

With an Eye on Taxes, Local Governments Finalize Budgets

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It's the time of year when local government entities are working on the budget for the next fiscal year. Most county and municipal governments have a proposed budget by this time, along with proposed millage, or property tax rates. Some may be having workshops or departmental meetings to discuss budgeting needs. The budgets' 2016-17 and millage rates will not be final until after the county and municipal boards vote to approve them, and that typically happens in September. This is a look at where local government bodies — including Lake County, Marion County, Lady Lake, Fruitland Park and the local school boards — are in the budget process now, what's being proposed for the next fiscal year and what to expect in the months to come.

Sumter County

Sumter County commissioners are proposing to hold the line on property taxes again this year.

The proposed ad valorem rate of 5.59 mills is slightly below the rolled-back rate of 5.5994 mills. Therefore, it is a slight tax decrease from last year.

The total proposed county budget for FY 2016-17 is nearly \$199.7 million, a 6.59 percent decrease from last year's total budget.

TRIM, or truth in millage, notices will be mailed to residents in August, and the proposed millage cannot be raised over the rate listed on the notice, but it can be lowered.

Commissioners will hold the first public hearing for the proposed budget at 6 p.m. Sept. 14 at 215 E. McCollum Ave., Bushnell.

The final public hearing will be held at 6 p.m. Sept. 27 at Colony Cottage Recreation Center, 510 Colony Blvd.

Lake County

The proposed total FY 2016-17 budget for Lake County is about \$345.6 million, which includes an operating budget of more than \$280 million.

Property values are up for the new fiscal year. The property appraiser certified property values at almost \$17.4 billion, an increase of 6.83 percent from the current year.

This is the fourth year Lake property values have increased, after the county experienced a

five-year decline.

New residential and commercial properties were added to the county's tax roll this year, with 2,560 single-family building permits issued in 2015.

The proposed general fund millage, or property tax rate, is 5.1180 mills, down from the 5.3051 millage rate of 2015-16.

The rollback rate is 5.1180 mills, which is the rate at which the county will raise the same amount of tax revenue as it did during the year prior.

Millage rates for other special funds, including ambulance, fire, stormwater and roads, are staying the same as this year but are higher than the rollback rates.

TRIM notices will be mailed out by the property appraiser Aug. 24.

Once the millage rates appear on the TRIM notices, the board cannot raise the rate, but they can lower it.

The first scheduled public hearing, when commissioners will vote to approve the budget, is Sept. 13 and the final hearing is scheduled for Sept. 30.

Lake County School Board

School board budgets are funded by federal grants and programs and the Florida Department of Education, in addition to local property taxes and other county school-related programs like adult education and after-school childcare fees.

Lake is proposing a property tax rate of 6.875 mills, an increase over the rolled-back rate of 6.52 mills, but a decrease from last year's millage rate of 6.918 mills.

However, this is a tax increase because it is higher than the rate needed to raise the same amount of tax revenue as last year.

The school board set the tentative millage rate at 6.875 mills, and will vote to adopt the final budget at a public hearing Sept. 12.

Marion County

Marion County is proposing a budget of more than \$510.3 million for FY 2016-17.

This includes all countywide entities and municipal service taxing units.

The proposed budget includes a countywide millage rate of 4.06 mills, which is higher than last year's rate of 3.90 mills and the rolled-back rate of 3.7756 mills.

However, budget director Michael Tomich said the county commissioners have been working on making multiple reductions to the budget and are working toward last year's millage rate of 3.90 mills.

Property values in Marion County increased by 4.2 percent, to \$15.64 billion.

Therefore, if individual property owners saw their value

increase, they will see a slight property tax increase.

If their property value remained the same, they'll pay the same as last year.

The first public hearing for the board to consider the budget is at 7 p.m. Sept. 8, and the final budget hearing is at 7 p.m. Sept. 22.

Marion County School Board

Marion's school board budget for FY 2016-17 totals more than \$519.3 million, an increase of about \$12.5 million from the prior year.

The proposed millage rate is 7.902 mills, which means taxpayers will be subject to slightly more than \$7.90 per \$1,000 of property value.

The proposed millage rate is a decrease of 0.27 mills from 8.172 mills in FY 2015-16.

The tentative millage rate will be reflected on residents' TRIM notices, which will be mailed out Aug. 18. On Sept. 6, the board will hold a public hearing to vote on the final budget.

Lady Lake

Lady Lake's total proposed budget for FY 2016-17 is \$15.8 million, which includes \$10.8 million in the general fund.

The proposed millage rate is 3.5510 mills, which is the same rate as last year, but it's 4.36 percent higher than the roll-back rate of 3.3962 mills.

Therefore, it is a slight property tax increase for residents whose property value increased. If an individual property value remained the same, the amount owed in property taxes would remain the same at the proposed rate.

Property values did increase in Lady Lake this year to about \$968.5 million, up from nearly \$908.8 million last year.

The proposed rates will be included on the Lake County TRIM notices to be mailed out later this month.

The first of Lady Lake's two public hearings to approve the budget is Sept. 7, and the final budget hearing is Sept. 21.

Fruitland Park

Fruitland Park is proposing a total budget of about \$12.8 million for FY 2016-17.

This proposed budget is based on an ad valorem tax rate of 4.7371 mills, which is the same rate as the past three years.

However, this rate is 45 percent higher than the rolled back rate of 3.2632 mills.

This is because the city's gross taxable value increased by 76 percent, to more than \$303 million, so there will be higher tax revenue at the same millage rate.

Most of the property value increase is from new construction in The Villages area of

Fruitland Park. Existing property owners will see an increase on their tax bill if their property value also increased.

Commissioners set the tentative millage rate at a city meeting in late July, which will be the rate that appears on the Lake County TRIM notices to be mailed out Aug. 24.

The first public hearing to consider the FY 2016-17 budget will be Sept. 8, and the final budget hearing is Sept. 22.

Wildwood

Wildwood commissioners set a tentative millage rate at 4.1044 per \$1,000 during a meeting last month.

This rate allows the city to raise approximately \$400,000 more than last year.

The city's chief financial officer, Cassandra Lippincott, said if the rate of 4.1044 was approved it would be the same tax rate as the current and prior year. Since the rate is above the rolled-back rate of 3.7715, the proposed rate would be a tax increase.