

## **MIRAMAR TAX RATE TO REMAIN SAME NEW PROPERTIES OFFSET INCREASING COSTS OF OPERATING CITY GOVERNMENT**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Weston residents should be happy to learn that the city's millage rate on property taxes will not be increasing this year.

"The tax rate will stay the same," said Helen Ostlund, the city's Budget Director explained. "However, if the value of their house has increased, their tax could go up."

The city is able to hold the line on increasing the rate because of the development that has added more taxable property to the tax roll. "There has been a lot of growth on the western side of the city," Ostlund said.

City officials said they are trying to hold the line on taxes even as costs of operating the government continue to rise.

"Just the cost of police department pensions and health insurance has increased by \$1 million dollars in the past year," said Miramar Mayor Bob Payton.

Payton said that officials noticed that there would be a significant shortfall in city income versus expenditures early in the last fiscal year and took steps to adjust spending accordingly.

"We do not want to reduce services," Payton explained. "As a vacancy occurs, we evaluate the position to see whether it is necessary. Rather than work for administrative convenience, we are shifting our focus for the benefit of the residents."

Payton said that the city is paying close attention to each project, and evaluating whether a road really needs to be resurfaced, a water line repaired or a curb painted.

"It's a balancing act," Ostlund said.

The growth in taxable property that has allowed the city to maintain the same millage rate is starting to slow, Ostlund said. That decline, which she said began last year and has continued this year, will possibly have an affect on millage rates in future years.

Ostlund explained that the valuation of property is carried out by the city's property appropriation office, and is adjusted on a regular basis.

Thus, even with millage rates remaining the same, if the assessed value of a house climbs from \$100,000 last year to \$105,000 this year, the taxpayer will end up paying higher taxes.

Ostlund said the current millage rate on residential property is 6.87% per \$1,000 value.

Miramar will hold two workshops on the millage rate, on August 20 at 5:30 p.m., and August 27 at 6 p.m. at the City Hall. The City Commission will hold a hearing on the rate at 6:30 p.m., August 3, just prior to the regular Commission meeting.

**MIRAMAR TAX RATE TO REMAIN SAME, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, Aug 6, 2003**