

Local tax hike expected

Council factors cost increase into budget

By Casey McDermott
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Borough officials are bracing for possible tax increases as they begin planning their budget for the next fiscal year.

The State College Borough Council reviewed the 2011 Centre Region Council of Governments (COG) Program Plan at its meeting Monday.

State College Borough Manager Tom Fountaine said the plan, as it stands, could require a slight property tax increase over the next few years to account for costs associated with proposed COG projects such as new regional parks and a deficit in library funding.

The COG Program Plan is sent annually to officials in all six municipalities in its coverage area: State College Borough and College, Halfmoon, Harris, Ferguson and Patton Townships, according to a copy of the 2011 document.

It is a preliminary method of

telling municipalities what COG accomplished in the past year, what it's working on and what it might need for future projects, said Cathy Prosek, assistant to the executive director of COG.

The feedback COG gets from the municipalities is then factored into creating the COG budget, Prosek said.

Council member Theresa Lafer said increasing the COG budget is likely and will directly impact the State College budget for the year, though she didn't know how by how much.

She said the borough is doing the best it can to accomplish the difficult task of planning a budget for next year using only what it knows about the current financial situation. "When you get elected to borough council, they really don't issue a good crystal ball," Lafer said.

And borough officials aren't the only ones trying to make sense of their financial future.

Schlow Centre Region Library has lost about \$115,000 in state aid

since 2007, said Director Cathy Alloway, and the library is bracing itself for funding cuts of anywhere from \$53,000 to \$60,000 this year.

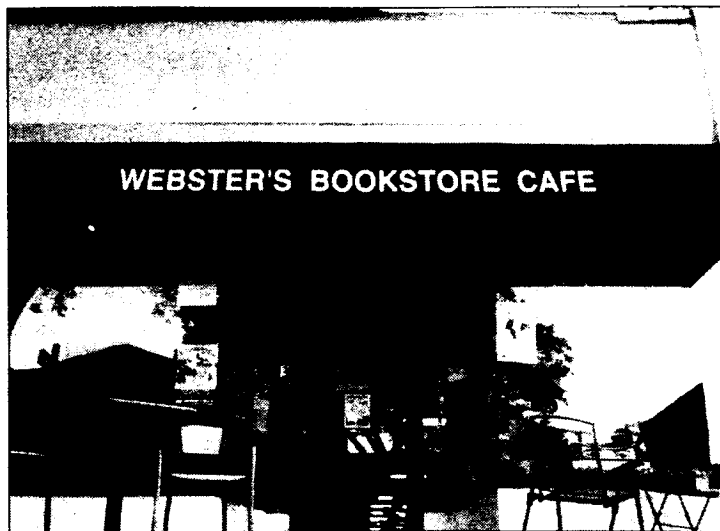
Alloway said she isn't sure that the appropriations the library receives from COG will be enough to make up for the shortfall in state funding.

Alloway said the library may be forced to start charging \$1 for a three-day DVD rentals, charging for room rentals to non profit organizations, cutting the library's hours or closing it during one or two slow weeks each year.

But thankfully, Alloway said, the library's time of need isn't going completely unnoticed. Just three weeks in, and its current fundraising campaign has already raised \$10,000.

"Some letters [in response to the campaign] bring tears to my eyes," she said. "It's very clear that the public knows about the cuts and are doing very much to bridge the gap."

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Steph Witt/Collegian

Webster's Bookstore Cafe is one of the businesses helped by Cogster.

Businesses get aid

Cogster helps raise money

By Paul Osolnick
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The State College-based company Cogster is working to raise money and support for local businesses in downtown State College and give back to patrons.

Cogster President Steve Bisbee said the company provides residents in State College, Bellefonte and Philipsburg the opportunity to invest in small businesses in their area while receiving a return in merchandise.

"Cogster brings the best elements of Wall Street to Main Street," Bisbee said. "And it creates a social platform that allows customers to support Main Street businesses and get something back in return."

Bisbee said that since Cogster was started in 2009 — its Web site component launched in 2010 — the company has collected more than \$19,000 for local businesses, including Zola New World Bistro, 325 W. College Ave., and Webster's Bookstore Cafe, 121 S. Fraser St.

Dave Fonash, co-owner of Zola New World Bistro, said the Cogster campaign helps provide an more revenue for his business.

"What we wanted to do is break down the traditional barriers associated with local residents injecting capital into locally owned mom and pop businesses," Bisbee said.

Bisbee said Cogster has raised

more than \$17,000 in about two weeks to support Webster's after the bookstore announced the loss of its 128 S. Allen St. lease.

Bisbee said the company charges a processing fee of 10 percent of funds raised by Cogster through the campaign.

Bisbee said that while Cogster has held campaigns to raise funds for about seven businesses, that only represents about 10 percent of the total business membership of Cogster.

Around 70 businesses are members of Cogster, Bisbee said. Membership on the Cogster Web site is free and allows businesses to advertise deals and specials on the Web site.

Doug Albert, owner of Uncle Eli's, 129 East Beaver Avenue, and the Douglas Albert Gallery, 107 McAllister Alley, hasn't totally embraced the idea of raising money through a Web site. Still, are two businesses in downtown State College and are currently members on the Cogster Web site.

Downtown State College Improvement District (DSCID) Director Jody Alessandrine said that Cogster's intention of establishing customer loyalty is good for businesses in downtown State College, although it won't happen overnight.

"It's going to take time to build up that client loyalty and the investment in the local business."

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Lynn McGowan/Collegian

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