

CUMBERLAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MAY 26, 2005, 5:30PM
SPECIAL MEETING
BUDGET

PRESENT: Chairman John T. Henley, Jr.
Vice Chairman Billy R. King
Commissioner J. Breeden Blackwell
Commissioner Talmage S. Baggett
Commissioner Jeannette Council
Commissioner Diane Wheatley
James Martin, County Manager
Juanita Pilgrim, Deputy County Manager
Cliff Spiller, Asst. County Manager
Amy Cannon, Asst. County Manager
Sara VanderClute, Public Information Officer
Grainger Barrett, County Attorney
Budget Staff
Marsha Fogle, Clerk to the Board

ABSENT: Commissioner Kenneth Edge

Chairman Henley called the meeting to order.

1. Department Head Appeals
- A. Library – Appearing: Jerry Thrasher

Jerry Thrasher asked the Board to consider adding money to the FY06 library budget as follows:

Priority 1:	Increase Hours at Cliffdale Regional Branch	\$133,278
Priority 2:	Increase Hours at North Regional Branch	\$114,131
Priority 3:	Increase Hours at East Regional Branch	\$107,455
Priority 4:	Books Budget – partial restoration	\$ 70,000
Priority 5:	Database Services – partial restoration	\$ 23,000
Priority 6:	Audiovisual materials restoration	\$ 20,000
Priority 7:	Carpet replacement – high traffic areas	\$ 20,000

Mr. Thrasher said the above additions would help to restore hours at the three branches from 59 hours a week to 70 hours a week. He stated that the book budget is 30% lower than it was in 1999 and noted that the Library has not received any new money for books since 1999. Audiovisual costs continue to increase. The carpet has not been replaced since the library moved into the new building, 19 years ago.

Commissioner Wheatley inquired if money for maintenance, i.e. electricity, custodial, etc. have been included in the above request. Mr. Thrasher said no; utilities don't change much since the library has to maintain certain levels of heating and air conditioning regardless of whether it is open.

Commissioner Blackwell inquired if citizens had to wait to use computers. Mr. Thrasher said some would wait from 40-45 minutes.

Mr. Thrasher noted an increase in the use of meeting rooms at the libraries. In response to a question he noted that 156,000 library cards have been issued.

Commissioner Council noted that the Board has restored money to the library since the cuts were made several years ago. She said she hoped that the money the County has this year could go toward increases in salary for county employees.

Commissioner Blackwell told the Board that the County needs to begin thinking about building another branch library to relieve the Cliffdale Branch.

b. Sheriff

Sheriff Butler asked the Board to consider providing \$47,675 to hire a computer technician. The Sheriff noted that since the Sheriff's Office entered the computer age in 1996 with 5 desktop computers and 2 printers it has grown to 220 desk computers, 180 in-car computers, a major automated records network and other supporting systems. He said there are only 2 people to manage this technology. He asked the Board to consider a new position (computer technician) to help manage his computer system. He noted that the two people he currently has work 24-7, with one being on call all of the time.

Commissioner Baggett said he would support the Sheriff's request. Commissioner Blackwell asked the Sheriff to consider consolidation of his dispatch office with Emergency Management. He suggested management staff, the Sheriff and Doc Nunnery get together after the budget has been adopted to look at the possibility of combining the two dispatch centers.

c. Social Services

Bill Scarlett, Director, DSS, asked the Board to consider an appropriation of funds to be used for performance bonuses. He noted the cost associated with turnovers and training new people. He suggested department heads could in fact administer a fair performance pay plan.

d. Freddy Johnson, President, Fire Chiefs' Association

Mr. Johnson asked the Board to consider providing funds for fire departments that respond to rescue calls. He noted these departments are providing a service that had been previously provided by the Cumberland County Rescue Squad. The departments need funding for training, equipment and fuel. He asked for \$300,000. When asked how the funding should be accomplished, by an increase in fire tax or from the county's general fund, Mr. Johnson said he would leave that up to the Commissioners.

Commissioner Baggett suggested that the most appropriate place to get the money would be from the fire service district tax.

Commissioner Blackwell suggested it may be time to look at a new way of funding our fire service, the establishment of a central fund, whereby money could be distributed equitably to provide fire service county-wide.

Commissioner Henley noted that to say the fire departments have not received any additional money, is not accurate, because of the recent revaluation where the

Commissioners did not reduce the fire tax rate to make it revenue neutral. That resulted in an increase of 10-12% to fire departments. He said if the County is going to fund the fire departments in addition to the fire tax, there needs to be some accountability and the county should have more oversight. It was suggested that language in the fire protection contract could set forth additional specific areas of accountability.

The Board discussed whether or not a referendum should be held to allow the citizens an opportunity to have their say as to whether or not they want to pay more taxes to enhance and provide more money for the fire departments to provide rescue type services.

2. Cost of Living Allowance/401K

James Martin, County Manager, shared some cost figures for COLA's and 401K contributions. He recommended that the Board approve a 5% COLA and a 1% 401K contribution/match.

He reviewed what is required of the county and employees as far as the Local Government Retirement Act is concerned. Employees must contribute 6% of their gross salary and the County contributes 4.9% (except for law enforcement officers).

Chairman Henley suggested that to require a 1% match by employees for a 401K Plan would not work well for employees at the lower end of the scale. He said he thought it would be more valuable to them to give them the money and let them set up their own IRA. He also noted that we need to address some positions in the county which are hard to fill and increase those salaries.

Commissioner Blackwell suggested that the Board consider a \$1,000 minimum on the COLA.

Commissioners Council and King urged adoption of the 5% COLA with a 1% 401K contribution. They stated they were flexible whether the 1% 401K employer contribution should be matched by an employee contribution.

Commissioner Wheatley asked the Manager if the above appropriations were sustainable. The Manager said he believed they were.

Board members discussed tying the 401K contribution to a Wellness Program for county employees. If employees participated in Wellness Program the county would provide a contribution of 1% of their gross salary to a 401K for them.

MOTION: Commissioner Council moved to approve the Manager's recommendation.

MOTION DIED FOR LACK OF A SECOND.

The Board discussed whether or not the COLA increase, the 401K contribution, some money for the library, sheriff and fire departments could all be funded and which items would be recurring and/or one-time expenses.

The Manager noted that the Board will be receiving a request in the next week in the amount of \$1.5 million for security at the courthouse.

The Board asked the Manager to look to see if providing some additional funding for the Sheriff, Library and Fire Departments could be funded based on money projected to be available, keeping in mind the \$1.5 million request that will be coming to the Board in the next week.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 9:00PM.

Clerk to the Board