



County passes massive cuts and moderate tax increase

By Vernon Fueston
Staff Writer

After months of deliberation, Chowan's commissioners passed a balanced \$15.3 million budget with heavy tax cuts and a modest 3.5 cents per \$100 property tax increase.

Virtually every corner of county government is affected by budget's \$3.4 million in expense cuts. The sharply divided board of commis-

sioners clearly favored a path maximizing budget cuts while holding any tax increase to a minimum.

While Chowan's property owners will see an increase of \$70 on the tax bill for a \$200,000 home, the effects of the budget cuts will be seen in many county services.

Chowan's schools were the hardest hit by the budget process.

Commissioners cut \$911,000

from the school system's original \$3.98 million budget request included in the county's original budget proposal. "Option E." Also cut was \$400,000 in capital reserve funds.

Social Services took a \$373,000 cut, putting its budget at \$3.4 million. The cuts came mostly from operations expenses and a reduction in the department's foster care allowance.

DSS director Ben Rose said

the foster care cut should not affect the county's ability to care for children in need. He said the county was prepared to cover any unexpected foster care expenses from its contingency funds.

The county's recreation department took an \$80,000 cut bringing its budget down to \$454,000. Reduced hours for the department's employees and a hike to \$25 for most youth team user fees made up

the difference.

The Sheriff's department budget was reduced to \$1.4 million after receiving a \$176,000 cut.

To meet that figure, two deputy positions were eliminated and one unfilled position frozen. Overtime was reduced and no patrols will go on during court hours, Monday through Friday.

The Public Safety Department (or Emergency Man-

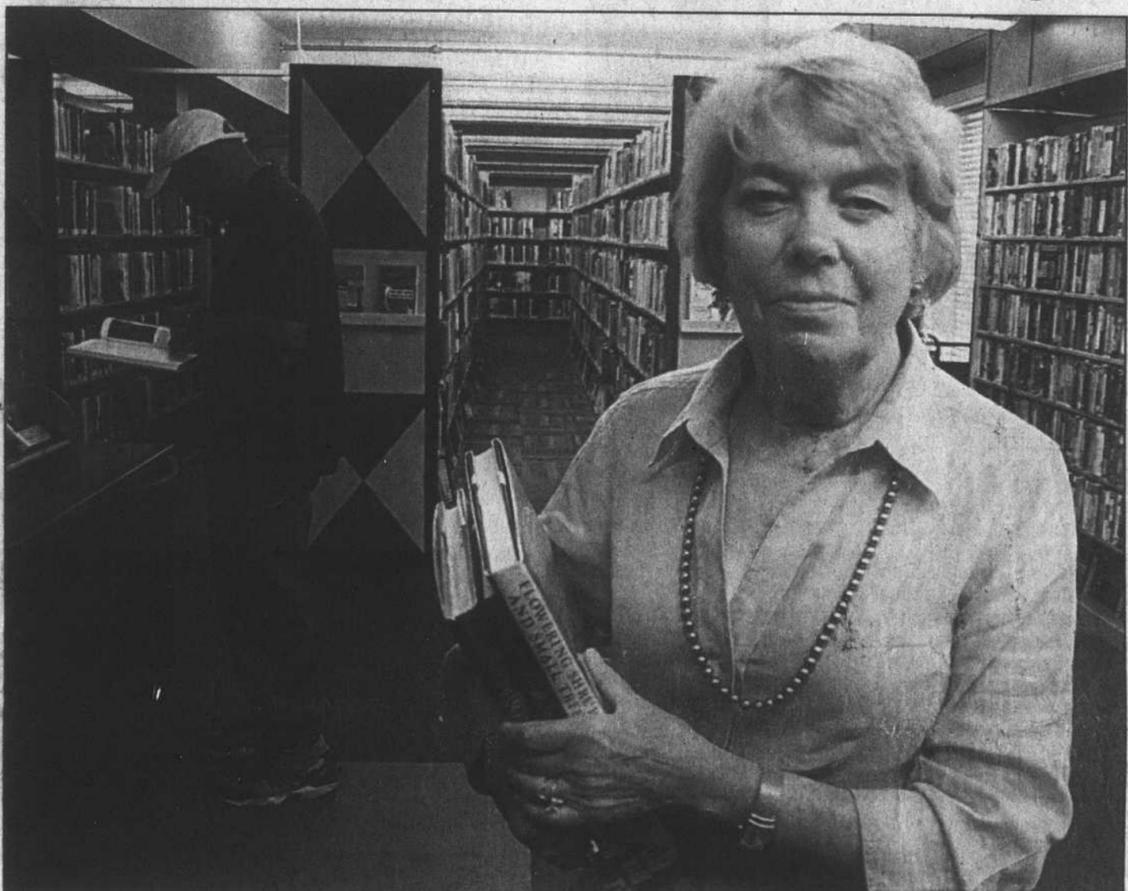
agement Coordination,) was eliminated, cutting the director's position and reducing the resources available for emergency planning.

The commissioners left money for fire inspectors and \$30,000 to fund a reduced emergency planning program, possibly by a part-time worker or consultant.

Jail operations budget was

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Library adjusts to tighter budget



VERNON FUESTON/THE CHOWAN HERALD

Coupled with the \$63,000 cut from the library's original request, county librarian Rosalie Miller, standing in the recently remodeled and expanded Shepard-Pruden Memorial Library, will also have to balance a significant cut in payroll.

By Vernon Fueston
Staff Writer

After absorbing a \$63,000 cut from its original budget request, Rosalie Miller, the librarian at Edenton's Shepard Pruden Memorial Library is struggling to stretch what dollars she has left.

But the plain truth is that services at the library will be different under the county's new budget. The library serves 4,000 patrons each month.

Affected will be the worker's wages, the library's hours of operations, its subscriptions to magazines and periodicals, book purchases, special programs and funds for computer maintenance.

With a payroll figure before the cuts amounting to \$106,000 of the library's projected \$209,000 budget, staff cuts had always seemed inevitable in the wake of any budget reduction.

But after learning that she will only have \$146,000 to work with next year, it was hard to see just how the library was going to function.

The library's budget for the previous year was \$174,000.

STAFF SACRIFICE

There was talk of closing the library on weekends and evenings, leaving the library inaccessible to many working citizens.

Now it appears the library will keep weekend hours and stay open one evening a week, thanks to the efforts of its staff.

The library's three full-time and three part-time workers have proposed voluntary cuts in working hours to extend the library's hours of operation and avoid job losses, Miller said.

Miller said she would also participate in the cuts.

If approved by its board, the library could stay open Tuesday through Saturday with evening hours on Thursdays till 8 p.m. and three hours of operation on Saturdays.

VANISHING MAGAZINES

Another likely change at the library will be funds for its magazines and newspapers. Most subscriptions will stop until funding can be restored in the future.

The purchase of new audiovisual materials like books on tape will end. New book purchases will be limited to best sellers and a few children's books.

Miller said she hopes to keep copies of USA Today and the News and Observer on hand, but many other local and regional magazines and newspapers will have to go.

One casualty could be the county's history.

ENDANGERED HISTORY

With stacks of state and local periodicals like the Chowan Herald and Our State Magazine dating back to the 1920's and beyond, there could be a hole in those collections for 2009-2010.

Coupled with other funding cuts that may stop the micro-filing of local periodicals, Miller said she worries about the county's history crumbling to dust over time or simply not being saved at all.

Miller said she's looking for ways to continue the preservation.

"That would be the loss of our county's history," she said. "It would just be awful. That would be just the end of research."

Miller said she is cutting every non-essential expense she can find.

She will no longer be a member of the North Carolina Library Association or the local chamber of commerce. She said she will be watching supplies carefully, too - all in an effort to save other programs and services.

LIBRARY PROGRAMS

"I hope and pray that we can keep some of our (adult and children's) programs," Miller said. "Without that I can't do anything for the children except what we can do in-house. There is so much that they

can do and learn."

Besides its children's series, the library has presented a number of adult programs like its popular World War II series. Getting those speakers here requires the payment of travel expenses and small honorariums, something that will be difficult, now.

Among the most popular amenities at the new library are its computers.

While they and their Internet connections will remain, patrons may see more "out of order" signs. Miller said the maintenance contracts that keep them and their software running will have to go next year.

ONE WAY OUT

One partial solution for the library's troubles could be donations and volunteers as the county puts its financial house in order.

Miller said donations could be made directly to the Shepard Pruden Memorial Library.

Volunteers are also needed, an effort coordinated by the Friends of the Library. Most volunteers help with fundraisers and socials, freeing staff hours for the job of keeping the library running.

Miller said that there are some things she just can't do with volunteer help, like manning the front desk or re-shelving books. For that she needs a professional staff.

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Director of social services resigns

By Vernon Fueston
Staff Writer

Chowan County's social services director has resigned to take a similar position in Cabarrus County.

Rose, who has worked for Chowan County since July of 1991, will leave his position on July 17. Deputy Director Melanie Corpew will handle his duties while the county searches for a replacement. That search is expected to take six months.

Rose said he was leaving to pursue greater professional advancement within the field of social service administration.

"It has been a privilege to serve the citizens of this great county," Rose said in a statement to the Herald.

"I have made life-long friendships here and really enjoyed my time here. It was a hard decision to make in many ways."

Rose did not cite recent budget cuts by the county as a reason for leaving the position and was complimentary of the county government in his statement.



VERNON FUESTON/THE CHOWAN HERALD

Ben Rose, Director of Chowan County's Department of Social Services, in the lobby of his soon-to-be former office.

"I would say thank you to the Board of Social Services for their support and dedication to the department over the years and thank you to the county commissioners and county management for their leadership," Rose said.

"I would also say thank you to my staff, who are a great group of professionals dedicated to public service. I wish I could thank everyone but the list would be too long."

Money comes in for lighthouse rehab



The N.C. Dept. of Cultural Resources has received \$1.2-million in federal funds to restore the exterior of the Roanoke River Lighthouse which sits on the downtown Edenton waterfront.

NCDCCR's Capital Projects Unit, which handled restoration of the 1767 Chowan Courthouse, will work with the North Carolina Dept. of Transportation to carry out the project, according to Linda Eure, manager of the local visitor center, who oversees state-owned historic properties in Chowan County.

Eure said the work would include moving the lighthouse to the exact spot along

the waterfront where it will stand and installing it on a suitable permanent foundation.

The lighthouse, built in 1886 by the U.S. Lighthouse Service, served as a navigational beacon to mariners on the Albemarle Sound until 1941. Of the more than 20 lighthouses that served to mark the rivers and sounds of the Albemarle and Pamlico, this is the last known surviving example of a square-sided, screw-pile lighthouse, according to information posted at the site where the lighthouse now stands.

Newberry said the design phase of the project is expected to begin this summer.



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