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Agencies advocate for human services levy



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MEDINA —The needs of Medina County citizens for human services continue to increase, yet the funding for these agencies is dwindling.

That's the message the leaders of three county agencies — the Medina County Office for Older Adults, Medina County Job and Family Services and Medina County Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Board —

had for commissioners Tuesday in a presentation about joining forces with the hope of putting a combined property tax levy on the Nov. 5 ballot.

Commissioners listened to the presentation without comment, but the agencies did their best to plead the case for a new revenue stream.

“We really are interconnected,” Office for Older Adults Executive Director Laura Toth said.

“We work collaboratively on a lot of cases. Together, our agencies provide human services to thousands of vulnerable county residents — families coping with the challenges of aging, poverty, hunger, child care, mental health, addiction and recovery, and senior transportation.”

Phillip Titterington, executive director of the ADAMH Board, said the three agencies meet regularly and talk about individual cases to maximize their resources.

Starting the conversation now gives commissioners time to weigh options in placing the issue on the ballot.

According to the Medina County Board of Election, issues must be certified to the county agency by 4 p.m. Aug. 7 to make it on the Nov. 5 ballot.

That would put the agencies in a good election cycle for passage, Titterington.

The three agencies commissioned Burgess & Burgess Strategists, of Cleveland, at a cost of \$36,000, to do a countywide survey of 400 voters in April.

The survey found that 62 percent of those surveyed supported the levy, 19 percent were against it and 19 percent were undecided.

Titterington said putting the levy on the November ballot would draw five times more voters than putting it on in May.

“With a higher turnout, the more likely the support will be (there),” he said.

The 1.0-mill, five-year levy would cost

\$3 per month for \$100,000 of property value. It will generate about \$5 million annually. The exact language that will be put on the ballot is being worked on by the prosecutor's office.

The funds will be split between the three agencies — \$2.5 million to support Job and Family Services, \$1.5 million for the ADAMH Board and \$1 million to the Office for Older Adults.

If passed, the usage of levy funds will be allocated as follows:

n Office for Older Adults: It will maintain and expand its meal program for seniors, Toth said.

Last year, it served 38,000 home-delivered meals. That number could rise in 2019. It also arranges 8,000 rides for seniors. She said that could also increase this year.

“The population is aging,” Toth said. “By the next census (in 2020), there will be more people 60 and older in the county than 20 and under.”

She said in the next 10 years, the senior population will grow from 22 percent to 31 percent.

n Job and Family Services: It needs to add caseworkers to keep pace with demands in elderly case management, Adult Protective Services, Child Protective Services and Foster Care Program, said Executive Director Jeff Felton.

He said children in foster care is up

48 percent, calls to child protective services are up 72 percent and child abuse/neglect investigations are up 112 percent since 2012. All of that is being done with minimal staff changes since 2012.

n ADAMH Board: Titterington said he'd like to improve available crisis/suicide prevention, recovery housing and peer support programs. He said he'd also like to expand local treatment options in Brunswick, Wadsworth and Lodi.

He said addiction and mental health issues can suddenly impact anyone and cuts across every demographic. The opioid/methamphetamine crisis exacerbates the risks to vulnerable residents face, he said.

“We believe it was in the community's best interest and our best interest to partner together and ask the citizens to consider one consolidated human services levy,” Felton said.

The 10 counties in Ohio most similar to Medina's population all have at least one human services levy already operating. In those counties, the average levy millage is 3.57 and the total annual cost is \$104.89.

The joint levy would be a first as the ADAMH board attempted to pass a levy in 2015, but it was unsuccessful.

In other news:

The county and city met recently and agreed to cap the total cost of the Medina County Courthouse project at \$38 million. Commissioner Bill Hutson said there is a termination clause in the contract where either side can walk away without any penalty.

The cost of the design phase is \$532,000, County Administrator Scott Miller said.

- The Medina County Drug Advisory Committee has distributed funding for the 2019-20 funding cycle. Grants totaling \$1.5 million were awarded to nine agencies:

I Brunswick police, \$150,039, two school resource officers;

I Brunswick Hills police, \$38,560, one school resource officer;

I Lodi police, \$56,389; one canine officer;

I Medina police, \$67,138; one canine officer;

I Medina County Drug Task Force, \$860,000;

I Medina County Sheriff's Office, \$179,056, four school resource officers;

I Montville police, \$45,610, one school resource officer;

I Spencer police, \$33,194, one police officer;

I Wadsworth police, \$97,970, two school resource officers;

Total: \$1,527,956

- Ed Szalabawka was commended for his upcoming retirement Friday after 21 years with the Medina County Sanitary Engineering Department. He was hired in 1998 and he was

recognized for his commitment and diligence as a wastewater treatment plant maintenance worker at the Kenneth W. Hotz Water Reclamation Facility in Liverpool Township.

- Discount Drug Mart was commended for its 50th anniversary. Parviz Boodjeh, a pharmacist, and his wife, Mildred, both deceased, established Drug Mart in Elyria. He expanded into Medina in 1975 and that's where the company's headquarters are today.

Drug Mart currently operates 75 locations and employs more than 4,000 workers. Seven of the stores are in Medina County.

It ranks in the top 10 chain drug stores in sales volume and number of locations nationally. It's an employee-owned company, led by Boodjeh's children, Dave, Don, Doug, Diana and Deborah.

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