

Hamilton County Commissioner's Court

Public Hearing on Proposed Budget

Budget Workshop

Friday, August 30, 2019

9:00 A.M.

Hamilton County Commissioner's Court met for a public hearing on the proposed Hamilton County Budget on Friday, August 30, 2019 at 9:00 A.M. with the following members present: County Judge Mark Tynes, Commissioners Johnny Wagner, Keith Allen Curry, Lloyd Huggins and Dickie Clary.

Tynes called the meeting to order and a quorum was established.

The purpose of this meeting was a public hearing on the proposed budget.

Wagner led the invocation and Tynes followed with the pledges.

Tynes opened the floor for the public to speak.

Jim Oosterhoff began by questioning the court about the salary increase for the elected officials wanting to know where they came up with the \$2,000.00 figure. He said that the cost of living is only around \$800.00 per year.

The court explained that there was really no strategy in the number and also let him know that the elected officials had not had a raise in three years.

Oosterhoff also asked about the salary supplement for the County Judge.

Tynes explained to Oosterhoff that there was only one Justice of the Peace in this county and only the County Judge can fill his shoes should he be out of the county. He also told him that the County Judge serves as Emergency Management Coordinator and as the Emergency Management Director for the county. For a small stipend the court has eliminated an entire department through eliminating the Justice of the Peace Precinct 3.

Oosterhoff then asked about the County Attorney budget and why it went up \$17,000.00.

Tynes explained to him that about four years ago the county elected at that time that all county officials have the same base wage. The County Attorney was paid considerably less than everybody else. The County Sheriff is paid more than everyone else. Tynes believes this occurred when the county assumed the City of Hamilton and the City of Hico contracts causing the sheriff to assume more responsibility therefore his salary was raised to compensate. Once

those contracts went away the salary was never readjusted. He said that if we are going to pay everybody the same wage then let's pay everybody the same wage excluding the sheriff.

Oosterhoff then asked if the County Attorney was involved enough to earn that pay increase. Tynes, Huggins, Wagner and Clary agreed that the County Attorney is very proactive with this court and does a lot of things that he does not have to.

Oosterhoff said that he understood and thanked the court for the answers.

Damon Chumney stood and thanked the court for the opportunity to speak.

Chumney questioned the court about the property taxes on the proposed budget.

Tynes explained to him that on the first few pages of the proposed budget were figured on the numbers from last year because that is the only numbers that the county had at the time. We have since received the certified totals on August 2, 2019 on the property taxes and that page 7 on the proposed budget reflects the numbers.

Chumney said you all ran as conservative and it doesn't look like that's what the court was doing.

Chumney then went to the County Judges budget. He said the salary was about a 5% increase and the salary supplement increase was about a 33% increase and he had concerns with the fuel and oil and vehicle repair and maintenance. He said the judges packet ended up being about a \$4,500.00 increase over all.

Tynes said that he already addressed this topic, but that he would address it again. He asked would you rather this court fund an entire department because somebody has to step in for the Justice of the Peace when he is gone. The County Judge is the only one that has the judicial authority to do that. Doesn't it seem reasonable that one official be compensated a little bit more for being on call from time to time? There may come a time when I am gone that the court might face the idea of opening the Justice of the Peace Precinct 3 back up. Because the County Judge does not have to magistrate and the County Judge does not have to fill in for the Justice of the Peace.

Chumney said that he understood, but he did not agree with it.

Huggins said we are probably spending \$5,000.00 to save \$80,000.00 and that's a pretty good trade.

Tynes said that the vehicle was involved for filling in for the Justice of the Peace and for the Emergency Management Coordinator.

Chumney said that these were new items in the budget that weren't there last year and we did the same job we did last year. I think you have explained it, but I am not sure that I agree with it.

Chumney went on to ask about the longevity pay and the increase that was budgeted this year. He said that there was about a 60% increase from last year.

Tynes said that if you look at the money in the precincts and the money in the general fund, I think you will find that the figures are pretty much the same.

Clary said that the numbers are deceiving, but that's just because they are in different places. If you will look you can see that the numbers are pretty much the same. The only time longevity will go up is when a tenured employee jumps from one tier to the next.

Tynes did point out that elected officials are not eligible for longevity pay.

Chumney then went on to speak about the contingency funds in the general fund and in the precincts. He said that he thinks that kind of defeats the purpose of a budget not knowing what we are going to potentially spend it on.

Huggins gave Chumney an example in precinct 3 as to why we may need the contingency fund. His example was about some of the flooding that we have had in the last few years and the affect it has had on some of his bridges. He has one bridge that needs to be replaced or the next flood will take it out. This was something that this time last year nobody would have known. This is where I think the contingency might address a need that you couldn't forecast, but is a genuine need. We don't want to end up having to close a road because the bridge is out for months. He said that is just an example for you.

Chumney said that if we need to replace a bridge that is something that needs to be put in the budget.

Huggins said that if he could have looked down that crystal ball a year ago that he would have done it.

Chumney said that he had noticed that the contingency in the precinct had doubled from last year except for Clary's. He thanked Clary for not putting it in his budget.

Tynes asked Chumney if he had ever known of the court spending \$1.00 out of the money that had been put into the contingency?

Chumney said no that he had not, but we don't know what this money could be spent for.

Tynes told Chumney that they would be having the same conversation from his chair every year because every year that he is in office he would add a contingency.

Chumney thanked the court for the explanation.

Chumney went on to the County Attorney's budget and said that he thought that increase was rather large from last year, but he knew that the court had already addressed that.

Chumney spoke about the sheriff's salary and stated that he thinks when the law enforcement contracts between the City of Hico and the City of Hamilton went away that the salary should have been cut because his responsibilities went down.

Chumney then questioned the raise in the courthouse repairs and maintenance line item.

Clary said that the increase actually is not high enough. The next major thing that needs to happen to the courthouse was the outside windows to be repainted and reglazed. He said that we are actually probably past the time period in which the Historical Commission would like for it to have been done. He said that just to take care of the windows the estimate that we had received, he thought it exceeded \$200,000.00. He said that number in that line item has gone up quite a bit, but really is not enough to maintain the building.

Chumney also asked about the increase in the communications department.

Tynes said that that increase had dwindled down to \$500.00 per position now.

Chumney asked about the new deputy position that had been added in to proposed budget. He thought that it was totally unnecessary.

Tynes said that the reasoning behind that position was something that needed to be taken up with the Sheriff's Department.

Chumney said that he understood that you couldn't tell the sheriff how to run his office, but from the financing standpoint the court could address that indirectly.

Chumney then went on to tell of some incidents that people had had with the Sheriff's Office that weren't good.

Tynes said again that this is something that needs to be taken up with the Sheriff's Office because it had nothing to do with this court. He said that Chief Madison has requested this deputy for an administrative deputy position. One that will not be on patrol the duties would consist of serving civil papers, bailiffing and transporting inmates.

Chumney continued with all that said that he opposes the proposed budget. He then thanked the court for their time and their patience.

Clary had one comment on the contingencies in the other precincts. He said I do support it because of the reasons that had been discussed. He said that he had been in office for long enough that he pretty much knows what his annual expenditures will be. He said there is a little bit of money in different places that he would use if there happen to be an emergency. He could have called it contingency, but the money is in other places and that's where he would get that if needed. He just chose not to put that money into contingency as a line item by itself.

Richard Layne then stood and thanked the court for the opportunity to speak. He said that he has been attending Commissioner's Court since 2000. He has watched this court change. He said this court has done a good reasonable job on this budget. He said that he does not like contingency, but that it was a legal way to handle things. He said as far as the deputy position, he had watched this court speak about this topic. He said he really thought that the Sheriff's Office was going to have a hard time getting it. He said that there has got to be a point somewhere where the department runs as staffed. He said it's the same story every budget and it's the same department. We go through this in cycles. He also mentioned that the county had a windfall of extra funds this year because the property reappraisals new homes and the elected officials are getting a raise and the taxpayers aren't getting anything.

Layne then asked Tynes why we had a closed session on the budget?

Tynes replied that it had to do with personnel matters. He said that it was a personnel matter that needed to be discussed with the court and that no decisions were made during the closed session.

Layne said that he had been attending meetings for a lot of years and the he has always opposed deficit spending. He said that the contingency fund was sort of like deficit spending. Layne says that it is legal, but he still thought it was deficit spending.

Tynes said the contingency is not deficit spending until it is spent and there would have to be a majority of at least 3 people to approve money out of the contingency to be spent. Then the county would see where that money was being spent.

Layne finished by saying that this court has been the best one that he has seen. He said that there is a little too much kumbaya going on but that could be addressed at a later day. Layne said that he appreciated the time to speak and the explanations given.

Tynes did offer that deficit spending and deficit budgeting are two entirely different things. Tynes said that since he has been in office the court has not deficit spent. We have adopted a deficit budget, but we have not deficit spent. The budget is based on all anticipated revenues plus if need be reserves.

The public hearing ended at 10:25 A.M.

The court recessed at 10:30 A.M. and came back into session at 10:37 A.M.

Tynes then confirmed the fiscal year 2019-2020 budget schedule with the court.

A motion was made by Huggins and seconded by Clary to accept and approve the proposed salary and expensed for elected officials for fiscal year 2019-2020. The motion carried unanimously.

The court then went onto the proposed budget and spoke about things such as the annex elevator, salary increases within the communications department and the extra deputy position in the Sheriff's Office. No decisions were made at that time and they were going to

reach out to Chief Madison and ask for his input on the request from the Sheriff's Office and communications budget.

Tynes adjourned the court at 11:55 A.M.

County Judge

Attest: _____

County Clerk