

County adopts 2010 budget

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Phillips County Commissioners adopted the 2010 county budget Dec. 11. The county mill levy has remained at 28.28 since 1992, and commissioners again adopted the mill levy of 28.28.

Phillips County's assessed value has increased \$9,351,724 from \$48,975,446 in 2009 to \$58,327,170 in 2010. That increase includes \$470,980 of new construction in the county. The majority of increase in assessed value is due to the addition of new natural gas production in the county.

General fund budget was increased from \$2,352,540 in 2009 to \$2,533,509 in 2010. Changes in the 2009 budget include a number of capital expenditure requests, a flat \$13/month of additional pay per qualified employee, regular employee step increases and increased health care costs. Most other budget items remain stable. The salary compensation plan put in place Jan. 1, 2000 will also be adjusted for cost of living in 2010 by one percent.

Medical insurance for the county increased four percent, but there were no increases in dental, vision or life insurance. The county does pick up the lion's share of the increase, but employees also pay from 20-35 percent of the premium, depending on the insurance and the plan they have selected. Their costs increased proportionally.

Other considerations for the 2010 budget include some major capital outlay requests from the elected officials and department heads.

Major requests include another vehicle for the sheriff's office for \$27,500, copier for the treasurer and assessor for \$5,000, courthouse steps and sidewalk for \$20,700, new mower for maintenance at \$13,450, a used pickup for maintenance at \$13,000 and a used tractor for the landfill at \$10,000. Road and bridge again submitted requests for new maintainers and a new loader in 2010.

Those purchases are under review and will be considered on a case by case basis, depending on the budget flow throughout the year.

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Phillips County Sheriff Rob Urbach again secured the Court Security grant. Included in the \$41,494 grant is \$29,994 for personnel services, \$10,850 for security equipment and \$650 for training.

Commissioners noted the grant will continue to pay 70 percent of the costs for a fourth officer employed for court security. The sheriff's office currently is staffed with four people—the sheriff, the undersheriff, a deputy and a court security officer. Commissioners again reiterate their desire to see ways the county and two municipal law enforcement forces can work together to more efficiently serve the citizenry.

The 2010 grant will also provide monies for teleconferencing in the court system.

Phillips County's road and bridge budget increased from \$1,622,737 in 2009 to \$1,743,785 in 2010. Highway Users Tax Funds (HUTF) from federal and state gas taxes continue to be the major revenue for road and bridge. The estimated HUTF income for 2010 is \$940,811, down \$9,874 from 2009 projections.

The mill levy for road and bridge will remain at 4.23 for 2010. Major equipment purchases continue to be a challenge for the department. Colorado is now limiting grants that are available for new equipment, which makes major capital purchases a challenge.

In 2009, the county road and bridge department again worked very little overtime, hired very limited part-time summer help and purchased almost no capital equipment, all in an effort to bring the road and bridge fund balance back up. Progress has been slow but sure.

A major event for the commissioners in 2009 was the completion of the new Event Center building. There is still one outstanding grant—the Enhancement Grant from the Colorado Department of Transportation. That grant will be used to complete the sidewalks, landscaping and parking area around the outside of the new building.

Work will not begin on the outside until weather permits in the spring. Since there was a shortfall in fund raising, the county will enter a lease purchase agreement with Bank of the West in

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January to complete financing of the project.

Other county fund budgets include the Social Services Fund at \$775,556 which is an increase of \$52,198 over last year, Contingency Fund at \$160,148, Conservation Trust (lottery funds) at \$88,000, E911 Fund Budget at \$108,950, the Economic Development Fund with a budget of \$21,000 and a Capital Expenditure Fund budget at \$202,600.

County Fair Fund has a 2010 budget of \$88,500. The county will give \$11,500 of tax funds toward that effort, which is the same amount given in 2009. The Fair Board utilizes ticket sales, contributions, income from stock car races and the current fund balance to fund the remaining amount.

While the county does maintain and improve the facilities at the fairgrounds, those funds are taken out of the General Fund allocation for fairgrounds improvement. The county will also continue to provide \$4,000 toward the Haxtun Corn Festival.

Other business

In addition to working on the budget in the month of December, commissioners:

—put a sign on the outside of the Event Center to recognize the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant used for the restrooms.

—noted Dragon’s Wagon Preschool, Phillips County Adult Education Services and the Phillips County Extension office all moved in or are in the process of moving in to the Event Center. The preschool plans to open Monday, Jan. 11 and will have a separate inspection by officials.

—held a public budget hearing.

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—received notice of several well permits in the Amherst area.

—noted recommendations from the Northeast Colorado Board of Health on proposed Individual Sewage Disposal System Guidelines. A concern is that the regulations will hit rural areas hard with expensive fees for thorough inspections of septic systems.

—noted the Haxtun district traded for a new John Deere mower at MV Equipment.

—advertised bids for the Event Center enhancement project to complete landscaping outside the building. Two bids the county was considering were both over budget, so commissioners will be rebidding within a month or so.