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Joliet's 2027 budget adds no jobs as health costs climb

Joliet’s proposed 2027 budget rises 4.54% to $751.1 million, with no new jobs as employee and health insurance costs continue to climb.

Madhu Mayer



The Joliet City Council has presented a budget that calls for an estimated increase of 4.54 percent in expenses over last year.

The budget discussed Tuesday estimates total expenditures for fiscal year 2027 projected at $751.1 million, an increase from the 2026 budget of $718.6 million.

Kevin Sing, director of finance, said highlights of the draft budget include $5.1 million for improving neighborhood streets; $2 million for sidewalk replacements; $21.6 million in health insurance for active employees; $19.9 million for retirees' health insurance; funding for a $475,000 grant to the Rialto Theatre; and $250,000 for Joliet Area Historical Museum.

"The city continues to allocate casino gaming revenues to fund governmental capital projects and equipment," said Sing. "The 2027 budget includes $25.9 million in new governmental capital items and $186.3 million in new sewer and water capital items."

Sing said the money can be allocated toward the replacement of six ambulances; replace 22 police squads; and replace four large snowplows.

The proposed budget also highlights, according to Sing, the Lake Michigan water project where Joliet will switch from deep wells to Lake Michigan water.

Sing said the project has three components, which include $71.5 million for 20 miles of water main replacements; $47.9 million for improvements to the city's water system; and $31 million for costs associated with Grand Prairie Water Commission, which is made up of six communities dedicated to providing sustainable water supply. It includes Joliet, Channahon, Crest Hill, Minooka, Romeoville; and Shorewood.

The commission will design and construct a new water system that delivers treated Lake Michigan water to the participating six communities.

The draft budget does not add any new positions to Joliet's payroll, compared to 11 new employees hired last year. But Sing alluded to employee costs rising as it will increase $6.5 million due to step increases in pay and cost-of-living expenses due to inflation. He also told the council that health insurance costs are up nearly 75 percent since 2020 and account for 17 percent of the general fund.

Sing said the city pays close to 50 percent for health insurance premiums that benefit retired employees and their dependents.

"We continue to spend within our means and ... and hold the line on taxes," said Sing, w added that only 8 percent of property taxes contribute to the general fund revenue.

No one from the public spoke during the budget hearing Tuesday as the evening presented residents with an opportunity to comment on the proposed appropriation's ordinance prior to board approval later.

In other city council business, members approved a resolution for $1 million toward a community funding award from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration. This would be a no-cost mental health program available to residents.

"The grant will support the Joliet Fire Department in administering and operating a no-cost mental health program for Joliet residents," the resolution said.

Mayor Terry D'Arcy said the grant will help those who are experiencing crises in their lives.

"This million can help a lot of people before they even get to the hospital," said D'Arcy.

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