Written by Ed Gebert Friday, January 25, 2013 2:13 PM -



VAN WERT — It appears 2013 may be another good year for sales tax receipts in Van Wert County. The first collections of the year from county retailers showed a 4.23 percent increase over January 2012 collections. Sales tax collections in January reflect sales from the preceding November, which is the first portion of holiday shopping season.

"This year we start on a positive. We're up \$13,000," reported County Treasurer Bev Fuerst at a Thursday morning meeting of county department heads. "That's what we got here in January for November sales, so I'm anxious to get February's because that will be December sales. Hopefully, we had a great Christmas season."

The figures show that the total income from the county's 1.0 percent and the 0.5 percent sales tax was over \$326,000 for November 2012 sales. That figure is up nearly \$72,000 from just three years previous.

In fact, sales tax revenue has been trending upward for the past few years, indicating that more money is being spent with Van Wert County businesses. Last year's sales tax income was up nearly \$715,000 from 2009 to almost \$4 million.

"Last year we had a great year," Fuerst stated. "We were up over \$88,000. We only had three negative months where we did not meet the [amount collected in the] month the previous year... Car sales went very well last year. The big box stores did well also. Keep shopping in Van Wert!"

## County financials strong but little wiggle room

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At the same meeting, County Auditor Nancy Dixon shared a budget worksheet for the general fund. The sheet highlighted the difference sources for revenue to the fund and county department heads took turns asking about various income line items.

"As far as finances right now, the general fund has \$640,000, so we seem to be in pretty good shape," she summarized. However Commissioner Thad Lichtensteiger pointed out that even with that money in the fund, most of that is already spoken for in 2013.

"After we finished with appropriations, we had about \$16,000 left in unencumbered dollars, so if we run into any speed bumps or any wrinkles, we could be in trouble," he cautioned. "We'd like to have a little more cushion than that."

Three new large sources of income are merely estimates at this point on the worksheet. Funds from the Blue Creek Wind Farm is not expected to come into the county until 2014. Lichtensteiger estimated that besides the regular distribution of payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) on the farm, another \$230,000 per year should be received in funding. That represents a percentage based on the number of megawatts of power generated which goes directly into the general fund.

In Paulding County, the first PILOT payment on the Timber Road II Wind Farm is set to be paid next week to that county. That amount will be approximately \$900,000 annually. The Timber Road project went online before the opening of the Blue Creek Wind Farm, which is split between both Van Wert and Paulding counties.

Another revenue estimate is the amount brought in through the electrical aggregation agreement negotiated between the county and First Choice Energy. The first installment of those funds is expected in the first half on 2013. The revenue estimate for this year is \$600,000. The other revenue source is money from the four casinos now open in the state of Ohio. The complexes at Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, and Toledo are expected to provide nearly \$400,000 in this year.

At the next department heads meeting, Dixon will have the worksheet on the expenses side of the ledger for the group to discuss.

The other major subject discussed Thursday morning was the difficulties of Internet access at various county offices, especially those in the Van Wert County Courthouse. A general strategy was agreed upon of contracting with a firm to resolve compatibility issues with various hardware and software systems, and to appoint someone to act as a clearinghouse of all the problems

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and questions for the support firm. That firm would be selected after a competitive bidding process. The commissioners spent part of the afternoon hours trying to work out possible solutions which would allow specific departments to use necessary software while simplifying the connection process.