

July 11, 2006

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

A Finance Committee meeting was held Tuesday, July 11, 2006 at 2:30 p.m. in the County Administration Building, Quorum Court Meeting Room, 215 East Central, Bentonville.

Committee Members Present: Allen, Moore, Sheridan, Stephenson, Summers, Wolf, Wozniak

Others Present: Treasurer Deanna Ratcliffe, Coroner Kimberly Scott, Ed Gartin, Travis Harp, Richard McComas, Michele Anderson, Michelle Crain, Sidney Reynolds, Darryl Marks, Elizabeth Bowen, Sandy Tang

Media: Joe Askins – Morning News, Jennifer Turner – Benton County Daily Record

JP Tim Summers called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None

1. County Attorney/Grants Administrator Report

There was no report from the County Attorney. A report from the Grants Administrator was distributed in the packets. There were no questions. JP Wolf noted that it was a good report. JP Wozniak noted that there is grant money available for fire stations, and recalled that there have been several requests during budget discussions for money for fire stations that no one seems to be applying for. The Committee discussed the recent statements in the media regarding the State of Arkansas' budget surplus, and JP Allen noted that the county is footing the bill in many critical areas that the State is no longer willing to fund and suggested lobbying our legislators. JP Wolf asked if the Arkansas Association of Counties was taking any action. JP Sheridan stated that he would check on it.

2. Coroner – Discussion on Calls

Comptroller Richard McComas explained a handout showing the number of calls the Coroner has made in the last 3 years, and the number of calls so far in 2006. JP Summers stated that they were concerned about the number of people they could expect to pay at each scene. Coroner Kimberly Scott stated that they follow a duty schedule, and explained which calls that the Coroner is required to attend. She said there are circumstances where she needs assistance, such as double fatalities and situations that are unfortunately very nasty. She said they budgeted for 720 calls in 2006, but it is something that she has no control over and that she does not send extra deputy coroners to scenes if they are not needed because she does not want them in the way. She noted that there are other areas in her budget that will not be expended, and that will be enough to cover the extra personnel costs. She said she had been able to obtain 400 body bags which normally cost \$35 each from Government surplus for \$5 per bag. She also stated that she has \$5,000 in her small equipment account, and would like to request a cooler at this time. JP Sheridan asked Kimberly Scott to explain again just exactly why she needs a cooler. Kimberly Scott stated that when people are killed passing through the area, it takes time to notify the families, and there are instances where they have to hold individuals who are being sent to

the State Crime Lab because they do not come to pick up bodies everyday. She said for instance, if someone dies on a Friday, it may be Sunday or Monday before the Crime Lab picks them up. She said they have used the Bentonville Police Department's cooler, but it only has capacity for one person, and on some weekends they have needed to house 2 or 3 people. She explained that Northwest Medical Center will not hold bodies if they are going to the crime lab, and St. Mary's will hold one person if they died in their facility. JP Sheridan asked what they do if they have to hold more than one body. Kimberly Scott stated that they have had to farm them out to funeral homes, and they are not always able to get someone to take them. She said if the body is going to the Crime Lab then she will call them and meet them somewhere, or tell them they have to do something because she has no way to preserve them for two or three days. JP Sheridan asked how often that happens. Kimberly Scott stated that they used to send one body a month to the Crime Lab, and they are now sending 2 or 3 per week. JP Wolf asked how many coolers they actually have available to them. Kimberly Scott listed the funeral homes that have coolers, along with St. Mary's, and the Bentonville Police Department, which each have availability for one body. She noted that they are getting into a situation where more and more of the funeral homes are not locally owned, and they are going to start charging for storing bodies. JP Wolf asked if they ever had bodies in every available cooler. Kimberly Scott stated that they have. JP Wolf asked if that was a regular occurrence. Kimberly Scott said that it was not.

JP Stephenson asked if it was true that the Crime Lab sometimes transported bodies iced down in body bags. The Committee discussed how the Crime Lab retrieves and transports bodies. JP Stephenson asked at what point a cooler in the county's facility would no longer be adequate. Kimberly Scott stated that at this point, if a family of four were to die in an accident, they would be held in 4 different facilities. She said that she is looking for a used or slightly freight damaged 3-person unit for around \$3500. JP Stephenson stated that in his opinion the County has reached the point in population that they need this facility, but he would not want to purchase anything without a warranty. JP Sheridan asked if any modifications would need to be made in the current Coroner's office facility. Kimberly Scott explained that it is a portable unit that plugs in when needed, with no additional electrical or plumbing requirements. JP Sheridan asked if any additional security would be needed. Kimberly Scott stated that she is considering adding bars to the back door. JP Sheridan asked if Washington County or hospitals located there had coolers that they could use. Kimberly Scott stated that they did not have the space. JP Allen asked if other counties the same size as Benton County had coolers. Kimberly Scott stated that some of them did. JP Allen stated that the county has grown into a metropolitan area, and by 2020 is projected to have a larger population than Pulaski County. JP Stephenson made motion that Coroner Kimberly Scott be authorized to spend up to the \$5,000 currently in her budget to purchase a portable cooler with a capacity of not less than three, and for the recommendation to be forwarded to the July 11, 2006 Committee of Thirteen meeting, seconded by JP Moore. Motion passed by unanimous show of hands vote. Kimberly Scott asked if she needed to appear before any other committees. JP Summers stated that they would report to the Committee of Thirteen that the Finance Committee had approved the request.

3. Planning Dept. – Discussion on Revenue/Expenses

Comptroller Richard McComas stated that the Quorum Court had asked for a mid-year report on the Planning Department permit fees and expenses. He said they had projected \$263,250 in permit fees for 2006, and have received \$144,130 to date, which averages out to approximately \$27,000 per month. He said if they receive \$25,000 for each of the next 6 months that will leave a surplus of \$30,850 at years' end and after taking care of deficits in four accounts, they will

have about \$26,000 left. He said there is also \$12,000 left over from the purchase of vehicles, so the total surplus funds will be about \$38,000. He said they are looking at a software program to handle the accounting and the issuing of permits, which will cost around \$40,000, and they want to go ahead and spend \$20,000 this year, which will require an adjustment in the 2006 Budget. He said that they want to begin the process but not make a final purchase until the new Planning Director is in place.

JP Summers asked how many permits were actually issued. Planning Director Michelle Crain stated that they had issued 355 permits, and did not start until the third week in January. JP Stephenson asked if everything was running as she expected. Michelle Crain stated that it had run even better than she had anticipated, and the new software would track all aspects of the Planning Department's functions. JP Allen asked if they were keeping track of people who did not get permits. Michelle Crain stated that when someone is reported, they post the ordinance at the construction site along with an application form and they usually comply with no problems. She said they have gotten good feedback, with a few complaints, but the licensed contractors love it because it did away with some of the under-cutting that was occurring. She also noted that they have a 24-hour turnaround on inspections. JP Sheridan suggested asking the Assessor employees to keep an eye out for new construction and let the Planning Department know. He asked if the Information Systems Department had been consulted on the new software program. Michelle Crain stated that they had worked very closely with them. JP Stephenson made motion to authorize the expenditure of \$20,000 for Planning Department Software and making an adjustment to the 2006 Budget, seconded by JP Sheridan. Richard McComas informed the committee that the software package will have to go to bid. JP Stephenson withdrew his motion. JP Sheridan agreed. JP Allen made motion to authorize the County Judge to obtain bids for a software package for the Planning Department, and to amend the 2006 Budget, seconded by JP Moore. Motion passed by unanimous show of hands vote.

4. Sales Tax Report

Comptroller Richard McComas stated that sales tax receipts exceeded \$900,000 this month, which is a 10% increase over the time period last year, and brings the annual increase to 12.21%, which is about what they budgeted.

5. Jail Collections

Comptroller Richard McComas stated that Jail Collections were above budget projections for June, but are still behind about \$37,000 for the year, but the State of Arkansas should start making payments again in August or September when they get their new appropriations.

6. Mid-Year Revenue and Expenditure Update

Comptroller Richard McComas stated that "Revenues Above Budgeted Projection" are \$677,000, and the majority of that was from the Final Settlement from last year which was put in this year's budget. He said there was not a whole lot of new revenue that will reoccur, because it is mostly from the final settlement and various grant money.

Michele Anderson went over the mid-year Fuel Analysis Report for the Sheriff's Office, County Jail, and Road Departments showing their budgeted amounts, what their expenditures were, and the percentage of their budget that has been used. She said countywide fuel expense is about \$50,000 more the first half of 2005.

Michele Anderson stated that they have spoken with several departments who have spent more than 50% of their budgets, and it is mostly due to one-time services and fees that have already

been paid. She noted that 76% of the capital expenditures have already been purchased, but we are still within 50% of the total budget.

JP Summers asked why we are so far over in Salaries. Michele Anderson explained that the Election Workers had been budgeted for in Other Services, but the IRS rules have changed and they had to pay them out of Salaries. She said they will make a budget adjustment at the end of the year.

7. Other Business

JP Summers asked JP Wozniak if he would be willing to serve as the Representative to the Arkansas Association of Quorum Courts since JP Sheridan will no longer be able to serve. JP Wozniak stated that he would.

JP Summers introduced a presentation from the Information Systems Department on computerizing the agenda, and said they were going to see if this would be a more efficient way to handle paper and manage information. He said that one of the possibilities was having monitors at the work stations so that each JP could view the agenda items onscreen. JP Allen asked if real estate transactions were available online. IS Director Sidney Reynolds stated that the Circuit Clerk's office is in the process of getting those online. The Committee discussed which information is available by subscription and what is available to the public.

Darryl Marks distributed handouts showing the breakdown of the total costs for either 16 or 18 units. JP Summers stated that he had asked for this information, and wanted to look at something that could be utilized not only by the Quorum Court but by other departments for training. The Committee discussed the system that is being used by the city of Siloam Springs, which are monitors that all show the same thing. Darryl Marks stated that they are looking at full work stations, and went over the handouts. JP Summers stated he would like to see a way for the JPs to communicate with each other that would be in compliance with FOI requirements, such as email that could be viewed by anyone. County Attorney Ed Gartin stated that he is still looking into it, but believed the Attorney General has issued an opinion that any communication that is limited to just the JPs would be a violation. He said that if they were just posting comments regarding agenda items which the media had access to and was posted on the County website, it would probably not be a problem. JP Summers stated there could be a lot of training going on in this room when it is not being used for meetings.

JP Stephenson stated that his interest in the system would be to cut down on the amount of paper he has to print from his computer at home only to get to a meeting and find that another set has been printed and the information has changed. JP Moore asked if it would not be easier to run permanently mounted laptops than individual CPU's. Darryl Marks stated that if it was something they want to use for training, it has to be able to meet the spec margins for the programs in which people will be trained. Comptroller Richard McComas asked if the screens would block the views of the JPs. JP Summers asked if they could access the data from their home computers. JP Wolf asked if the information would be read-only. Darryl Marks said yes to both questions. JP Summers stated that they did not have to make a decision today, but wanted to know if the Committee was interested in exploring it further. JP Stephenson stated that he thought that while it is a good idea to try to economize and use the same system for both the Quorum Court and training purposes, he did know if they needed 18 training units set up on the high resolution that they will require. He said that the laptop idea appealed to him because it is portable. He said several corporations and government entities provide laptops, and it would still be county property that could be taken home, just like a county vehicle. He said he thought trying to do a hybrid where they could use the computers for the JPs and for training would be

burdensome and not really satisfy anyone. JP Summers asked how the cost of the laptops would compare. Darryl Marks stated that laptops start at \$2,000, which is about \$500 more than the CPUs. JP Summers stated that one of the things he liked about this is that they could put a lot of historical information on them, such as minutes and searches of particular phrases. JP Allen questioned the cost of the laptops, and stated that he had just purchased a Dell for his business that only cost \$1,000. Darryl Marks stated that they purchase a 5 year maintenance contract on them and for technical purposes use only the Latitude Line because they are consistent as long as that model is produced. JP Summers stated that another thing this could do is put all of the ordinances online so they would not have to keep up with the Code Books, and that would give them immediate access to the information, which would be a real asset. JPs Stephenson, Wozniak, and Allen spoke in favor of looking into it further. JP Wolf asked what the downtime would be on either system in case of a malfunction. Darryl Marks stated that the maintenance agreement that they purchase provides for overnight replacement if necessary.

JP Schindler stated that the Historical Commission is looking into the possibility of being added to the County Property Tax statements as the recipient of a voluntary tax that taxpayers would indicate they wanted to pay. Assessor Shirley Sandlin stated that she thought the Quorum Court could pass an ordinance adding them to the tax statement. County Attorney Ed Gartin stated that they used to do it for the Sunshine School, but he had issued an opinion about 10 years ago that they could not collect the tax for anything other than a county entity and the Historical Commission qualifies as one.

JP Schindler also stated that the existing cable franchise agreement requires Cox Cable to pay a 3% franchise fee on its revenue to the County, and the city of Little Rock is currently negotiating for 5%, and Benton County should consider doing the same. County Attorney Ed Gartin stated that he had not reviewed the contract for some time and was not sure of its status. He also said that he was not sure whether or not the Public Service Commission's authority pre-empted the county's ability to take any action with respect to rates or tariffs.

JP Summers announced that the next Finance Committee meeting would be August 1, 2006 at 2:30 p.m., and the next Quorum Court meeting would be July 27, 2006 at 5:00 p.m.

After motion and second the meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.