

# Lake County commissioners approve 0.5 percent sales tax hike

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Plain Dealer file photo Daniel P. Troy

PAINESVILLE, Ohio -- Lake County commissioners raised the county sales tax and lowered property taxes and a storm water fee Tuesday, a move they said will help keep the county solvent and avoid financial problems in 2013.

The three commissioners voted unanimously to raise the sales tax by 0.5 percent, bringing the new rate to 6.75 percent.

The new rate, which takes effect April 1, will be lower than Cuyahoga County's 7.75 percent rate, but will be higher than Geauga and Summit counties' rates, which are 6.5 percent. Commissioners emphasized it's a user's tax that is not charged on basic necessities, such as groceries, and shifts some of the tax burden from homeowners to consumers.

Commissioners lowered property taxes, a savings of about \$34 for every \$100,000 in home value for the 2012 tax year. They also decreased the stormwater residential fee by \$15 beginning in 2013 for the 15 communities in the county's stormwater management district.

The changes are expected to bring the county an additional \$20 million annually.

"A lot went into this process before we made a final decision," said Commissioner Robert Aufuldish, a Democrat. "Our budgets for the last seven years were reviewed by our finance directors, and they said we needed an increase in our sales tax. We already cut 120 jobs - 22 percent of our county staff - and without the boost we'd lose another 100 jobs and face a fiscal emergency in 2013."

Daniel Troy, president of the commissioners, said Lake County had the second lowest sales tax rate in the state at 6.25 percent, and the increase still keeps the county in the lower third of the state.

"Lake County is great place to live and run a business," he said. "Like everyone else, declining property values and state budget cuts have hurt us, so the sales tax increase will stop further bleeding."