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Navajo County looks at cost-saving measures

By: Donna Rescorla , The Independent

HOLBROOK - At their Oct. 21 meeting, Navajo County supervisors were apprised of the cost-saving measures being undertaken for the 2008-09 budget.

Assistant County Manager Dusty Parsons handed the supervisors a list of some ways the county could save about \$1.87 million.

"These are some of the items staff has looked at," Parsons said. "I think we're all aware of the economy and what has happened. We aren't panicking - far from it - but there are some things to do. There is no reason to panic, but it is prudent on our part to look at ways to be more fiscally conservative."

Supervisor David Tenney said, "I assume the construction equipment was needed. If they aren't purchased, will this increase maintenance cost on another line?"

Parsons said they are going to buy two crack sealers but the other equipment is what they can do without and still be safe. The list of equipment purchases to be postponed include two sweepers, two 150 horsepower motor graders, a loader with a four-yard bucket, a tractor trailer truck, a tractor and a belly dump truck. The total savings will be \$1.13 million. General fund and HURF fund personnel savings are estimated to total \$737,616.

"We know the state Legislature will go into a special session," Parsons said. "What this means for us, we don't know but it will be prudent to minimize our costs. We know things aren't going to be any better coming into the next year. Where it will hit us, we don't know."

"Last year we had a number of problems," Supervisor Jesse Thompson said. "Where are we going if we have an emergency?"

"We always have to respond," Parsons said. "If there's an emergency, it will be a whole new scenario. We will have to decide where the funds are."

Supervisors were told nobody will be laid off but a hiring freeze had been discussed. If the economy gets better, they can reassess what they want.

They discussed the vacant clerk of the board position and the savings seen from that. The savings included salary and benefits.

County Manager Jimmy Jayne said he met with Lorinda Brown, interim clerk of the board, and her staff and "right now they are managing their way through. We have very capable women on the front line.

"We are starting to plan now what vacancies can be left open and what purchases can be cut."

"I appreciate the explanation, but if we do run short, if our front office needs some help, we need to come back and revisit the issue," Supervisor Jerry Brownlow said.

"The positions won't be frozen," Jayne said. "We're also going to redirect who does what up front."

In other board news:

* Andy Jacobs of Policy Development Group spoke during the call to the public on his work with ADOT on statewide transportation planning.

"We are looking at 30 to 50 years out," he told supervisors, adding that he had been working with the White Mountain Regional Transportation Committee in this area.

"We came in the spring to get input on how this area will fit in with the planning. Now we're done. We took a look at all the information we had and put it in a report of the Eastern Mogollon Rim area."

Two more meetings are planned on Nov. 14 at the Day's Inn meeting room in Show Low. Sessions will be held at 10 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. to give people the greatest chances to be present.

"We are looking at transportation needs across the state," Jacobs said. "We want let people know what transportation planning is going to mean to their children."

When Supervisor Jesse Thompson asked if there were any other public hearings being planned, Jacobs said the meetings on Nov. 14 were the final ones. Brownlow indicated the Navajo Nation was in a different region.

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* Paying off for a wager he made for the Show Low/Blue Ridge football game, Tenney stood and sang the Blue Ridge fight song. Blue Ridge won 49 to 0.

"I had to find three former Blue Ridgers who knew the fight song and I can sing it for you," he said. He might have been singing the words, but he held up a sign that showed his true feelings - "I'd still rather be a Cougar."

Supervisor Percy Deal said, "I didn't have my hearing aid in my ear. Can you sing it again?"

Tenney "graciously" declined. Brownlow, who represents the district which includes Blue Ridge, said he wished County Attorney Mel Bowers could have been there.

"Never let it be said I won't take my lumps because when we win, I'll give you your lumps," Tenney said.

* Sheriff Gary Butler asked the supervisors to approve a "sub-grantee agreement" with the Jake Flake Emergency Services Institute (Northeast Arizona Training Center) for use of grant funds from AZPOST (Arizona Police Officer Standards and Training) for maintaining and repairing the defensive driving track. The \$40,000 will be held by the Sheriff's Office in an interest bearing account and provided to the training center when needed for taking care of the track.

* Acting as the board of directors for the public services district, supervisors approved two contracts with the Arizona Department of Health in a consent agenda. One contract for \$23,093 is for tuberculosis control. It will be used to improve the overall management and surveillance of tuberculosis in the county.

The second contract is for the prenatal block grant which will provide prenatal education. The amendment changes the compliance statute reference and adds a paragraph regarding budget terms.

* Supervisors authorized Board Chairman J.R. DeSpain to sign the community rating system recertification letter to the National Flood Insurance Program. The letter will indicate the county has elected to continue participation in the community rating system which will allow residents to purchase flood insurance under written by NFIP.

* Supervisors approved a task agreement between the Bureau of Indian Affairs Fort Defiance Agency Division of Transportation and Navajo County to allow for the purchase of a tractor tire for a mower used to maintain BIA public roads. Funds up to \$450 will come from District II Special Road Funds.

"This is an example showing the funding is just not there for the BIA to do maintenance," Thompson said.

Tenney said he agreed, adding that Washington needs to be informed about the fact that the BIA couldn't even buy a tractor tire.

Although Deal's term on the board will continue to the end of the year, a special retirement party had been held for him at Kayenta on Oct. 20. Deal said it was a wonderful surprise. The other supervisors expressed their appreciation of Deal and his long tenure, 28 years, on the board.

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