

Sussex County adopts \$140 million operating budget for Fiscal 2007

Georgetown, Del., June 20, 2006: Sussex County Council has given its blessing to a proposed \$140 million budget for the 2007 fiscal year.

County Council, at its Tuesday, June 20, 2006, meeting approved the proposed Fiscal Year 2007 budget, which will keep property tax rates unchanged, while using additional revenue from sources such as the realty transfer tax to increase funding for enhanced public safety, improved libraries and new facilities. The budget is approximately \$3 million more, or 2.1 percent, over the current year's \$137 million budget.

Council voted 5-0 to approve the new plan, which was unveiled last month and the subject of a public hearing Tuesday. Council also held public hearings for, and approved, proposed assessment rolls and annual service charges for county sewer users.

The new budget, as well as the new assessment rolls and sewer rates, takes effect July 1.

Officials noted that the adopted budget keeps in place the county's property tax rate of 44.5 cents per \$100 of assessed value, making this the 16 consecutive budget in which the rate has remained the same. th

However, some rates, particularly for sewer users, will change, in large part because of substantial increases in fuel and electricity prices during the last year. Users in most of the county's 15 sewer districts will see rate increases, ranging anywhere from 1 percent to 9 percent, to help cover the costs of increased power and fuel prices. Sussex County's four sewage treatment plants are the largest consumers of electricity in the county's budget.

County Administrator Robert L. Stickels said taking into account several factors, particularly rising fuel and energy prices, made this budget an especially difficult one to put together. "This is my 19 budget, and by far, this was the most complex in all my years at the county," Mr. Stickels said. th

The new budget includes funding for, among other things:

- A 20 percent increase in public safety, to \$21 million, for paramedics, the continuation of a contract with Delaware State Police for additional troopers and local law enforcement grants;
- A new county administrative office annex, to be built in downtown Georgetown;
- Continued open space and agriculture land preservation;
- Planning to begin on improvements at two county-run libraries;
- Salary increases of 3.5 percent, plus \$500 in energy assistance, to full-time employees.

Council President Lynn B. Rogers praised the county's budget team for its diligence in crafting a budget that is sensible, yet responsive to the needs of a growing county. The team includes Finance Director David B. Baker, Accounting Director Susan M. Webb and County Administrator Robert L. Stickels, who will retire Nov. 1, 2006.

"As always, the budget committee has given us, and the people, another responsible budget for the next year," Council President Rogers said. "We're grateful for that."

A copy of the Fiscal Year 2007 budget, the accompanying budget letter and original news release issued May 23, 2006, is posted on the county's web site, at sussexcountyde.gov.