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Westchester finance chief delivers tax-levy figures to board

WHITE PLAINS — It was quick and cordial and it might actually close the book on the Westchester County **tax** levy debate.

Having been subpoenaed earlier in the week, **Finance** Commissioner Ann Marie Berg appeared Friday before county legislators to deliver two sets of tax-levy figures.

They'll now be able to send tax warrants to municipalities by a March 1 deadline. And the figures the legislators use won't likely be County Executive Rob Astorino's when the full board takes the matter up for a vote Feb. 14. "We're using minus 2.2," said Chairman Ken Jenkins, a Yonkers **Democrat** who issued the legal writ without the support of some of his colleagues.

"That's what we have in our hands, and that's what we will be moving forward with."

Berg's appearance before the county board's **Budget** and Appropriations Committee took about five minutes. But the fallout over whether a subpoena was even necessary took a little longer. Jenkins said it accomplished the goal, while others said it was just wrong.

Issuing a subpoena goes over and above the abuse of power," said Legislator Sheila Marcotte, R-Tuckahoe. "I don't think this is necessary."

The Astorino administration called the situation silly and unnecessary and said Berg appeared voluntarily. Arguments over the tax levy have gone on since the Board of Legislators approved a \$1.78 billion budget in late December, but the administration said it was filled with phoney revenues and bad assumptions.

A series of vetoes, overrides and threats of a lawsuit followed, complicating what has historically been a routine process of figuring out how much **taxpayers** must shell out for county government.

Astorino's \$555 million levy included a 1 percent decrease while the board's \$548.4 million levy carried a 2.2 percent decrease."

"I think we're beating a dead horse here," Astorino's chief of staff, George Oros, said Friday. "The reality is, the problem we have is that we still think cutting **taxes** further while adding spending is a recipe for disaster. "Oros said the board should just veto Astorino's levy, a move Democrats say is unnecessary.

Legislator Marty Rogowsky, D-Harrison, had more a middle-of-the-road view. The board had asked for two sets of numbers but never received both, he and other Democrats said. Rogowsky said it would have been better to subpoena the records, rather than the commissioner. (Jenkins said that wasn't an option because only a judge can command records.) But nonetheless, Rogowsky said, the matter appeared to be behind the branches.