

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
BUDGET WORK SESSION V**

June 6, 2017

5:00 PM

Board Members Present: J. Harry Lange, Susan Andrews, Martha Chewning, Becky Langston, Jim Woods. Staff Present: Randy Dowling, County Manager; Nancy D. McMichael, County Clerk.

Others Present: Jimmy Carver (EMS), Thomas Faulkner (EMS), Bucky Search (EMS), Mike Brown (Public Works), Wayne Morris (Tax Assessor), Brian Williams (Community Development), Joe Weldon (Coroner), Vickie Jamerson (Tax Commissioner), Stacy Haralson (Clerk of Superior Court), Mike Jolley (Sheriff), Thomas Lakes (Probate), Jack McClung (Chief of Council of Fire Chiefs), Byron Hawkins (Chief, Northwest Harris VFD), Richard McKinney (Chief, Antioch VFD), Christy Searcy (Accounting Clerk), Clint Chastain (Severn Trent Finance Officer), Cassandra Hernandez (Severn Trent Finance), Dylan Lindhorst (Severn Trent Finance).

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Lange called the meeting to order and said the purpose was to continue discussion regarding the proposed budget for FY 17/18.

Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that he had previously provided the list of items deleted or added as a result of the June 1 Budget Work Session and that he has no new information to add.

Chairman Lange said that after the June 1 Work Session, the budget was adjusted by about \$840,000; and that a couple of items have come up to include the body armor and fingerprint machine. Mr. Dowling said that another request has come up, from Northwest Harris Volunteer Fire Department, which will be addressed in tonight's Regular Session, for the County to pay the grant match of \$12,143. Commissioner Andrews said that the Board had discussed leaving the Valley Partnership fees in the budget until clarification had been received.

REQUEST FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION. Commissioner Langston made the motion at 5:07 PM for an Executive Session for the purpose of discussing a personnel matter. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Woods and passed unanimously.

RESUME WORK SESSION. The motion to go back into Work Session was made by Commissioner Langston, seconded by Commissioner Woods, and passed unanimously.

BUDGET FY 17/18

Commissioner Langston said that her suggestions for reducing the budget include taking the "big ticket" items that are absolutely necessary and postpone some of the items; that she has an issue with raising spending over one year to about 25% over last year; that she has a problem with using reserves to balance the budget, especially if a tax increase will be needed next year; and that if revenues increase the budget can be amended. Her suggestions included the Community Center debt (\$559,000), the four deputies and equipment, the fire department disability insurance that is mandated, the \$110,000 carryover for fire services, the cameras for the Prison, the 2% COLA for employees, the 911 equipment, and possibly the part-time park attendant for Ellerslie Park, for a total of not quite \$2.5 million. She said that she would postpone the financial software, the GIS, the IT, and additional personnel hires.

Discussion included that the IT position may be a wash based on current costs but is needed for efficiency and accountability of computer related expenditures; that while the GIS is not required for the 911 system, it is necessary to maintain the system and add various information or it will become obsolete within a year or so; that the "big ticket" items are necessary; that if the true cost of living is not 2%, it could be reduced; that while restructuring the Community Center debit has been looked at, it can't be done, except to refinance which would probably result in a higher interest rate; that it may be necessary to reduce current personnel; that purchases could be delayed until something basically dies or until January; and that the Board has to be prudent for the next few years and not get into a potentially bad situation; that GIS is also a safety issue if not kept current.

Millage. Commissioner Andrews suggested that the Board consider taking the .36 of the possible 1.36 millage increase from Solid Waste to reduce the overall possible millage rate from 1.36 to 1. Commissioner Woods said that the possible 1.36 increase may be insufficient for one year; and Commissioner Andrews said that the Board could do 1.5 or 2 to be comfortable, but such an increase would not make the citizens comfortable, to which Commissioner Langston agreed. Discussion included that the proposed budget now reflects a possible 1.36 millage increase; that the last change in the rate was a reduction around 2008 of about 1.33 mills and the possible 1.36 increase would take it back to 2007 levels; that the County has one of the lowest millage rates in the State; that while an increase of 2 may be necessary at least two Commissioners said they could not support such an increase; that while a possible millage increase may take place the amount of the possible increase may be from 1.36 to 1.76, with consensus in favor of 1.76. Mr. Dowling said that on a \$200,000 home a 1.5 mill increase will equate to a \$120 per increase in property taxes and that a 2 mill increase will equate to \$160 a year increase. [Public Hearings regarding any millage increase will be held in August.]

Jail Fund. Currently around \$617,000, of which \$500,000 is proposed to transfer to General Fund to pay for a portion of the Jail staffing, leaving \$117,000. Discussion took place as to where the Jail Fund comes from and what it can be used for to include that funds will accumulate from court fines and could be used for the cameras and body armor and tasers for deputies who may need to go into the inmate section of the Jail from time to time where such items may be necessary.

Cameras for Prison. A necessary purchase (\$100,000) from Jail Fund.

Food Expenses at Jail and Prison. Discussion included that there may be possible savings by having the same company provide the food for the Jail and the Prison, but that due to the calorie intake it may not be possible.

Medical Expenses at Jail and Prison. Discussion included that there may be possible savings by having the same company provide medical services for the Jail and the Prison.

Body Armor. A necessary purchase (\$24,420) from Jail Fund. Sheriff Jolley, in response to questions, said that all deputies currently have body armor, but it has to be replaced every five years and cannot be refurbished because the Kevlar material is no longer effective.

Tasers. A necessary purchase (\$4,920) from Jail Fund. Sheriff Jolley, in response to questions, said that 60 is part of the name brand (Taser 60) and he needs about 48 total.

Fingerprint Machine. A wash as it is a reimbursable grant.

Fire Department Match. Unallocated request (\$12,143); is not part of the \$110,000 rollover. (See Regular Session minutes of June 6.)

Valley Partnership. Put back in budget (\$32,500), pay monthly, and a decision will be made later as to continue or not.

Ellerslie Park. Discussion included that if the park opens, it has to be maintained, and if it can't be maintained, it doesn't need to be opened; that paving of the park drive should be delayed; that work being done by EMC Engineering regarding the paving of the drive should be delayed; and that crush and run/gravel should be put down until the drive can be paved; that there is no benefit in paving the park; and that unless someone is working at the park and on site, any improvements will be destroyed. Brian Williams, of Community Development, said that the idea of not paving the road in the park is not a bad idea; that he can continue working with inmates and guards to continue getting the park cleared. Mr. Dowling said that if the consensus is to have the road graveled, rather than paved, the work could be done in-house by Public Works, but it would take a while. Mike Brown, Public Works, in response to questions said that his department could do the work, but it would have to be done over a period of time and as time permits. Consensus was to not pave the drive, but to gravel it, with the work being done by Public Works as time permits and to delete the part-time park attendant (\$25,042).

Salary Increase of 2%. The amount is about \$143,000 for General Fund, Water Works, Solid Waste, 911, and Airport, of which \$116,000 is in General Fund. Consensus was to leave the 2% COLA in the budget.

Financial Software. Discussion took place regarding the current financial system, which is basically defunct, and the proposed new financial package, which will help alleviate the issues being faced in comparing the proposed budget with last year's budget. Consensus was to leave the financial software in the proposed budget.

IT Position. Discussion included that the consultant being utilized for IT purposes has been working quite a lot lately in connection with the high-speed internet to various county facilities and assisting with the internet issues of the library and community center; and that having the position that is under the County's control 8 hours a day is necessary for computer upgrades, phone message system upgrades, computer internet patches, and other computer-related work that is not being done as quickly as it should to include fire walls; that a consultant on call at \$120 an hour, plus a minimum \$100 trip fee, is not the best fix for the County. Mr. Dowling said that the week he started work with the County, his computer crashed and upon learning the IT person would not be on site for a few days, he took his computer down to Columbus and waited for it to be fixed

Recycling. Discussion took place, with consensus being to delete recycling from the proposed budget as it is not feasible for the County to continue such expense.

Probate. Thomas Lakes, Probate Judge, appeared before the Board and said that he does not have the numbers yet of the percentage increase for each of the hourly rates he is considering for his employees; that due to open enrollment, there have been changes in the election of benefits for some of the employees in his office that may factor into having a little more room in talking about salary increases for them since the cost (of the benefit) has already been included in the proposed budget due to the County absorbing those costs.

Chairman Lange said that another Budget Work Session is not scheduled and possibly won't be needed; that the Board will hear the citizens tonight during the first Public Hearing and then again during the second Public Hearing on June 20.

ADJOURNMENT

MINUTES APPROVAL. The motion to approve these Work Session minutes was made during Regular Session of June 20, 2017, by Commissioner Woods, seconded by Commissioner Chewning, and passed unanimously.