

West Boynton coalition calls for millage rate compromise

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Increased taxes or cutting county jobs and services — that was the decision [West Boynton](#) residents had to make last week.

A Coalition of Boynton West Residential Associations special meeting regarding [Palm Beach County](#) taxes and the 2010 county budget took place July 16 for members to voice their concerns over the possibility of a millage rate increase.

More than 70 people came to the Valencia Shores clubhouse to take a poll to decide if they wanted to tell the county to keep the millage at 3.7811, raise it to 4.344 or compromise in between.

The audience answered questions about what were their top priorities for the county to handle; what should be cut; is money being wasted, and if so, where; should the tax rate be changed; and a possible way to compromise.

The decision made from the survey is being tallied and will be taken to the county for consideration.

The [Palm Beach County](#) Board of County Commissioners must determine the millage rate for 2010 taxes in the next few months, starting with a meeting that took place July 21.

Ken Lassiter, president of COBWRA, said because property values have decreased, keeping the same millage rate would produce about \$100 million less tax revenue for the county.

Lassiter said the same rate will cause cuts in county services and reductions in county staff, thus increasing the county unemployment rate. The county has already gone through several rounds of cuts, including 200 jobs that won't be around the start of next year.

Raising the millage rate will maintain most service levels and reduce the need for county employee layoffs. It will increase the county taxes every homeowner will pay. For example, for a home with an assessed value of \$229,200 and a \$50,000 homestead exemption, the county taxes would increase from \$677 in 2009 to \$779 for 2010.

Raising taxes by increasing the millage rate to 4.3440 will produce the same total tax revenue as this year.

"With the feedback we got today, I feel most people want a compromise," said Ellen Gabler, the coalition's secretary. "I am for the 4.34 because if you start diminishing services, the values of homes will go down only further and further for only a couple of pennies."

Every member of the board had a different opinion on how to face the pressing issue of the millage rate.

Eric Malkin, second vice president, said he wanted a mild compromise at 3.98, which would result in \$14 million in cuts.

"We still are going to have to raise it to around 4.8 the next year," he said, alluding to saving what they could for now.

Aside from the millage rate, Lassiter said he was for eliminating overtime, among other cuts.

"We have employees making \$125,000 a year with \$25,000 in overtime," he said.

Stuart Caine, first vice president of COBWRA, was among the majority and wanted a compromise somewhere in between. He said if police and firemen start to get cut, then crime increases.

"When this happens, we lose money on property values anyway," he said.

The recommendations from COBWRA will be taken to the county as part of the commission's decision process. Before the meeting, a show of hands showed that almost two-thirds of the residents wanted a compromise.

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