

Prenzler: Residents could see 6 percent drop in tax levy, plus increased criminal justice budget with new plan

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EDWARDSVILLE — Residents could see a 6 percent, or \$2 million, drop in Madison County's property tax levy, and at the same time see a boost in the criminal justice budget.

The County Administration updated its 2018 fiscal year draft budget last week and the spending plan includes 12 new positions within the Sheriff and Probation and Court Services departments and the Coroner, Public Defender and State's Attorney's offices.

"The 2018 fiscal year budget gives residents property tax relief and addresses the needs in public safety and the courts," Madison County Chairman Kurt Prenzler said.

In 2016, Prenzler worked to cut the maximum tax rate of the county's general fund from .25 to .20. The tax cut would be an additional reduction of the total county rate.

County Administrator Doug Hulme said the common theme during budget meetings was that requests for public safety resources went unanswered in years past.

"Every department involved with public safety asked for more resources for the upcoming fiscal year," Hulme said. "This budget will meet some of those requests by adding positions and we are able to do this because of cuts in other areas."

Hulme said the added positions include two Sheriff deputies, two jailers, two public defenders, a deputy coroner, a probation officer in pre-trial release and four full-time assistant state's attorneys, one of which is grant funded.

"We have seen an increase in inmates and the costs associated for housing them," Prenzler said. "Housing inmates is a cost picked up by the taxpayers."

Prenzler said the goal is to reduce the jail population by making sure cases go to trial sooner.

"We are spending money in hopes of bringing down our overall costs," he said.

The county's spending plan for the general fund is more than \$48.2 million. The combined budgets for the five departments — Sheriff, Probation, Coroner, Public Defender and State's Attorney — is \$24.6 million, about half of all general fund spending.

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