

Taxes explained at Naples session

By I.M. STACKEL

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NAPLES — After all these years as an elected official, Collier Commission Chairwoman Donna Fiala is still amazed at how few people understand their tax bill.

Speaking at a Collier County League of Women Voters session on taxes Monday, Fiala pointed out, once again, that county taxes – meaning, taxes county commissioners approved – represents 27 percent of the total tax bill.

Collier schools represent 40 percent of the tax bill. County commissioners have no control over those tax rates.

There are at least 60 other entities that also have the authority to impose taxes on one's land.

Fiala said people write to her and ask her questions about their tax bills, without realizing the commission is not responsible for the bulk of the tax.

At the request of league members, a number of county officials came out to the Collier County Athletic Club session to discuss taxes and how that money relates to services.

In addition to Fiala, officials included Tax Appraiser Abe Skinner, Office of Management and Budget Director John Yonkosky and his deputy Mark Isaackson, Productivity Committee Chairman Steve Harrison.

Are county residents getting good services for their money? League of Women Voters President Sandy Parker believes so.

After the session, she said she's amazed at how much the county does on so little money.

A central topic was devaluation of county property, a situation that has created an economic recession.

Harrison said tax base deflation is not history, and will likely carry over into the next few years.

Residents have to ask themselves if they're willing to receive fewer services to keep taxes down, he said.

How property is appraised is a long discussion, according to Skinner.

Gauging the value of a piece of property is not the same thing as taxing it, he stressed.

Skinner and his staff appraise all property in Collier, or about 250,000 parcels, he said.

Pointing out that he answers to the Florida Department of Revenue, and not the Collier County Commission, Skinner reiterated that the property appraisal process begins Jan. 1 and reflects values from the previous calendar year.

That is the only way his office can appraise that many pieces of property and get them right, Skinner said.

For more information on Save Our Homes exemptions, and why property value can decrease but taxes don't, property owners can contact Abe Skinner's office.

Officials at Monday's session were in unanimous agreement on one point: a budget is not a sure thing, only a spending plan.

After the session, Parker said the panel does a tremendous job in monitoring taxpayer money.

"It's a challenge for local government that most people don't understand," Parker said. "We don't appreciate, enough, the amount of time and effort they spend to continue to provide us with services and not raise taxes."

Parker said they all have a very tough job, especially people like Harrison, who is a volunteer.

“They devote thankless, thankless hours to share their expertise,” Parker said.

For more information on the League of Women Voters, go to www.lwvcolliercounty.org.



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