Phillips County Commissioners adopted the 2013 county budget Dec. 7.

The county mill levy has remained at 28.28 since 1992. Commissioners again adopted the mill levy of 28.28.

Phillips County's assessed value has increased $3,825,272 from $56,488,730 in 2011 to $60,314,002 in 2012. There was $1,416,150 of new construction in the county and an increase in natural gas production. Overall property tax collection will increase for the county by $108,179.

The county general fund budget was increased from $2,683,612 in 2012 to $2,819,237 in 2013. Changes in the 2013 budget include limited capital expenditure requests, a flat $40/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 be adjusted for cost of living by 1 percent in 2013.

Commissioners voted to keep their annual salary at $26,280 or 60 percent of what they are eligible to take by state statute. This has been their practice for many years.

Limited part-time office help is in the budget for landfill record keeping. The county is keeping an additional full-time person in place for maintenance until the end of September when that need will be re-evaluated.

The county's health insurance increased 9 percent overall. The county picks up the lion's share of the increase, but employees also pay from 20-35 percent of the premium, depending on their plan. Their costs increased proportionally. The county dropped two of the six available health plans. The remaining four plans all carry a deductible which the county will actually pick up in 2013.

The board reviewed a number of major capital outlay requests. They include a skid steer for use in maintenance of county buildings and the fairgrounds, improvements to the bowling alley property providing record storage and indoor parking for county vehicles, improvements for the east courthouse parking lot, replacing portions of sidewalk on the courthouse square, a UTV for use at the landfill, an updated spray control unit for weed and pest, a new patrol vehicle, tasers and road and bridge equipment.

Final decisions on these items will be made soon as the county has entered the new year.

Road and bridge budget went from $1,856,115 in 2012 to $1,928,992 in 2013. The increase in spending will only become a reality if the board decides to seek and is successful in obtaining major grants to help with purchase of new capital equipment.

Highway Users Tax Funds from federal and state gas taxes continue to be the major revenue for road and bridge. The estimated HUTF income for 2013 is $1,114,269, a decrease of $31,555 from 2012 projections. The mill levy for road and bridge will remain at 4.23 for 2013.

In 2012, the county road and bridge department did purchase a new front-end loader. It was purchased through a lease-purchase agreement with an outstanding balance of approximately $150,000. It is scheduled to be paid off in 2017 with annual payments of $32,093.

The county continues to pay off the lease-purchase agreement on the Event Center. It was originally scheduled to be paid off in 2015. In the last three payments, the county was able to apply a total of $161,000 above the required payments. Most of that increase was possible due to additional contributions from the Heginbotham Trust. The county received another generous gift from the Trust to help pay off the Event Center.

The outstanding balance as of Dec. 31 was approximately $115,000. A majority of the original pledges have been received. Outstanding pledge payments and monies from the capital expenditure fund will be used to finish payments. If expenditures stay in line for 2013, the county may be able to complete all payments this year, two years earlier than anticipated.

There is a new enhancement project scheduled for the Event Center/Homesteaders Park area this year. It will include extending the current bicycle/pedestrian path around the entire fairgrounds, a new water feature on the south side of Homesteaders Park and some additional landscaping features. This project should go forward this summer.

Other county fund budgets include the Social Services Fund at $765,077, which is an increase of $23,899 over last year; Contingency Fund at $166,847; Conservation Trust (lottery funds) at $28,164; E911 Fund Budget at $123,100; and the Economic Development Fund with a budget of $62,778.

Capital Expenditure Fund has a budget of $2,397,814. A majority of that is a pass through grant from the Department of Energy for the NECO Wind Project south and west of Haxtun.

County Fair Fund has a 2013 budget of $54,150. The county will give $15,000 of tax funds toward that effort. This budget reduced significantly when the county commissioners and fair board contracted with BST Production to run the races for 2013. The fair board will receive $500 per race but will not be responsible for related costs or receive other race income.

The fair board utilizes ticket sales, contributions 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.

Holyoke Enterprise January 3, 2013