

Municipalities brainstorm money-saving ideas

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Tompkins County municipalities are searching for ways to save money and stretch it as far as possible, and local leaders heard several presentations on the subject Thursday.

The Tompkins County Council of Governments is looking into energy savings, ideas to lessen the impact of a proposed tax cap at the state level, and how to provide boat patrols on Cayuga Lake after state reimbursements for the patrols are completely cut, as scheduled.

Caroline Town Council member Dominic Frongillo said a Cornell Cooperative Extension survey a couple of years ago revealed where municipalities have their greatest energy costs. Many have already taken steps toward conserving energy or incorporating alternative energy sources, he said. Lack of time, staff and know-how prevented further energy-saving projects, however, and a position at CCE is in the works to help municipalities develop these projects.

Martha Robertson, chairwoman of the county legislature, said if pension costs, which can't be controlled by local governments and school districts, could be carved out of the property tax cap, it would take a huge burden off local taxing entities.

Medicaid and pension costs alone are expected to increase more than the proposed tax cap next year, County Administrator Joe Mareane said.

Sheriff Ken Lansing said boat patrols are necessary, but he's not sure yet how to provide them without any state support. He said he is considering developing a list of citizens living on both sides of the lake who are skilled boaters who are willing to be called on in emergencies.

"Obviously law enforcement is our problem," Lansing said, but citizen responders could be used in the event of a rescue. "You can't forget the lake, because obviously if you do, there's going to be trouble."