Huntley unveils conservative budget

By Lenore T. Adkins

Huntley leaders unveiled a proposed budget for the next fiscal year on Thursday night, with the main focus on the general fund that, due to a property tax levy freeze, declining revenue streams and financial uncertainty in Springfield, is down \$2.8 million — nearly 25 percent lower than the previous budget.

The general fund covers day-to-day operations and at about \$8.6 million, is the biggest one in the roughly \$20 million budget — 75 percent of the money in the general fund pays personnel costs.

Although building permit fees are expected to raise \$600,000 for the general fund, the village is budgeting for \$300,000, pointing to the declining housing market and the completion of Sun City.

In 2007, building permits accounted for 18 percent of the general fund. In 2012, they are expected to comprise just 3.5 percent, representing a clear shift in the times.

"Were kind of at the end of an era in issuing building permits," Village Manager Dave Johnson said.

On the bright side, Huntley is projecting \$1.6 million in sales taxes, a \$250,000 increase from the previous year. As well, the board has said it intends to hold the property tax levy steady at nearly \$3.5 million, a reprieve for Huntley taxpayers.

The economic downturn, its impact on property values, the state's financial woes and ongoing concerns about home assessment inequities between Grafton and Rutland townships factored into the decision to freeze the levy.

Huntley will also likely become a leaner operation during the next fiscal year.

Staff levels are expected to be down 1.5 positions from 91 employees last year to 89.5 workers, which works out to 3.7 employees per 1,000 people — 24,291 people call Huntley home.

The proposed budget accomplishes this formula by leaving a police officer position empty and reducing a full-time police administrative slot to one that's part time.

The budget hearing is scheduled for Dec. 8.