

MERRY *Christmas*

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THE 2022 BUDGET

Concerns about fiscal stability surround Scott County's adopted tax levy

BY CHRISTINE SCHUSTER
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Scott County's tax levy increase adopted for the upcoming fiscal year trails significantly behind a benchmark measuring inflation and growth, leading some top-level administrators to question if the board's unwillingness to increase the levy undermines the future financial stability of the county.

The county's tax levy will increase 3.99% over the current fiscal year under the budget adopted by the Scott County Board of Commissioners this month, but county staffers have warned officials the increase may not be enough to avoid a cutback in services or a dramatic spike to the levy down the road.

The adopted budget and levy carries some financial risk for the county with less flexibility in the budget for unforeseen expenditures, according to Danny Lenz, the county's deputy administrator and chief financial officer.

In a statement to Southwest News Media, Scott County Board Chair Jon Ulrich said the county board is always looking to strike a delicate balance.

"And every year, we're trusted to make decisions based on prevailing economic conditions as well as the need to maintain our service levels and meet the needs of our residents," Ulrich wrote. "I believe that this Board's action in setting the 2022 levy and budget helps achieve that balance, maintaining our excellent bond rating while still remaining sensitive to our taxpayers' bottom lines."

The county has maintained a AAA bond rating since 2016.



The Scott County Government Center at 200 4th Avenue West, Shakopee.

PHOTO BY CHRISTINE SCHUSTER

TAXPAYER IMPACTS

During budget meetings earlier this year, Lenz said county officials may need to adopt a higher levy increase in the coming years to avoid a "destructive cycle."

In October, Scott County Administrator Lezlie Vermillion pressed board members for direction on where to cut levy expenses after some members said they wanted the levy increase to land below 3.99%.

"Are we delivering at the wrong service level for you?" she questioned. "It's too high? You want us to make cuts in some areas?"

It's really hard to define, "just cut the levy," because right now, we are at the brink in certain areas."

Despite unease from county staffers regarding the county's financial health, some county board members pushed back with concerns about how voters perceive levy increases, despite the county's tax rate declining annually for the past decade.

Commissioner Dave Beer ultimately voted in favor of the budget, but cast the lone vote

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