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Key Biscayne budget gets preliminary approval - The Key Biscayne Village Council tentatively passed a budget for the next fiscal year. They will meet again in two weeks to finish their work.

Miami Herald, The (FL) - Friday, September 16, 2011

**Author:** *Rebecca Burton and Tania Valdemoro Longest, tvaldemoro@MiamiHerald.com*

The Key Biscayne Village Council on Tuesday passed a proposed \$24 million budget that maintains village services and keeps the tax rate flat.

The council has to approve a budget by Oct. 1, which is the start of the new fiscal year.

Key Biscayne's tax base rose 1.7 percent to \$5.52 billion from \$5.42 billion in the past 12 months according to the Miami-Dade County Property Appraiser's Office. In terms of the budget, that means a gain of \$265,622 in tax income, said Acting Village Manager John Gilbert.

There are no major cuts to services or employees in the proposed budget, Gilbert said.

But village officials reduced the youth council's budget by \$10,000 and cut \$25,000 from the special events budget because they've already funded Key Biscayne's 20th Anniversary this year.

The village has saved \$447,741 by refinancing several of its existing bonds.

But Key Biscayne will be paying more to their firefighters, general employees and police because they receive a 3 percent cost-of-living allowance, according to their union contracts. Village officials will provide more information about those costs at the Sept. 27 budget hearing.

Gilbert proposed hiring a finance director at a salary of \$100,000. The council raised the salary to \$120,000 to attract better candidates.

Former village manager Chip Iglesias told the council, "An increase in the finance director's salary would increase the pull, the candidates until now never had municipal governmental experience."

Under the proposed budget, residents and business owners will pay \$3.20 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value. The tax rate has not changed since 2008.

"We are happy that our tax base has been the same for so many years," Mayor Frank Caplan said.

Under the proposed tax rate, the owner of a home assessed at \$658,901—the village's

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average for an owner-occupied home would pay \$1,948 in taxes.

That assumes the owner qualifies for a \$50,000 homestead exemption and that the property's taxable value increased 1.5 percent from the previous year, the maximum amount allowed under the Save Our Homes amendment to the state constitution. Save Our Homes has kept those taxable values artificially low.

People who bought their homes more recently could see a tax cut if their home's market value dropped below their previous tax assessment.

Key Biscayne only receives a portion of a property owner's tax dollar. The county, the school district and other agencies get the rest.

The council also discussed the budget for its Capital Improvement Plan budget. According to the mayor, the council will give more leeway to how the village uses money for land acquisition.

Alan Fine, a representative of the land acquisition committee, suggested moving \$1 million from the Capital Improvement Plan in order to possibly purchase the fields behind MAST Academy. He explained that the fields could be developed into playing fields and help bring in revenue.

"If ever there was a time to take on projects like this, now is the time," Fine said.

Caplan said the council is not sure of what exactly is going to happen with the money but it will be discussed in more detail in two weeks. The second and final budget hearing will take place at 7 p.m. on Sept. 27 at Village Hall, 560 Crandon Blvd.

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