



Property tax collections up by \$5.6 million

By MARK HICKS • The Leaf-Chronicle • March 12, 2009

February property tax collections

County property tax collections are up by about \$5.6 million for 2008. Officials had expected the amount to increase over the previous year.

By the end of February, when property taxes were due, the county trustee's office had already collected a total of \$71.6 million since September, compared to the \$66 million the office collected during the same period of 2007.

"It's a considerable increase when you look at it and compare it to what we expect to collect," said county Trustee Brenda Radford, adding later, "I think we're a little ahead (to reach the projected collections). We're right on target and I think that will continue as we collect late taxes."

She said her office continues to accept late tax payments and will pursue payment on delinquent accounts.

For 2008, county officials projected the collections to be about \$77 million.

The tax collection numbers help officials as they begin to shape the county budget for the next fiscal year, when they again will project how much revenue will be generated from property tax, which accounts for growth and other factors.

Accounts and Budgets Director Erinne Hester said the trustee's report of collections for budgeting purposes also provides a means of calculating a more accurate projection of delinquency.

"Any local government's largest single revenue generator is property tax collections," she said in an e-mail. "So understanding what you anticipate not collecting provides a more realistic budget for estimated revenue."

The county's delinquency rate usually runs around 5 percent, she said.

Radford reminded those who have not paid their property taxes that penalties of 1.5 percent are assessed for each late month, and the case may go into collections, which can accrue attorney's fees and court cost.

While the \$71.6 million is a few million shy of the projected collections, it is a significant increase from the \$66 million collected during the same period for 2007.

Radford attributed the increased collections to getting word out to residents about payment options.

"Our office has made every effort to make options available to county homeowners so paying their taxes is convenient as possible," she said.

Residents were able to pay property taxes at 29 local banks, which is more than double the 11 banks that accepted payments when Radford took office in 2006. Also, the trustee's office was open on Saturdays through February, including the deadline day of Feb. 28.

Radford said her clerks also went into the county to sign up people for tax relief and tax freeze, in addition to collecting property taxes at county fire stations.

During February, her office brought in nearly \$29.2 million, which is \$1.6 million more than what was collected in February 2008.

Additionally, the county's growth has added more taxable parcels to the rolls over the years.

"While the land mass has not grown, we have grown the number of parcels," Radford said.

She said when she started at the trustee's office back in the late 1970s, the number of tax-producing parcels was about 33,000 and now Montgomery County has increased to almost 70,000.

Radford said she recently talked with Hamilton County's trustee, as well as other across the state, and she learned property tax collections are mostly up statewide, while sales taxes are down a bit.

"We'll just have to roll with it and use the finances we have as prudently as possible," she said.



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