

County Board sets preliminary property tax levy for 2010

The Washington County Board of Commissioners set a preliminary maximum levy for 2010 for the county's net levy, and a levy for the Regional Rail Authority, at its meeting Sept. 15. The board must set a final levy in December. The levy set Sept. 15 may be reduced before it is voted on in its final form, but it may not be increased.

The preliminary levy was set at \$86,783,800. The board also passed a resolution on a proposed county budget, that designates the revenue raised by the levy be used for general government, community services, public works roads and bridges and parks, library services and debt service. It also includes a regional rail authority levy of \$566,400, to be used for regional transportation projects, which the board voted on separately.

The preliminary levy represents a .94 percent increase in the county's operating and capital budget property tax levy from 2009. The board also gave preliminary approval to a 1 percent increase in the county's levy, or \$850,000, to pay for the voter-approved Land and Water Legacy Program, which is designed to improve water quality; complete parkland acquisitions; protect high quality natural areas; and help preserve the county's rural landscape by having the county acquire land or enter into land preservation agreements to permanently protect strategic lands. County voters approved a referendum in 2006 to raise money for the program, but the levy has never been enacted.

The proposed 2010 operating budget was approved by the board at \$144.3 million, or a 1.4 percent decrease from 2009. The county eliminated 21 full-time positions in the county in 2009, in anticipation of tighter budget constraints.

The board also passed a resolution setting a preliminary property tax levy for the Washington County Housing and Redevelopment Authority at \$3,332,236, which represents a .94 percent increase over 2009.

The board will continue to review individual department budgets through October, before setting the final levy and budget Dec. 15. An evening meeting will be conducted Dec. 8 before the final levy is set, to allow for additional public participation.

Under the preliminary budget, owners of a home valued at \$250,000 will see a 3.3 percent decrease in the county portion of their property tax bill, or a reduction of approximately \$22. The county property tax levy represents about 25 percent of the property tax bill paid by property owners in Washington County.