

The Barnes County Commission met in Special Budget session on Thursday, September 18, 2014 with Phil Leitner, Cindy Schwehr, Eldred Knutson, John Froelich, and Rodger Berntson present. Chairman Knutson called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m., and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The 2014 Working Budget was reviewed to determine where year-end carryover balances would likely be. The 2015 Budget Requests were reviewed, and the following items were discussed:

- **Auditor's** request to continue funding the current staffing level upon possible retirement of one employee was denied. This would be a savings of approximately \$38,881. In the event that the employee does not retire in 2015, the General Fund would have to absorb the cost. Staffing in the Auditor's office will be revisited mid-year, to see how things are going at the reduced staffing level.
- **Tax Director's** request for a half-time Zoning Coordinator was removed, as the general consensus was to wait and see how it goes this coming year, now that the Tax Director's staff is fully trained. This would decrease Dept 001-3400 by \$34,439. Their request for a four-wheel drive vehicle in 001-0600-6961 was reduced from \$25,000 to \$15,000 – a savings of \$10,000.
- **State's Attorney's** proposal to add a full-time benefitted Administrative Assistant at a Grade 7 (rather than a non-benefitted, half-time position, with the other half being paid by Abused Persons Outreach Center for victim advocacy) was approved, contingent upon a potential retirement. If grant funding is received, the cost would be roughly the same; however, if the County has to pick up the balance, the cost would be approximately \$11,113 (this calculation does not include taxes or benefits, except for "employee-only health insurance").
- **Clerk of Court's** request was adjusted to reflect the elimination of one full-time employee prior to January 1, 2015 per the State's recommendation, with all positions funded for only six months, as they will be taken over by the State as of July 1. This would be a savings of approximately \$19,873. Error: \$3,000 was inadvertently budgeted in 001-1100-6858 Mental Health, and should have been entered in as 001-1100-6885 for Termination Costs. A correction will be made.
- **Sheriff's** request for pay increases for certain officers was revised to include only an increase for Jed Reile to \$19.33 per hour. This would be a savings of \$18,131.
- **Veterans Services** request for 011-0800-6101 Part-Time Wages was reduced from \$11,136 to \$9,136 and 011-0800-6200 Freight and Postage was reduced from \$250 to \$150, a savings of \$2,100.
- **Weed Control** budget line 016-0000-5356 State Reimbursements was increased from \$15,000 to \$16,000 per Jim McAllister's recommendation.
- **Corrections** budget line 026-1600-6821 was added at a cost of \$3,600 for the County's annual portion of the Community Service cost-share.

Beth Didier, Auditor, presented a proposal for next year's funding of the various County and State levies which reflected a decrease in total mills levied from 100.23 mills in 2013 to 92.99 mills in 2014, a reduction of 7.24 mills, which would allow the County to remain revenue neutral, meaning that the County's levy request would not cost taxpayers any more than it did last year. This proposal also included a 4% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for all employees.

The Commission discussed alternatives, with the shared goal of remaining revenue neutral, or possibly decreasing. As a group, the Commission agreed to reduce the General Fund's request from 14.91 mills to 14 mills, the Veterans Services' request from 1 mill to 0.9 mill, the Winter Show's request from 2.5 mills to 2.35 mills, Water Resources' request from 4 mills to 3 mills, and the Library's request from 2.54 mills to 2.5 mills, while increasing the Corrections levy from 8.5 mills to 9 mills. Cindy Schwehr moved to leave the mills for City-County Health District at 5 mills and to decrease the mills for Economic Development from 3.79 mills to 3 mills; John Froelich seconded the motion. Motion carried upon roll-call vote, with Phil Leitner and Rodger Berntson voting "no". The total County/State mills for publication purposes ended up at 90.5 mills.

The Commission discussed salaries. Eldred Knutson indicated that he will not support salary increases until a performance-based appraisal system is put in place. John Froelich made a motion to approve a 2% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) across the board, not including elected officials or part-time employees; the motion died for lack of a second. Cindy Schwehr moved to approve a 3% COLA, not including elected officials or part-time employees; Rodger Berntson seconded the motion. Motion failed upon roll-call vote, with Eldred Knutson, John Froelich and Phil Leitner voting "no". John Froelich moved to approve a 3% COLA for full-time employees; Cindy Schwehr seconded the motion. Motion carried upon roll-call vote with Eldred Knutson and Phil Leitner voting "no". Cindy Schwehr moved to approve a 3% COLA for elected officials, excluding Commissioners; John Froelich seconded the motion. Motion

carried upon roll-call vote, with Phil Leitner and Eldred Knutson voting "no". Phil Leitner moved to give the Commissioners a 0% increase; John Froelich seconded the motion. Motion carried upon roll call vote, with Eldred Knutson voting "no". Cindy Schwehr made a motion to increase all part-time wages by 3%; John Froelich seconded the motion. Motion carried upon roll-call vote with Phil Leitner voting "no".

With no further business, Phil Leitner made a motion, seconded by John Froelich, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

The public hearing will be on October 9, 2014 at 6:00 pm.

Beth M Didier
Barnes County Auditor

Eldred Knutson, Chairman
Barnes County Commission