

Aid to Cut Tax in National Park, Woodbury Heights

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NATIONAL PARK -- Two Gloucester County municipalities are among 39 statewide to receive "extraordinary" aid from the state to offset local property tax increases.

National Park will receive \$100,000 and Woodbury Heights is in line for \$60,000, Department of Community Affairs Acting Commissioner Charles Richman announced Friday in Trenton.

"It's good news," Woodbury Heights Mayor Harry Elton said. "The money is going to reduce the tax rate."

As proposed, the municipal budget for 2009 calls for an approximate 10-cent increase in the local purpose levy.

The borough council will amend the budget to accept the DCA funds. It is expected that the projected tax increase will be reduced to 7 cents.

That is an approximate \$100 increase in the local purpose levy for the owner of a property assessed at \$142,600 ÷ the borough average. As introduced, the budget called for an average \$143 tax increase to support local services such as police protection.

In National Park, the DCA award translates into a 10-cent reduction in a proposed 31-cent increase in the local purpose levy, said borough Clerk Victoria Holmstrom.

The borough council had proposed a 31-cent local purpose levy increase ÷ \$261 for the owner of a property assessed at the local average of \$84,115. The town is expected to amend its 2009 budget to reflect an approximate 21-cent increase ÷ \$177 for the owner of the average National Park property, she said.

Holmstrom admitted she was "excited" to hear of the award.

The town applied for \$102,000 ÷ citing costs associated with the police department that merged a year ago with Westville.

The extraordinary aid program, according to the DCA, offers aid to towns that propose significant tax increases due to "extreme circumstances." Any funds that are awarded are to reduce the projected tax increase.

National Park received extraordinary aid in 2005 when it was awarded \$50,000.

Woodbury Heights also has received state awards in the past. Elton said the awards have dropped each year, suggesting the state is "weaning" the borough from the funding source.

The mayor noted there are new ratables coming into town he cited the redevelopment of the former Caldor shopping center ÷ that will offset the anticipated drop in state assistance.

Among other South Jersey towns receiving extraordinary aid money:

Brooklawn will receive \$30,000; Commercial Township, \$240,000; Gloucester City, \$150,000; Laurel Springs, \$50,000; Lindenwold, \$100,000; Maurice River Township, \$250,000; Penns Grove, \$850,000; Salem City, \$400,000; Willingboro Township, \$200,000; and Woodlynne, \$100,000.

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