

Grafton dips into village funds to balance budget

By Steve Schuster
News Graphic Staff

Grafton — The village of Grafton will take a \$412,748 dip into its reserve funds to balance its 2013 budget, according to Village Administrator Darrell Hofland.

Hofland cites limited development in 2011 and 2012 and limited levy restrictions imposed by the state among the reasons why the village needed to dip into the reserves in order to maintain current programs and services.

The limited levy restrictions are due to Gov. Scott Walker's creation of a tax levy limit measure in his first two-year budget. But prior to Walker taking office, municipalities like the village of Grafton were allowed to increase the (tax) levy limit by up to 3 percent.

But in Grafton's case, reserve funds are serving their intended purpose, Hofland said.

"The reserves are created as a result of careful budgeting of prior years' expenditures by village staff," Hofland said in an interview Monday.

Revenues in the general fund (comparing 2012 and

2013 budgets) are anticipated to decrease by 2 percent or \$189,624 less, and existing property values declined by \$80.7 million as of Jan. 1, 2012, according to Hofland and village documents.

But, Hofland remains optimistic.

"The village still has 29 percent of a remaining fund balance ... that's 4 percent above our 25 percent goal," Hofland said.

The village of Grafton will also spend \$186,000 less in 2013 than in 2012, but will increase its tax levy 3.3 percent, in part due to the fire department referendum approved Nov. 6.

The referendum allows for the village and town of Grafton to collectively spend an additional \$410,085 annually for training, salary and benefits for a new full-time fire chief, part-time emergency medical technicians, firefighters paid per call and on-call emergency medical responders. The village's portion equals roughly \$246,000.

The village board on Nov. 19 approved a 2013 budget of \$25.9 million, which includes operational costs and capital improvements.

The 2013 tax rate will be \$6.65 per \$1,000 of assessed value, which means owners of property valued at \$250,000

would pay \$52.50 more per year in village taxes.

The budget includes several infrastructure improvements – including \$309,600 for a street improvement program and \$263,070 for underground utility projects, which include sewer and water line replacement, Hofland said.

Over \$1.5 million will be used for the urbanization and widening of Port Washington Road and nearly \$1.8 million will be used for the final design and construction of a replacement utility garage at the waste water treatment plant, according to village documents.

And among some of the greatest expenditures in the 2013 budget, over \$5 million is slated for public safety and just over \$5.6 million on public works.

(Contact Steve Schuster at sschuster@conley.net or via [Twitter www.twitter.com/stevenschuster](https://twitter.com/stevenschuster))