

County, cities review 2013-14 budgets

County Commissioners approve \$115M budget

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CLEVELAND COUNTY – By vote of 4-1 Cleveland County Commissioners June 18 approved the \$115,419,068 county budget for fiscal year 2013-14, an increase of \$6.3 million from last year's budget of \$109,077,688.

Increases in fuel and insurance costs and cost of living raises for the first time in five years to the county's 750 full time employees impacted the budget but the newly adopted budget does not include property tax increases for the 13th year, said Chairman Ronnie Hawkins.

"I am very proud that we held the tax rate at 57 cents per \$100 valuation and are able to give raises to employees," Hawkins said. A total of approximately \$20 million is in the budget for salaries, insurance and benefits for the 900 full time/part time employees and represents a big chunk of the budget pie.

The newly adopted budget includes an increase in the county's volunteer fire service district tax from 3 cents to 5 cents. Commissioner Hawkins said the fire district tax does not impact the budget.

"Asking our families to go higher on taxes and fees goes against my promises that put me in office. We still have people out of work in the county

and the budget is asking more than people can afford," said commissioner Jason Falls who cast the 'no' vote.

Fire department representatives from Oak Grove, Waco, and Grove volunteer departments spoke during the public hearing in favor of the fire tax increase to fund their operations for equipment and training of volunteers which they say are badly needed.

The new budget includes a 2% cost of living increase to county employees who haven't had a pay adjustment since 2008; a 6.14% increase in Social Services costs by \$558,000 with overall appropriation of \$7.8 million for county mandated programs and services; increase in the law enforcement and detention center operations budget by \$172,000; and an increase of \$109,573 to \$1,590,573 in current expenditures to Cleveland Community College.

The new budget addresses several capital projects – a Farmers Market with the City of Shelby to create a new Farmer's Market in uptown Shelby with \$50,000 included in the budget for this purpose; a joint venture with the City of Shelby to develop an industrial park west of Shelby at Foothills Commerce Center; the historic courthouse renovation with the Earl Scruggs Center scheduled for completion by end of 2013; and assisting with the renovation of the Shelby High school baseball stadium for American Legion baseball.

The budget appropriates \$161,000 to the Cleveland County Economic Development Partnership to be used in the recruitment of new businesses as well as existing industry expansions and allocates \$110,000 for travel and tourism with the majority of funding coming from the local occupancy tax.

Annual household landfill fees go up from \$50 to \$62 and the increase in tipping fees of \$4.65 per ton will increase fees charged to municipalities. Kings Mountain residents will pay 50 cents more each month in sanitation fees.

The per-pupil funding for the Cleveland County School System will remain the same at \$1,763.38. The current expense allocation was reduced by \$558,643 due to the projected decrease in the number of students. The county allocation in the budget totals \$27,249,570.

In his budget message, Interim County Manager David Dear said that the county has been facing challenging economic conditions over the past several years that have negatively affected county revenues. "Because of the commissioner's strong leadership and sound fiscal management, Cleveland County has been able to present a balanced budget with no tax increase and no reduction in county funded services."

Grover residents to see 27% increase in water, sewer rates July 1

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GROVER – Residents of Grover will see their water and sewer rates rise 27% July 1 which means that a typical user of water and sewer (2,000 gallons) will see a total bill of \$49.37, including \$15.29 for water, \$22.86 for sewer and \$11.22 for trash service, an extra dollar fee from last year.

For residents using 5,000 gallons water and sewer and utilizing trash service the bill will total \$86.27.

"This will be a hardship for residents," said town commissioner Bill Willis. Other board members agreed.

The dilemma town fathers faced at Monday night's public hearing on the \$651,765 budget for 2013-14 was whether to upgrade infrastructure and/or lose funds spent the past year to transition the current wastewater treatment plant to the wastewater treatment plant formerly owned and operated by Grover Industries.

Last year, Grover Industries and the Harry family donated the Grover Industries Wastewater Treatment Plant to the Town of Grover in an effort to help the town continue to meet citizens' current needs as well as future needs. The plant will in effect triple the towns' capacity to process wastewater, Mayor J. D. Ledford said during the public hearing at which no citizens were present to give input.

Ledford said that in order to make the transition and upgrades, additional costs are involved. To upgrade the Linden Street Wastewater Treatment Plant, formerly operated by Grover Industries,

as well as the aging lift stations, the cost will total \$2 million dollars. To help offset those costs the town is applying for several grants as well as a 2% interest loan.

"In today's economy I know this is not what you would like to see but we are at a unique time in Grover's history where something has to be done," the mayor wrote Grover residents. If we continue to wait, the cost of building materials and the replacement of aging equipment will only continue to rise and we are still not guaranteed to receive any other loans or grants in the future. We have looked at all of our options and the majority of Council feels like this will be the best option for Grover's future."

The mayor said the water/sewer raise reflects a July 1 raise by the town's water supplier, the City of Kings Mountain, of 7 1/2 percent and the 27% hike will be in effect for at least the next three years to help pay for the improvements.

In a related action the board continued its contract with W.K. Dickson Company, the Charlotte engineering company working with the board on sewer infrastructure.

The good news that came from the meeting was that Grover's property tax rate of 39 cents per \$100 valuation is unchanged.

The \$651,765 budgets includes \$276,505 for the general fund, \$2600 for the cemetery fund, \$22,150 for Powell Bill fund, and \$350,510 for water and sewer which represents the big chunk of the budget pie.

No cost of living adjustment is included for the town's eight employees.

City of KM utility customers to see 7.5% increase in water, sewer

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KINGS MOUNTAIN – City utility customers will pay 7.5% more for water and sewer beginning July 1.

The typical water-sewer customer who uses 5,000 gallons of water per month will see an increase of \$3.49 per month or 12 cents a day.

Kings Mountain City Council unanimously adopted the \$35.2 million budget June 18 after a public hearing at which no citizen voiced opinions.

City councilman Tommy Hawkins took the occasion to thank the city staff for their work on the budget after the presentation by city manager Marilyn Sellers.

The new water-sewer rate over the

next three years will help the city pay for water system improvements, for which the city is borrowing \$33,840,600 from the state's revolving fund with 20-year pay back with no interest.

The existing, combined water-sewer rate for an inside-city residential customer with a 3/4-inch water line meter using 5,000 gallons of service per month is \$46.18. The new rate July 1 will be \$49.67.

The only other increase July 1 is a 50-cent increase in sanitation fees due to a 15% tipping fee assessed by the county for garbage taken to the landfill.

There is no property tax increase. The 40 cents per \$100 valuation is unchanged since 2006.

There is no electric base rate increase and no natural gas base rate increase.

Three new positions are funded in the budget – one new employee to assist the head of the Department of Information Technology and two part timers in the fire department will become full time employees.

There are no cost of living increases to the 200 employees of the city who received a 2% increase in pay last year. Fringe benefits, including insurance, are included in the budget.

Commending the mayor and council, Sellers said, "You have made tough decisions and I appreciate your support and the support of department heads. We have a great team – a visionary team – and this is a realistic budget."



THE SHEPHERD'S TABLE sponsors a free meal every Tuesday from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, 220 North Watterson St., in Kings Mountain. Delivery is available if you are unable to pick up the meal and they also offer dine in.

The volunteers who prepare and serve the meals are members of the church and donations cover the cost of the meals.

For more information on the "Shepherd's Table" food ministry, you can contact Sister Eloise Jenkins at 704-739-6705.

At left: Volunteers at Mt. Zion Baptist Church are busy serving up lunch for the "Shepherd's Table" food ministry. Volunteers are (L - R) Rodney Jordan, Betty Pressley, Fae Jordan, Eloise Jenkins, Joann Holland and Charlene Simmons. photo by BETH BROCK

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