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TREASURER

Ravalli discovers $800,000 in checks

Funds had not been deposited

The Associated Press

HAMILTON — Ravalli County employees working to reconcile the books in the treasurer's office told commissioners they found more than $800,000 in checks that hadn't been deposited.

Last week, county commissioners placed Treasurer Valerie Stamey on paid leave after months of complaints about overdue disbursements as well as complaints by residents that property tax checks hadn't been cashed. Commissioners placed Clerk and Recorder Regina Plattenberg and treasurer's deputy Dan Whitesitt temporarily in charge of daily operations of the treasurer's office.

Whitesitt told commissioners Tuesday that nearly $802,000 in checks from November and December were found in various locations in the office and were in the process of being posted in the county's accounting system and deposited. Workers hoped to have that cleared up by Wednesday, he said.

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Checks

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On Monday, the Department of Revenue gave the county until Feb. 3 to make a $4 million payment on its October, November and December taxes or face an estimated $37,000 penalty. Based on last year's figures, the agency estimates the county should have forwarded nearly $4.5 million to the state.

Commissioner J.R. Iman said he thinks the county needs to pay at least some of its bill to the state right away.

"And ask forgiveness," said Iman, until the investigation is complete and accounting updated.

Plattenberg said they are working with a state Department of Administration field accountant to develop a plan to bring the office up to date.

Commission Chairman Greg Chilcott said the county also has contacted some retired treasurers from outside the area who may be able to help the office get caught up. It's not clear how long that might take, he said.

A day after Stamey was placed on paid leave, she offered her side of the story to the South Valley Pachyderm Club in a 90-minute talk that Theresa Manzella recorded and posted on YouTube. Manzella is a Republican legislative candidate.

Stamey told the club she uncovered evidence of years of missing files and said illegal tax liens had been filed against property owners. She said she called for the FBI to investigate.

On Tuesday, Stamey deflected blame for the uncashed checks and told KTMF she hardly ever handled deposits.

But workers reported some of the uncashed checks were found in a bag that Stamey had been working on.

Sheriff Chris Hoffman told the Ravalli Republic that the FBI has contacted the county.

The commission plans to meet today to discuss interim management of the office and consider state laws that could affect its dealings with Stamey, who was appointed in September.