

*Lakes - Pollution*

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**Money matters**

# Budget crunch looms

## Winter Park digging deep to pay for lake maintenance

**By Mark Andrews**

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — Lakes are Winter Park's crown jewels.

Along with majestic oaks, brick streets and upscale stores, these gems help define the city's character. Lakes Virginia, Osceola, Maitland and others also provide recreation for boaters, fishermen, skiers and — in less-polluted areas — swimmers.

But caring for lakes costs the city a lot of money. Only the police, fire and parks departments spend more.

If city commissioners stick to their pledge to hold the line on property taxes this fall, the city would have only 3 percent more money to work with next year.

Because that is less than the inflation rate, the city faces a money crunch for the budget year that begins Oct. 1.

Still, spending on weed control and police patrol for lakes is expected to increase substantially next year. Outlays for street sweeping and storm drainage improvements also would go up, according to budget proposals that

interim city manager Phyllis Allison submitted to the city commission last week.

A key factor in fighting pollution is controlling the stormwater that flushes dirt, oil, pesticides and other contaminants from streets and lawns into lakes. The city commission is considering forming a stormwater utility to

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raise money for holding ponds and other structures to collect and filter drainage.

If the program is adopted later this month, residents would be assessed at least \$2 per month, while businesses and institutions would pay a lot more. The fee would be added to city water and sewer bills starting next January and raise an estimated \$600,000 per year. But because the fee would be in effect only nine months of the next budget year, it would raise about \$450,000.

Not including new programs funded by the stormwater utility, spending for current drainage and lakes-related work would go up next year by 9 percent to about \$987,000, according to Allison's budget proposals.

That includes \$353,000 to kill pesky aquatic weeds, carry out lake safety programs and plant lakefront vegetation to help filter pollutants out of stormwater runoff.

The budget also calls for \$275,000 to sweep streets of debris that might otherwise go into storm sewers, \$252,000 for maintenance of the stormwater sewer system, \$55,000 to install and maintain traps on the end of drainage pipes to catch debris before it can get into lakes, and \$52,000 for police patrols of the city's larger lakes.

If the utility program is adopted, the city would spend another \$111,000 next year to hire a stormwater engineer and pay for administration of the stormwater utility.

This person would run the new utility, inspect drainage features of new developments, and coordinate another program starting in August that requires people who substantially renovate property to build systems to hold and filter the first gush of rainfall on their land.

If the city commission continues to fund lake and drainage pro-

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jects heavily from the general fund, \$245,000 would remain from stormwater utility fees next year to pay for construction of new drainage holding ponds and other stormwater control and lake restoration projects.

Allison has proposed that the city commission cap

the amount of general fund revenue that goes into drainage and lake improvements at \$625,000 per year from now on. Additional money for lake cleanup and drainage work would come from the proposed utility fee.

In addition, the city's newly increased boater fees will help pay for more police patrols of lakes on weekends and holidays, she said.

City officials will review the budget at 7:30 a.m. work sessions on each of the next three Mondays. The budget will be adopted after two public hearings in September.