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Davie budget: No layoffs, but leaner times ahead

By Susannah Bryan

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DAVIE

It took nearly four hours, but the Town Council has agreed to lower taxes and avoid layoffs, while warning of even leaner times ahead.

"If we think this year is tough, next year is going to be brutal," Mayor Judy Paul said Tuesday night, referring to the drop in property values that is expected to continue.

Paul had a way to save the town \$2.7 million, but was unable to persuade a majority on the council to back her entire plan. To help save \$837,000 in overtime costs, Paul wants to put the town's officers back on a four-day, 10-hour schedule. Another idea rejected by the council would have reduced salaries by up to 20 percent for 46 managers who each make more than \$70,000. The savings: \$465,000.

Under the proposed budget approved in a 3-2 vote Tuesday, the town set a tentative property tax rate of \$5.64, up from \$4.95, for every \$1,000 of assessed value. Council members say they plan to reduce the tax rate at the town's next budget hearing on Sept. 21.

Paul and Councilwoman Susan Starkey cast dissenting votes, saying they wanted a lower tax rate for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

The fire assessment fee paid by residents would increase from \$104 to \$130 under the initial plan, though council members hope to lower that, too.

Before an overflow crowd of police and firefighters, many in union shirts, the council spent hours balancing the town's \$91.4 million budget and hearing from more than 25 officers, firefighters and residents.

Broward County Property Appraiser Lori Parrish, a Davie resident, told council members that five homes in her neighborhood were in foreclosure and argued against increasing the town's tax rate by 14.5 percent.

Police Lt. Rich Moore, the department's union treasurer, warned that Davie would be less safe with fewer officers on the road. He criticized previous fiscal blunders by the town, including a costly legal battle



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against the expansion of the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport that Davie lost.

Weeks ago, both the police and fire departments were told the rank and file would face layoffs if they did not give up lucrative raises next year. Both unions voted to keep their pay increase.

The unionized general employees have agreed to a salary freeze to avoid layoffs. Town managers and non-union workers won't get raises either. Late Tuesday, the council vowed not to lay off firefighters or officers despite the earlier warning.

Under their contract, officers will get a 3.7 percent cost of living raise and firefighters are guaranteed a 2.5 percent cost of living raise on Oct. 1. Both firefighters and officers not at the top of their pay grade will receive a 5 percent merit increase as well.

In September 2010, all police officers will receive an additional 5 percent raise, bringing the total to 13.7 percent.

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