

## **Big county budget draws little heat**

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### **Body**

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Oct. 19--La Crosse County is heading toward its biggest budget ever at \$208.4 million, but that seems to be generating little controversy.

No major disagreements arose Thursday as County Administrator Steve O'Malley spent several hours with supervisors going over major issues in his proposed budget.

Board Chairman Steve Doyle predicted the Nov. 12 public hearing and Nov. 13 session to pass the budget would be "very short."

Most of the budget increase comes from the \$29.5 million jail addition the board unanimously approved Thursday.

Despite the huge spending increase, O'Malley's budget raises the property tax levy by 3.9 percent, to \$26.9 million. Though if the state Legislature passes a budget with a tighter property tax limit than 4 percent, the board may have to do some cutting or juggling of numbers.

The tax rate would fall from \$3.70 this year to \$3.60 in 2008. Property taxes make up only about about 12 percent of the county's budget.

The budget does make greater use of county reserves in 2008. O'Malley uses \$3.2 million in fund balance to pay for everything from new sheriff's squad cars to health insurance.

There's even \$27,290 to prop up shortfalls in the county's congregate meals

program, which includes about \$10,000 to keep the town of Campbell's site open for another year.

Only about five seniors eat at the congregate meals site in Campbell, with meals delivered to another 30. O'Malley considered shutting down that site for budget reasons but decided to use reserves to keep it open while the board considers the broader policy implications.

Supervisor Charles Spiker said the trend across the country is for seniors to have their meals delivered at home instead of going out.

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