

Council adopts budget; more cuts imminent

By Debbie Lowe
Staff writer

Carroll County Council met twice last week in an attempt to develop a budget to stop constant overspending of projected income by department heads. They were successful in that endeavor. However, the budget, adopted Thursday morning, may have to be trimmed even further before it is submitted to the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF) for approval.

Council members were told by DLGF the county could only support a \$5 million budget for 2008 after a \$6.8 million budget submitted last September was not approved. The submitted budget was trimmed from \$8.2 million in department requests approved by county commissioners. The preliminary budget adopted Thursday morning was \$5.543 million, nearly a half-million more than deemed acceptable by DLGF.

Council next devised a method by which the \$5 million threshold would be achieved. The mechanism involved the cooperation of commissioners. The plan was to request commissioners defer repayment of a portion of a \$675,000 inter-fund loan from the cumulative bridge account for six years, with repayment to begin in June 2009. A second component of the plan was for commissioners to repay \$150,000 from a \$500,000 appropriation from the general fund for highway department salaries in 2003. With those two steps in place, showing the additional income, the council could submit the adopted amended budget with confidence it would be approved by DLGF.

However, Council decided to discuss the most current budget reductions with department heads in a Thursday morning public meeting. During the meeting, department heads reacted with a wide range of emotions. Some accepted their fated numbers and agreed to work within the new limitations. Two did not accept what they were handed.

Carroll Superior Court Judge Jeffrey Smith and Carroll Circuit Court Judge Donald Currie strongly objected to further reductions in what both considered "bare bones" current appropriations.

"There are no more cuts to be

made," Smith said. "I think you've asked us to do the impossible."

"What services are we supposed to do without?" he questioned council president Nancy S. Cripe.

"That's up to you," Cripe responded.

When it was suggested the courts share employees in order to eliminate one full-time position, Smith contested the idea.

"You're asking us to do the impossible," he said.

"People have their right to their day in court," Currie said and suggested council members fully consider the courts' budget reductions before they decided to subsidize residents at Carroll Manor. He challenged the council to look at other departments and analyze whether they have made equal reductions in spending as he and Smith have done.

"You're asking us to eliminate two more deputies," Cripe told the judges about their refusal to accept the council's budget numbers.

"It's clear we have the authority to do what we need to do," Smith said referencing a previous judicial mandate from him for an additional employee at the time for his court.

The judges reiterated their threat in writing the following day. Cripe was presented with a letter signed by both judges dated April 4. It read in part "...If the council can successfully persuade the Indiana Supreme Court that the courts of Carroll County should be relieved of any of the responsibilities currently required by law due to the fiscal circumstances of the county, then possibly further cuts could be made. However, at present funding levels, it will be a challenge to meet our mandated requirements and any further reductions would necessitate the courts cutting essential services to the community. Therefore, the courts of Carroll County are not in any position to further reduce the 2008 budgets."

For a review of all budget reductions made by the council, visit the *Comet* Web site at www.carrollcountycomet.com and click on "Government Meetings and Agendas" in blue on the left on the home page. Scroll down to find a chart that lists each general fund department and their current budget appropriations.

Carroll Manor

Assistant superintendent Diane Brown received the budget reduction numbers for the facility Thursday morning. She said with only \$261,700 to spend, staff would have to be eliminated from the payroll.

It was noted that approximately \$84,000 had already been spent this year. Council members made allowances for the overspending this year but told Brown no such allowances would be made for 2009, which will reduce the appropriation to nearly \$211,000.

"Is there anything we can do to get rid of negative publicity?" Brown asked the council. She said calls were received asking if the Manor was closing or what was happening which, in her opinion, hampered efforts to fill beds.

Council member Rob Baker told Brown that by virtue of the fact that she was standing in a public meeting complaining about the situation, she was in fact proliferating the negative publicity.

Other departments

County clerk Laura Sterrett, surveyor Wayne Chapman, auditor Beth Myers and sheriff Tony Burns all accepted their budgetary fates.

Former county employee Phyllis Moore requested she be paid \$6,142.85 as approved by commissioners for overtime, vacation and compensatory time not used before the end of 2007.

Council member Steve Ashby made a motion to pay the claim. He stated in an earlier meeting that because of the wording of the personnel policy, council would ultimately be forced to fund the request. The motion passed in a three-to-two vote with Ann Brown and Carl Abbott not supporting the motion.

"I begrudgingly voted for it because it's been abused," Baker told Moore.

Council will propose commissioners reduce the number of paid holidays from 14 to 10 in 2008. The actual holidays would be left to commissioners' discretion.

Council member Jerry Hendress made the motion to adopt the revised budget of \$5,543,382.30 effective April 3, 2008.

Treasurer's Office

Ann Brown announced errors totaling \$68,005.92 were recently

discovered in the treasurers' office cash sheet. However, the office continues to be \$47,165.72 out of balance with the cash sheet. That number, which according to Brown amounts to "four years of errors," has remained constant for several months and is expected to be zeroed out by the Indiana State Board of Accounts (SBOA) to achieve a totally balanced fund and account ledger.

Brown reported treasurer Jane Brewington had not made bank deposits since March 7. She said when confronted, Brewington said there were computer issues which prohibited her from posting checks.

Brewington was criticized in a prior SBOA audit for the same practice. SBOA noted at the time state law dictates deposits be made daily.

Brewington was also criticized by council members for her policy of refusal to take property tax payments before tax bills were mailed to property owners.

Brown recommended council issue an edict to Brewington ordering her to make daily deposits and accept advanced property tax payments. Council consensus was to request commissioners' attorney Barry Emerson write a letter to direct Brewington, listing those expectations.

Brewington said in an April 3 follow-up interview she had not deposited checks since March 17. She admitted that her office, upon her direction, refused advanced property tax payments. She said the county could not spend that money because it had to go through the tax settlement process before allocation.

"I'll do it if it helps the county," she said.

However, auditor Myers said had the money been deposited in a timely manner, it could have collected more interest for the county. She also explained there is a distribution formula for property tax money and that formula could be employed with advanced and delinquent tax collections as an advance against the settlement amount.

Council will next meet April 15 and 29, both at 8:30 a.m.



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Commissioners From page 1A

from \$80,000 in the line item to pay for flood debris removal. He said council members inquired if the county was obligated to provide dust control.

Commissioners tabled the matter until the April 21 meeting when Francis will present a power-point description of the 2008 road plan.

Building permits

Commissioners took no action on a building permit fee schedule recommended by Carroll County Area Plan Commission. Zoning administrator Kathy Mylet said the schedule allowed for more costly permits for accessory buildings than commercial ones.

APC member Pete Wagoner urged commissioners to adopt the fees. He said APC was criticized for not acting sooner to increase fees. He said members were provided fees charged by neighboring counties to consider in making decisions. He said they "digested the information pretty well" before developing recommendations.

The decision was tabled and APC was directed to review the proposed rate changes at the next APC meeting.

Brown blasts Comet editorial

Commissioner Brown said he "took exception" to the recent *Comet* editorial which stated that he, along with other county leaders, heard for three

and four years from the Indiana State Board of Accounts in audit exit interviews the county auditor and treasurer did not balance the books between the two offices. The editorial stated that he and the others did not address the issue with either of the elected officials in a public meeting to require them to adhere to the Indiana Code that mandates they balance monthly.

"I found it very offensive," he said in the commissioners' meeting. "I did not cover anything up."

He said the SBOA said there was a discrepancy between the two offices and called it a "simple posting error in the treasurer's office."

He said the SBOA representative did indicate if the treasurer was not re-elected to the position, she would have to "make that money up" when she left office.

Brown further explained that after receiving the first two SBOA audits he took a copy to the Delphi *Comet* office.

"How is that covering up?" he said.

Other business

Steve Casper of Communication Consulting Services was granted authority to activate cost saving telecommunication measures for the county. He said examination revealed the firm could save the county \$256.36/month. The fee for the

service is 50 percent of the savings on a monthly basis.

Dean Scott, president of the newly formed Carroll County Agriculture Association presented the group's first handbook for government officials, supported by Carroll County Farm Bureau, Pork Producers, Purdue University Extension/Carroll County and the Indiana Farm Bureau.

Scott said the purpose of the handbook was to provide government officials with a single reference source about agriculture in the county, including the effect on the economy and health of county residents.

Burial benefits for veterans were reduced to \$100 per death.


The next meeting will be April 21 at 6 p.m.

Drainage Board

County surveyor Wayne Chapman reported seven work orders received in March. He said he expected the number to increase when farmers are able to get back into the fields this spring.

A special drainage board with Howard County representatives will be May 7. Mears and Brown were appointed to represent Carroll County on the board. The meeting is necessary to address issues germane to both counties with a shared drain.

The next meeting will be May 5 at 8:30 a.m.



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