

County agencies seeking more funding

1.0-mill human services levy likely to appear on November ballot

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Agency heads (from left) Phil Titterington, Jeff Felton and Laura Toth prepare to discuss the need for a 1.0-mill human services levy with Medina County commissioners.

Photo by GLENN WOJCIAK

MEDINA – Three Medina County human service agencies with growing needs hope to place a 1.0-mill levy on the November ballot that would generate about \$5 million annually.

The money would be shared the three agencies with \$2.5 million allocated to Job and Family Services, \$1.5 million to the Alcohol Drug Addiction and Mental Health Board and \$1 million to the Office for Older Adults.

A similar levy was rejected by voters in 2015, but directors of the three agencies said their need for additional funding has not gone away and told county commissioners May 28 that they would be requesting that they put the issue before voters again in November.

“To put it simply, the need for human services is growing, but our funding is not keeping up,” said Laura Toth, director of the Officer for Older Adults.

Similar agencies in some other counties are funded by separate levies, but Toth said JFS, Older Adults and the ADAMH Board in Medina County work collaboratively with many clients and have opted to seek a single funding source that could support all three agencies.

Phil Titterington said levy proponents are hopeful that Medina County voters will support the levy despite turning down a 0.8-mill request in 2015. Titterington pointed out that fewer than 10,000 voters turned out for the 2015 primary election and more than 50,000 are expected to cast ballots this November.

Titterington said the big increase in voter turnout should benefit his cause since a survey of 400 likely voters indicated that 62 percent of people asked said they would support the proposed levy.

Toth, Titterington and JFS Director Jeff Felton explained some of their funding needs in a presentation to county commissioners. They described how JFS has seen a 72 percent increase in calls to child protective services since 2012 and 112 percent increase in child neglect and abuse investigations. The \$4 million ADAMH board budget suffered a \$1.6 million cut in state funds in 2012, and the OOA is struggling to provide services like meals and transit to a rapidly aging population that is expected to make up 31 percent of the county population in 10 more years.

Titterington also described Medina County as unusual in that it does not have any levies in place to supplement funding for human service agencies that are primarily funded by state and federal grants. Titterington cited 10 other Ohio counties with populations similar to Medina County’s that all have two or three separate human services levies in place that range from 2.3 mills to 4.7 mills.

The agency heads also described how they would allocate the additional funds if county voters approve a 1-mill levy this way:

- The OOA would use the additional \$1 million annually to expand its meal programs for seniors and offer older adults more transportation options.
- JFS would add caseworkers to keep pace with demands in elderly case management, adult protective services, child protective services and foster care programs.
- ADAMH would use its additional \$1.5 million to improve crisis prevention programs, recovery housing, peer support programs and local treatment options in Brunswick, Wadsworth and Lodi.