

Budget Hearing Meeting #44 - 2022
Fairfield County Commissioners' Office
October 18, 2022

Budget Hearing Meeting

The Commissioners met at 11:00 a.m. in the Commissioners' Conference Room of the Historic Courthouse at 210 E Main St., Lancaster, OH. Commissioner Fix called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone with the following Commissioners present: Steve Davis, Dave Levacy, Jeff Fix. Also present: Aundrea Cordle, Jeff Porter, Rochelle Menningen, Bennett Niceswanger, Bart Hampson, and Staci Knisley.

Announcements

Commissioner Davis spoke briefly about the budget process.

Fairfield County Soil and Water Conservation District

Nikki Drake, Director of Fairfield County Soil and Water, along with Jonathan Ferbrache and Christina Holt, attended the Budget Hearing. Ms. Drake provided charts and spoke about funding and highlighted a drainage project at the Fairfield County Airport. She added the airport project did not have engineering firms that would bid on a particular project, so Soil and Water completed the design.

Commissioner Davis inquired about the property involved with the Airport project.

Ms. Drake and Johnathan Ferbrache spoke about the concerns of wildlife close to an airport and the issues of drainage and gas lines on the Fairfield County Airport property. Solar field and other upcoming projects were briefly touched on by Mr. Ferbrache.

Fairfield County Treasurer

Treasurer James Bahnsen spoke about his office's budget, salaries, and the plan to purchase a kiosk for tax payments at the Fairfield Center. Also in attendance were Michael Kaper and Jennifer Effinger.

County Administrator Aundrea Cordle spoke about staffing the current Brink's position with a county employee and the possible use as a constable.

Mr. Bahnsen, spoke about the difficulties that have occurred with the current contract for Brink's services.

Commissioner Fix asked if there are other companies that could provide the service.

Mr. Bahnsen explained that there are not other companies that could provide the services needed.

Fairfield County Veterans Services

Director of Veterans Services, Park Russell spoke about the changes in his budget for 2023. These changes included a replacement employee for 2023 and a program that would help encourage Veterans to use the agency.

Commissioner Davis asked about the budget line item for a vehicle and about transportation issues.

Mr. Russell spoke about the possible need for a van replacement. And the vans that were purchased the previous two years. He also spoke about a vehicle lift for wheelchairs.

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Commissioner Fix asked about Veteran outreach programs.

South Central Major Crimes Unit

Commissioner Fix explained that this is an opportunity for the Commander to speak about the financial requests he had for 2023.

Commissioner Davis asked for clarification for the request to make prior advances a permanent transfer. He also asked about the request to have facility rental fees eliminated.

Major Crimes Commander, Dennis Lowe, stated that if rental fees were eliminated, he would use rental fees toward additional programming.

Commissioner Davis asked about differences between the Sheriff's Office and SCMCU programming.

Commander Lowe spoke about conversations with the Sheriff's Office.

Commissioner Davis asked if some of the programming is newer evidence-based programs and inquired about a proposed new position for an Overdose Death Inspector.

Commander Lowe stated there is a need, and he had considered making the same request and had looked at grant opportunities for the position.

Commissioner Davis stated he would consider the request to forgive the prior advancements but would not advise that the Commission forgo facility rental fees due to agreements that had been previously made.

Commissioner Levacy stated the importance of drug enforcement and overdose investigations and added he believes this should be an area in which SCMCU takes the lead.

Commander Lowe stated the SCMCU has the tools and skillsets to investigate overdose deaths but that not all jurisdictions welcome the Unit's assistance. The Commander also spoke about the reason for the creation of project FORT.

Commissioner Fix asked the Commander where he thought it would make the most sense to have an Overdose Death Investigator.

Commander Lowe stated that the agency investigating drug trafficking should have the Overdose Death Investigator. He further stated he has a good relationship with the County Prosecutor and is located next to the Coroner's Office.

Commissioner Levacy spoke about the pride Fairfield County has related to its internal and external collaborations, and his frustration that agencies are not making more cooperative efforts.

Commissioner Davis stated that all four agencies that have been discussed, Prosecutor, Sheriff, Coroner, and SCMCU, are all asking for additional funding.

Administrator Cordle asked if having an Investigator would lead to additional autopsies and if those costs would be incurred by the Coroner's Office.

Commander Lowe affirmed that it would lead to additional autopsies at a cost to the Coroner's Office and added that you need substantive follow-up investigations to make arrests related to overdose deaths.

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Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission

Regional Planning Commission Director, James Mako provided budget spreadsheets and an overview of the department's financials.

Commissioner Davis asked for clarification on a difference on the provided spreadsheets.

Staci Knisley explained that some of the differences are due to encumbrances.

Commissioner Davis asked if there was a plan for the 125% carry-over.

Mr. Mako explained that the carry-over was to cover anticipated future budget shortfalls.

Commissioner Davis discussed possibility of reducing 2023 carry-over by \$50,000.

Commissioner Levacy asked Mr. Mako's opinion regarding a County Building Department and spoke about his concerns with not having an in-house Building Department.

Mr. Mako stated that Toole and Associates provides a good service for the cost.

Administrator Cordle stated we could not pay for an employee for the same amount we pay Toole and Associates.

Mr. Mako stated Toole has been contracted for 2023.

Fairfield County Juvenile/Probate Court

Judge Terre Vandervoort from Juvenile and Probate Court stated that her Finance Director worked with Mr. Hampson on the 2023 proposed budget. She also stated that detention numbers have increased.

Commissioner Davis stated that the overall budget requests exceed estimated revenues by 6M. He asked for clarification regarding 2022 and 2023 expenditures. The Commissioner asked if there were any expenditure line items that could be reduced and explained that many departments would be asked to trim expenses wherever possible.

Judge Vandervoort stated that there is little room for reduction and that costs for many contractual services expenditures have increased. The Judge expressed her desire to have the Court Appointed Attorney costs reflected in a separate budget because they may cause her budget to appear inflated.

Commissioner Fix stated that the current court appointed attorney costs appear to be on track.

Judge Vandervoort stated that the pandemic affected Court activity and therefore costs. She added that the expectation is that expenses will increase. She also spoke about upcoming retirements and possible payouts.

Commissioner Fix proposed a follow-up meeting for October 25, 2022.

Fairfield County Common Pleas Court

Commissioner Fix welcomed Judge Richard Berens, Josh Horacek, and Brian Wolfe from Common Pleas Court.

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Judge Berens spoke briefly about his new staff and the budget.

Josh Horacek thanked Mr. Hampson, Ms. Knisley, and Ms. Cordle for their assistance with the budget process.

Commissioner Davis asked about possible budget flexibilities.

Judge Berens stated that he was confident that the budget could be adjusted.

Commissioner Davis asked if the Court Appointed Attorney expenditure line being in their budget was of concern to Judge Berens and Josh Horacek.

Mr. Horacek explained that if the number could be easily identified, he was not concerned.

Commissioner Levacy asked about the increase in transcription costs.

Mr. Horacek explained that individual transcriptionists are in short supply and that contracted transcription services were more costly.

Judge Berens thanked the Commissioners and spoke briefly about needed maintenance at the Hall of Justice.

Fairfield County Coroner

Commissioner Fix welcomed Dr. Varney and Luann Davidson from the Coroner's Office.

Coroner Varney spoke about 2021 deaths being unprecedented and added that there were fifty-nine overdose deaths.

Commissioner Fix asked for Dr. Varney's opinion of hiring an Overdose Death Investigator, and if he had a preference as to the agency that should house the investigator.

Dr. Varney spoke about his conversation with the Prosecutor's Office regarding an Overdose Death Investigator and stated that he felt South Central Major Crimes should have the Investigator.

Commissioner Davis asked some questions regarding line items of the budgets.

Dr. Varney spoke about his reasons for increasing salary expenses for a long-time employee.

Commissioner Fix asked for the total cost of an autopsy.

Ms. Davidson stated that costs for an autopsy depended upon the location of the autopsy and transportation costs.

Commissioner Davis asked for clarification regarding defining a death as overdose related.

Commissioner Levacy asked about toxicology reports and criminality in deaths. He further asked if Dr. Varney was involved in a final conversation regarding the placement of an Overdose Death Investigator.

Dr. Varney spoke about reasons and requirements for determining a death a homicide.

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Fairfield County Board of Elections

Commissioner Fix thanked Brett Riffle, the Director for the Board of Elections, and Jane Hanley for coming, and asked if they would like to begin by highlighting their budget.

Mr. Riffle and Ms. Hanley explained there were changes in salaries since the budget reflected the adoption of the County's Comp Plan which moved election workers to a minimum of \$15.00 per hour.

Jane explained that the election turnout was originally projected at 35% and that the projection may now be as high as 70%.

Fairfield County Domestic Relations Court

Commissioner Fix thanked Judge Laura Smith and Lori Lovas from the Domestic Relations Court for attending.

Commissioner Davis asked about budget line items and the proposed court appointed rate. He also asked the Judge for her opinion on the placement of the Court Appointed Attorney expenses.

Judge Smith stated she is ok with having the expenses for Court Appointed Attorney fees in her budget.

Fairfield County Emergency Management Agency

Commissioner Fix welcomed EMA Director, Jon Kochis, and Christy Noland from the Emergency Management Agency.

Mr. Kochis provided a PowerPoint (contained in the minutes) and spoke about the information provided. He elaborated on new technologies and operating expenses.

Ms. Cordle spoke about her participation in an emergency management exercise.

Mr. Kochis spoke about mitigation equipment needed and the hospital's need for an efficient generator.

Commissioner Levacy asked if it would help to reach out to anyone at the state for assistance with equipment needed for the hospital.

Mr. Kochis spoke about grants during and immediately after the pandemic and explained the grant cycles.

Commissioner Davis asked for the total operating budget for EMA and about Federally matched funds.

Ms. Noland clarified the match and budget ask.

Fairfield County Prosecutor

Commissioner Fix thanked Prosecutor Witt for returning.

Prosecutor Witt provided two proposals, one with an investigator. He spoke about the allocation for a new attorney and the challenges hiring at entry rate.

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Commissioner Davis spoke about the housing of an Overdose Death Investigator and asked about the monies needed for the Prosecutor to run his office.

Prosecutor Witt stated that he was contacted last summer by Coroner Varney regarding death certificates and that a meeting was held regarding overdose deaths. Mr. Witt stated that he was in favor of housing an investigator in his office because there are other crimes that the investigator could assist with in providing proof to prosecute but added that several departments could utilize an investigator. The Prosecutor stated he does not wish to diminish any relationships over the housing and hiring of a new investigator position.

Commissioner Davis asked about solutions for the accounting of the Court Appointed Attorney and spoke about reducing the difference between anticipated revenues and expenses.

Mr. Porter, Ms. Cordle, and Ms. Knisley weighed in on the conversation.

Commissioner Davis made a motion to approve the 1st budget from the Prosecutor's Office provided on October 11, 2022.

Commissioner Fix asked if the 2023 Sales Tax and Property Tax Revenues were projected conservatively, and the consensus of the room was that most felt the revenues would come in higher.

Adjournment

With no further business, on the motion of Steve Davis and a second of Dave Levacy, the Board of Commissioners voted to adjourn at 3:53 p.m.

Roll call vote of the motion resulted as follows:

Voting aye thereon: Steve Davis, Dave Levacy, and Jeff Fix

Motion by: Steve Davis Seconded by: Dave Levacy
that the October 18, 2022, Budget Hearing minutes were approved by the following vote:

YEAS: Jeff Fix, Steve Davis, Dave Levacy
ABSTENTIONS: None

NAYS: None

*Approved on October 25, 2022

Jeff Fix
Commissioner


Dave Levacy
Commissioner


Steven A. Davis
Commissioner

Rochelle Menningen
Rochelle Menningen, Clerk