

Des Plaines says security's costing them at home

By Amy McLaughlin

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Des Plaines has put off several projects, including building new fire and police stations, to instead prepare for possible terrorist attacks.

That was the message from acting City Manager Bill Schneider in his testimony Tuesday before a committee of House Democrats in Washington, D.C.

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, an Evanston Democrat who invited Des Plaines officials to testify in the nation's capital, said she heard the message from Schneider and other local officials loud and clear.

Schakowsky said she's planning to support proposed legislation before the House to free up about \$4.4 billion for local communities. But, she said, it's not enough.

"While local governments are on the front lines, they simply don't have the resources that it takes to do the job. That's because the federal government has short-changed them," she said.

Schakowsky and other Democrats heard from several leaders of towns across the country about the cost of complying with federal guidelines on homeland security.

Officials from Los Angeles, El Paso, Texas, and Elizabeth, N.J., also spoke about the costs of

training emergency workers to respond to chemical and biological attacks and buying equipment needed to do it.

Local leaders were invited to speak to members of the Democratic Task Force on Homeland Security, a panel led by U.S. Rep. Carol Maloney, a New York Democrat.

In Des Plaines, a town with a \$120 million budget, officials estimated that when the nation's terror alert status is raised to Orange, or high alert, they spend about \$3,800 a week on police overtime. The city has spent about \$90,000 to-date on such overtime.

Also, city officials next year plan to buy anti-terrorism-related equipment for police, fire and public works employees at a cost of \$429,900. Special terrorism-related training for the so-called first responders is expected to cost about \$279,000 next year.

To compensate, Des Plaines officials have put off the purchase of a \$375,000 fire truck and their plans to build new police and fire stations, Schneider said.

"Ironically, without federal infusion of dollars, public safety could be jeopardized as a result of homeland security," he said.

Des Plaines officials said they also have special needs because their police department works with Chicago police to provide extra patrols for neighboring O'Hare International Airport.

Schneider said the extra effort to prepare has paid off in terms of being ready for such emergencies.

"It's a shift in resources to homeland security," Schneider said. "We've very ready. We're more ready than other towns."

Schakowsky said she hopes Tuesday's hearing and future meetings shed light on the need that local governments have for money to prepare for disasters. She said she and other Democrats are pushing for another \$1 billion for local communities in addition to the \$4.4 billion already proposed.

"When you're talking about a city with a total budget of \$120 million, these are big bucks," Schakowsky said.