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35 Cents

Board gets mixed budget messages

By SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

The 1993-94 budget is now officially set, but what remains to be seen is the fall-out from county employees and residents who have been before the board asking for consideration.

The commissioners got mixed messages at last Thursday's budget hearing when some speakers asked for more money for departments, others asked for no budget growth, and one speaker asked for both.

Legal Services of the Coastal Plains asked for a \$2,000 appropriation, and the library and the Perquimans County Restoration Association asked that monies cut from their budgets be restored. One resident asked if the budget included an increase in the number of sheriff's deputies.

Jesse P. Perry, an outspoken member of the Perquimans County Tax Payers Committee, a group which ran an advertisement in *The Perquimans Weekly* requesting no increase in the 1993-94 budget over 1992-93 levels, asked that the commissioners consider an increase in funds for the library, as well as a salary supplement for the librarian.

Roy Reed spoke on behalf of the Tax Payers Committee.

"The finance officer's budget requires an increase in the tax rate which is unacceptable to at least 600 voters in Perquimans County," Reed said, referring to the 600 signatures the committee obtained from county residents asking that the commissioners hold the line on the budget.

Reed said last year's hefty tax increase for many residents resulting from the property revaluation made it unreasonable to raise taxes again. Reed said he understood the average property owner sustained a 42 percent tax increase in 1992-93.

"Really, it discourages people, I feel, from moving into the county when they realize there's such a tax penalty for living here..." Reed said. "We do know the proposed budget can be reduced" and the county still run smoothly, Reed added.

"While we don't presume how to tell you to do it, however we do offer some ideas" for cutting the budget, Reed told the commissioners. The committee's proposals included deleting mapping, increasing salaries only if it could be done without a tax increase, eliminating the increase in the school system's request, and instructing department heads to operate with the same funding as last year.

Reed also proposed reducing the number of county employees and rewarding the top employees with merit pay.

Reed said the county might find it difficult to manage with budget reductions, but efficiency would probably increase.

Reed again asked for a hold-the-line budget, saying it should

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Steve Casper's square dance group weaved and stepped the Virginia Reel on the lawn of Cove Grove at Saturday's Old Neck Celebration at Cove Grove. Organizers were pleased with the turn-out of over 200 supporters of a historic district in the Old Neck area. (Photo by Susan Harris)

County budget approved

Compromise leads to higher taxes, more cuts

By SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

The Perquimans County commissioners performed final surgery on the 1993-94 fiscal budget Monday before agreeing on the county's financial condition.

For almost two hours, the commissioners explored every vein pumping funds into the county coffers and carefully shaved off spending growths that would call for an expensive prescription for taxpayers.

When the operation was complete, the county was left with a budget just over \$5 million, a 75 cents per \$100 valuation tax rate, a 4 percent raise for employees and a \$60 solid waste fee.

"We must treat the taxpayers and the employees fairly," Mack Nixon, Perquimans commissioner

Original departmental budget requests would have sent the tax rate from the 72 cents 1992-93 level to 93 cents per \$100 valuation. County manager and finance officer Paul Gregory slashed 13 cents from the rate with the cuts he made before presenting the commissioners with a \$5.3 million budget requiring an 80 cents per \$100 valuation tax rate. The commissioners continued to cut until the rate was brought down to 75 cents.

The commissioners dickered longest with the proposed 5 percent raise for employees.

"I'm going to support, and I think we must support, a five percent salary increase for employees," commissioners chairman Leo Higgins said to kick off the budget discussion. Higgins cited 8 percent inflation and a \$50 per month increase in hospitalization insurance over the past two years as his reasons to stand behind the raise.

"I would love to give these people in the county a 5 percent raise, but I would also love to see us hold this tax rate down," said commissioner Archie Miller.

Commissioner Shirley Yates also supported the 5 percent raises, even if it meant a 76 cents tax rate. Co-chairman Mack Nixon said he supported raises, but would drop them back to 3 percent if the raises caused the tax rate to go over 75 cents.

"The county is very desperate for funds and it seems that the ad valorem tax rate is the only place we can go back to," Nixon said. Nixon added that with last year's revaluation and the economic status of people in the county, a sharp tax hike could hurt some taxpayers. "We must treat the taxpayers and the employees fairly," Nixon said.

"I know we're poor, but gosh knows, our employees are poor too," Gregory commented.

Higgins concurred.

"We can't balance the budget on the backs of our employees," Higgins said.

The commissioners discussed a 4 percent raise, a 5 percent raise given Oct. 1, and a 2.5 percent July increase followed by a 2.5 percent December increase in an attempt to maintain pay raises, but keep the tax rate at 75 cents.

When the discussion turned to looking to the fund balance to fund part of the raises, Gregory dropped his head.

"It's tough to say, but don't take from the fund balance even if it means cutting salaries," Gregory said. The finance officer said the fund balance has steadily decreased over the past few years. While Gregory said the fund balance is not at a "dangerous" level, it is at a "tough" level. Gregory said the account needs to be built up, not drawn down further.

"We need a zero appropriation of fund balance this year," Gregory said.

Nixon said the trend toward siphoning off funds from both county and school system fund balances has left both groups facing tough financial decisions. If anything serious were to occur, Nixon said, "We're looking at a double whammy here," with neither agency having strong reserves.

Getting hit in the last two rounds of cuts were mapping, dispatch, EMS, register of deeds, fire departments, social services, schools and the commissioners.

After flipping through the 53 pages of the budget and notes taken since the budget process first began in April, the commissioners compromised and unanimously approved the 1993-94 budget.

Old Neck salutes its history

By SUSAN HARRIS
Editor

Over 200 guests drove across the iron cattle gate and up the graceful tree-lined lane to historic Cove Grove Saturday for the Old Neck Celebration.

The lawn was reminiscent of the Wilkes barbecue scene in the epic drama *Gone With the Wind*, with guests scattered around the lawn enjoying a traditional southern pork barbecue meal while the Claymon Sawyer family strummed old-time instruments on Cove Grove's grand front porch. A dance floor ringed with bales of hay provided a stage for Steve Casper's square dance group, which bobbed and weaved the Virginia Reel.

The celebration was a fund-raiser sponsored by the Old Neck Historic District Committee of the Perquimans County Restoration Association. The committee is attempting to establish a historic district to be included in the National Register of Historic Places to recognize one of the premiere antebellum neighborhoods in the state.

"We thought it was a big success," said Beth Skinner Taylor, chairman of the historic district committee and a descendant of the builder of Cove Grove. "We were real pleased."

Taylor said descendants of the

original settlers of Old Neck came from as far away as Connecticut to celebrate the history of the community and help raise the necessary research funds to get a historic district on the map. The committee estimates the research will cost \$6,000.

Taylor said she is still unsure exactly how much the event will profit, but the committee is hopeful that the proceeds, combined with donations, will be sufficient. The committee has also applied for matching grant funds through the North Carolina Department of Archives and History. Although the status of the grant application is unknown, Taylor said the committee was told it would be easier to get a grant if matching funds were already on deposit.

The event was a very special day for the Skinner family. Maise Skinner, who lives at Cove Grove, was surrounded by her daughters, Beth and Sally Tarkington, their children and their grandchildren.

In addition to Cove Grove, other historic buildings in the proposed Old Neck Historic District include the Sutton-Newby house, the Fletcher-Skinner-Nixon house (1812 on the Perquimans), Riverside (the William Jones house), Elmwood (the Thomas Nixon house), the Francis Nixon house, the Gabriel White house and Willow Branch Schools (Frog Hall School).



Cove Grove resident Maise Skinner and her great-grandson, Baker Skinner Jethro, enjoy a moment together during the Old Neck Celebration at Cove Grove. The two represented four generations of Skinners, whose ancestors built Cove Grove, who attended the event. (Photo by Susan Harris)

Social services to distribute USDA commodities on June 15

Perquimans County will receive USDA donated commodities for distribution on June 15, 1993. The Hertford Lions Club will begin distribution at 9 a.m. at the Ice Plant on Grubb Street.

All households who will not be able to pick up their commodities may use a representative for this purpose. The commodities card or application must be signed in the correct places for this to be acceptable. No household will be allowed to pick up food for more than themselves and one other household as representative. There will be no exceptions.

There will be two lines at the distribution site. The second line will be for the physically handicapped and/or disabled who are present at the distribution to pick up their food. A doctor's note stating the disability, or proof of handicapped license plates for their vehicle must be provided. Those persons using the handicapped line may pick up food for their own household only. Again, there will be no exceptions.

Cars may not be driven into the dis-

tribution area. Please remember to park only in authorized parking areas as the Hertford Police Department will be patrolling the area.

Applications may be obtained from the following agencies beginning June 7: Department of Social Services, Health Department, Economic Improvement Council, Catholic Social Ministries and the Senior Citizens Center.

The Commodities Distribution Program is available to all eligible persons without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, handicap or political beliefs. Information about regulations against discrimination and how to file a complaint may be secured from the N.C. Division of Social Services, 325 N. Salisbury Street, Raleigh, N.C. or from your county department of social services.

HouseholdIncome
SizePer Year

1\$ 9,061
212,259
315,457
418,655
521,853
625,051
728,249
831,447

Add \$3,198 per year for each additional family member.