

Commissioner Sue Gunzburger

Broward County Commission, District 6

The fiscal year 2009 budget has been approved by the Broward County Board of County Commissioners and I'm proud to announce that the \$3.6 billion total budget provides for a property tax rate that decreases 7% from the state-mandated "rolled-back" rate. The rolled-back rate is basically the property tax rate that generates the same amount of property taxes as the previous year.

This was a particularly challenging task. Home values plunged and taxpayers sent a clear message that they wanted property tax cuts when they overwhelmingly passed Amendment 1 in February.

Following the clear will of the people, the Commission worked throughout the year to fill an \$87-million dollar gap in the budget. This follows precedent setting budget cuts of more than \$90-million the year before. Budget cuts made for fiscal year 2009 will reduce the county tax portion of your bill by \$96 if you have a homesteaded property and \$90 on non-homesteaded properties.

In order to meet the demands of Amendment 1, the Commission reduced the hours of some county libraries and closed most county parks on Tuesdays, the day when attendance at county parks is typically low. We also reduced or modified a number of bus routes that were underutilized. Agencies and departments within county government were drastically consolidated in order to cut administrative costs.

I believe that when the economy suffers there is typically a greater need for human services, fortunately our social safety net has been maintained in order to provide services for those most in need.

It's important to understand that about 62% of the general fund budget, or \$795 million, comes from property taxes. Roughly half of that money finances the Broward Sheriff's Office, Supervisor of Elections and Property Appraisers Office. The remainder finances county services such as parks, libraries, public transportation and human services.

While the County Commission is charged with collecting all property taxes from Broward County residents, we are only one of more than 80 entities in the county with the authority to impose a tax on your property.

If you take a close look at your tax bill, you will see that your property is taxed by a number of other entities, including the municipalities, the Broward County School Board, hospital districts, water districts, etc. So while the county portion of tax bill was reduced, these other taxing authorities may have imposed additional taxes on your property and that could impact your tax bill.

Broward County has always been fiscally conservative and our millage rate has been lowered or has remained the same for the past decade.

With the nation's economy in a state of flux we are sure to face many more financial challenges in the year ahead, especially when the full impact of the failing housing market is felt.

We'll start tackling those issues soon and I appreciate your suggestions and comments. Please call me at (954) 357-7006 or e-mail at sgunzburger@broward.org