

Last update: August 18, 2006 – 11:01 PM

## **City official wants to boost levy to hire cops**

St. Paul Council Member Dan Bostrom also said he would work to find additional money to pay 25 officers.

[Jackie Crosby](#), Star Tribune

One of the most tax-averse members of the St. Paul City Council is suggesting that he would like to tack on another 1 percent to the 8.6 percent increase in the property tax levy that Mayor Chris Coleman is proposing for 2007 to hire more cops.

Council Member Dan Bostrom, a retired St. Paul police sergeant, said Friday that he will propose a 9.6 percent levy increase next year and that he will fight to find even more money to hire 25 new police officers. Coleman's budget calls for hiring five.

"My point is, if you're this deep in the tank and you're only getting five officers, why not go one more and get 25," Bostrom said. "Then that 1 percent has really done something significant."

Bostrom, however, also would have to find more money elsewhere in the budget to meet his goal of hiring more officers since raising the property tax levy by another 1 percent would raise an additional \$645,000 -- only enough to pay salaries for nine to 10 cops for a year, said Finance Director Matt Smith.

The owner of a home assessed at \$179,000 would pay about \$48 more in property taxes under Coleman's plan. Raising the city levy another percentage point would add between \$5 and \$6 for that homeowner.

The City Council must set the maximum property tax levy by Sept. 15, according to state law. After Sept. 15, the council could lower the levy, but it could not go higher.

The council's levy amount is subject to a mayoral veto. But for now, Coleman isn't immediately rejecting Bostrom's notion. "The mayor is open to taking a good, serious look at it and seeing what we can do," said Nancy Homans, Coleman's policy director.

Council President Kathy Lantry, who on Friday lashed out at Bostrom for failing to back the council's two previous attempts to raise the levy to hire more cops, had a similar reaction. "I'm certainly open to it," Lantry said. "Of course, I want to be sure that by doing so, we're funding sufficiently so we can afford to keep them."

Former Mayor Randy Kelly raised the levy for the first time in a dozen years in 2006 and said he wanted to use the 3 percent increase to hire 25 police officers. However, the amount raised by the increase was not enough to cover their salaries for a full year.

Coleman decided to hire only 12 additional officers this year, saying he feared he would have to lay off some of them because the city faced a budget gap that eventually grew to \$16.5 million.

Bostrom acknowledges that hiring 25 new officers in 2007 will mean paying for them in 2008.

"How do you sustain it for next year? You know what? You have to deal with it next year," he said. "You recognize there's a problem and decide that you're going to fund it."

Jackie Crosby • 651-298-1541 • [jcrosby@startribune.com](mailto:jcrosby@startribune.com)

©2006 Star Tribune. All rights reserved.