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Lumberton unveils \$8.78M budget that aims to cut tax levy

By DANIELLE DESISTO
STAFF WRITER

LUMBERTON — After years of working to stabilize municipal finances, the Township Committee has put together an \$8.78 million budget that would lighten the burden on the average taxpayer.

Officials last Tuesday introduced a spending plan that includes a cut in the local purpose tax rate by about a penny, from 42.1 to 41.1 cents per \$100 of assessed property value. The decrease would translate to a \$30 tax break on the average residential bill.

If the budget is approved, the owner of a home assessed at the township average of \$292,917 would pay \$1,233 annually in local taxes.

The proposed tax levy, or the amount to be raised by taxes, is \$5.69 million. In 2016, the tax levy was \$5.86 million, a reduction of about \$170,000.

“We’re hoping the rateable (or taxable property) stabilizes and we’ll be able to keep the budgets flat,” Township Administrator Brandon Umba said.

A public hearing on the budget is scheduled for April 25 at 7:30 p.m. at the municipal building.

Several commercial businesses are interested in the township, which would help increase the rateable base, Umba said. Starbucks and Republic Bank have presented plans to the Land Use Board.

New commercial properties will increase the value of land and translate to added tax revenue.

The township has reduced its overall spending budget by \$1.19 million over the last 10 years since the economic

downturn, including the loss of rateables, officials said.

Officials found ways to stabilize the budget by slowing the growth of municipal employee contracts and trimming aid to programs that could exist with the help of outside funding without relying on the government, said Committeeman Mike Mansdoerfer, liaison to the Finance Department.

Such measures accommodated the falling property taxes and grow the municipality’s surplus, officials said.

This year’s budget anticipates using \$307,500 in surplus. The township’s surplus use has been flat for several years, according to Umba. The balance is about \$1.7 million, according to the budget.

The budget also would provide for significant increases in aid and municipal salaries primarily due to contractual obligations, including to the public employee and police and firemen’s retirement system; aid to volunteer fire companies; and salaries for the police force, municipal clerk, administrative and executive officials, construction official, and road repair and maintenance workers.

It allocated less money for garbage workers’ salaries, as many are new employees receiving starting pay. There is also a significant decrease in holiday celebration funding because donations are now used.

“The fruits of our labor have started coming out. We saw that in this year’s budget,” Umba said.

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