

Some county tax revenues decline in first quarter

■ Council vice president urges caution in budget discussions

Revenues from county transfer and recordation taxes in the first quarter of the fiscal year are down 33 percent, compared to the same time a year ago. The decline in revenues, which are generated when houses

Council Notes

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are bought and sold, is being blamed on a slow housing market.

"If the economy does not recover and the housing market does not improve it could result in about a \$63 million revenue loss for the entire year," the county's finance director, Timothy L. Firestine, told the County Council's Management and Fiscal Policy Committee on Monday. "If the trend continues, the impact is a \$120 million hole over two years."

To committee chairwoman Marilyn J. Praisner (D-Dist. 4) of Calverton, the outlook means caution. "We need to spend more time with the fiscal plan, especially with projects coming on line, and how we factor in additional projects, because they have both capital and operating expenses," she said.

But Firestine and analyst David Platt said other revenue streams, including income taxes, are ahead of estimates and the housing market is expected to recover.

The preliminary figures were presented as part of one of two finance reports to the council. A second report is due in March before the council begins its budget deliberations.

public does not want golf subsidized "when it can be self-supporting," said council President George L. Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park.

The agreement allows the Revenue Authority to stop operating any golf facility it determines to be a drain on the system — except the course at Little Bennett in Clarksburg, which cannot be closed until its debt is paid.

Alternatives to close a course must be presented to the Council and Planning Board.

— MARGIE HYSLOP

Businesses recognized

Eleven companies and individuals were honored with the 2006 Workforce and Economic Development awards at the county conference center on Tuesday. The winners include Freewebs, which received the Small Business Award; The Tower Cos. and Lerner Enterprises, which won the Environmental Innovation Award; Supernus Pharmaceuticals and United Therapeutics, which were given with the Business Partnership Award; MedImmune, which won the Economic Development Advancement Award; Douglas Wrenn, who received the Economic Development Leadership Award; Helen Collins, who won the Workforce Determination Award; Elmer Villatoro, who was named Participant of Year; Salome Annie Martin, the Senior Participant of the Year; Ha Do, the Disability Participant of the Year; Elisa Rubio, the Youth Participant of the Year; and Lisa Cuzzo, who received with the Workforce Leadership Award.

Senior property tax credit

On Tuesday, the council approved, 8-0, an additional property tax credit for low-income homeowners who are at least 70 years old and who qualify for the county supplement to the state circuit breaker tax credit.

Under the new program, eligible seniors would receive an additional credit of 25 percent of their circuit breaker supplement. Seniors would not have to apply separately for the credit, and the county would use the original circuit breaker application to determine eligibility for the extra credit.

The law takes effect July 1.

Golf courses leased

The council unanimously approved a 30-year agreement to lease the four golf courses on county park land to the county Revenue Authority to make the courses self-supporting.

The golf courses operated at a nearly \$500,000 loss in fiscal 2005 and an almost \$1.4 million loss in fiscal 2006, which ended June 30.

Under the lease, the Revenue Authority, which has managed the courses since spring, would pay \$480,000 annually for the first six years, then 5 percent to 10 percent of net revenues over \$5.6 million thereafter.

The council's intent is for the property to remain park land, but the

In other council actions

•The council voted unanimously to change the development plan of the first floor of "the Gallery" building in the Montouri Property on Old Georgetown Road from residential to nonresidential retail use.

•The council voted 7-0 for a 16-acre development project on Bel Pre Road in Silver Spring to include expansion of an existing church and development of 20 single-family detached houses, six townhouses and 12 duplex units.

•The council delayed approval of \$2.5 million for fire code enforcement and establishment of an inspection fee schedule for commercial buildings. Praisner asked to hold the items until Nov. 28 after the further meetings between the fire department and the child care community.

•The council approved a new process for evaluating and distributing fiscal 2008 council grants. Leventhal plans to convene a meeting on Dec. 5 with the new MFP and Health and Human Services committee members to discuss the role of the Grants Advisory Group.

What's ahead

The County Council takes a fall recess Nov. 6-20. Some committees will meet during the break. Regular session resumes Nov. 28.