

County begins budget work with hearings

Water, sewer rate hikes are projected for next year

By Megan Broome

Staff Writer

CLAYTON— The Rabun County Board of Commissioners has begun meeting with different departments in budget workshops to discuss budget proposals for Fiscal Year 2020.

The final budget is scheduled for approval by commissioners on June 25, 2019 at 5 p.m.

The first meeting was held on Tuesday, April 9 and meetings with departments are scheduled through Monday, April 22.

The budget meeting last Thursday was the second in the series of sessions, and commissioners went over budget proposals for county departments.

The Rabun County Water and Sewer Authority estimated a budget of \$337,00. This went down from \$375,00 the prior year.

“We’re looking at adjusting our rates,”

said Brendan Thompson, general manager for the Rabun County Water and Sewer Authority, to commissioners.

He said there will be a water increase of 6 percent and sewer increase of 8 percent.

“[We’re] trying to stay reasonable,” Thompson said.

The Tax Assessor’s office has requested an increase in board member compensation of \$1,400. It was noted that this rate would be closer to other counties. They also requested \$700 for contract labor because they have an employee of many years who is retiring.

The Rabun County Golf Club’s expenditures were shown to be in line with prior years. They requested a trim mower and are in the process of getting a new clubhouse. Fred Derrick, director of golf, represented the golf club at the workshop.

Please see **COUNTY**, A11

COUNTY

■CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

Mike Carnes, EMS/911 director, said his department is asking for one new employee because the number of calls is increasing every year. He said that Emergency Medical Services (EMS) drives to Gainesville on average four times a day.

He also said they are requesting one new truck and remount at an estimated \$325,830 and a new cardiac monitor at \$30,815.

It was also noted that overtime wages might come down after a new employee is hired.

Carnes also represented E 911 in the budget meeting. It was stated that projected revenues for the department are \$370,000 and salaries are up

about \$21,000.

They are asking for \$16,950 for small equipment, an increase from the \$800 budgeted last year.

The goal is to improve communication on Lake Burton and throughout the county during bad weather. There was also discussion to increase entry level pay to \$12.75.

The Senior Center reported that the number of part-time employees is up and discussed the new flooring installed. They requested funding for upkeep of this new flooring.

Emergency Management (EMA) requested safer equipment such as a washer and dryer system that can be used to clean clothes firefighters wear to a scene. They also discussed purchasing a dual camera drone.

Small equipment at \$4,000 was also part of the proposed budget to

use for rescue equipment because it has an expiration date and needs to be replaced.

"Thank you for everything you do for emergency management and rescue," a commissioner said.

The Rabun County Health Department requested additional funding to help support a low-income adult dental program at the facility.

"We're that first line of defense when it comes to health," said a representative from the Health Department.

Budget meetings continued on Tuesday and Stephen Arbitter, county commissioner, sent a statement to *The Clayton Tribune* highlighting what happened at the meeting.

The Library Board reported that they have seen an increased demand for electronic books and audio recordings that are

generally 75 percent more expensive than traditional books.

They also proposed replacing the book drop because the current one is in disrepair after being hit by cars. To offset the increase in the budget, the library board has used part time help and volunteers to help with used book sales, copier and fax services and late fines.

The Road Department requested capital outlay for a mini excavator because the current 17-year-old machine is no longer functional.

They reported a turnover in staff due to economic pressure from private industry and began working on spring paving projects around the county as well as keeping up with routine mowing.

Projects around Lake Burton specifically are a high priority.

The Fire Department

requested three new full-time employees to cover one full additional shift.

There has been increased pressure to add more part-time employees to help cover times when full-time employees are off.

The need for more full-time employees has increased as there is a decreasing number of available volunteers and increasing workload.

The proposal also requested a new tanker for south Rabun and will start to look for a ladder truck.

The Solid Waste/Recycling department said there is a need for a compactor and the Recycling Center needs to replace equipment boxes.

FAITH, Fight Abuse in the Home, had no changes in their budget and said funds are primarily used for trauma therapy for

children. They noted that services provided are valuable to Rabun County.

The Recreation Department requested a new athletic director to work with new programs like state baseball tournaments, pickleball and tennis programs. They stated that this will bring revenue and economic impact to Rabun County.

The Clerk of Court's office included the need for computer upgrades in their budget proposal. They mentioned that storage has become less of a problem with an e-file system.

A special called meeting to approve the preliminary budget is scheduled for Wednesday, May 22 at 8:15 a.m. A public hearing will be held on June 13 at 5 p.m. before the final budget is adopted on June 25.

County wraps up hearings, ready to present preliminary budget

By Megan Broome

Staff Writer

CLAYTON— The Rabun County Board of Commissioners concluded their last rounds of budget workshop sessions this past Monday and are now in discussion to prepare a preliminary budget to present to the public.

During the April 18 workshop, District Attorney George Christian discussed needing a support staff position and Assistant District Attorney (ADA) position and said he was having trouble getting an ADA position.

Tony Galloway, director of Rabun County Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), discussed public welfare and the 20 percent cut in services they had to make to stay within budget. He said that travel reimbursements for foster parents had to be cut.

"We're going to be coming in right at budget," Galloway said. He said that county money helps supplement the budget so they can continue to serve families.

There was discussion about how Rabun County is limited to one court room and that with the number

of court cases increasing, this would cause an even bigger issue in the future if it is not addressed. An additional mental health court has been added, so this increases the workload even more.

However, more resources are becoming available in the community with more Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) support groups.

Coroner Sam Beck had little change in his budget and asked for an additional \$500.

Paws 4 Life requested more animal control officers to be able to provide 24/7 care.

During Monday's workshop, the overall budget for the Tax Commissioner is down \$10,000.

The Sheriff's Department asked for an increase in starting salary for detention officers. Currently, detention officers get paid \$12.15 per hour and they want to increase that amount to \$14.09 per hour.

"Hopefully recruiting a better qualified person," a representative stated. They explained that they are losing deputies to other departments because of the pay.

They also budgeted

\$7,500 for inmate housing. They explained that Rabun County has to pay to house inmates in other facilities while also paying for medical, transportation and other costs that incur.

Currently, it costs \$35 per day to house an inmate in Jackson County and \$45 a day to house an inmate in Hall County.

They also asked for an additional \$10,000 for prison meals because the average population of the jail has gone up. They did note that they changed the meals to two hot meals and one cold meal for lunch in order to save costs.

They noted they are moving position from the jail side to the Sheriff's Office side, but the amount would be affected.

They now offer NA, AA and three church services a week for inmates at the jail. They also have access to a video system where they can contact friends and family members 7 days a week. The cost is the same as a phone call would be.

The Sheriff asked for an increase and discussed installing new computers in cars and different things that were added.

They asked for funding for supplies and uniforms

and for one more Bailiff at the Courthouse due to the increase in the number of court proceedings.

The public defender's office asked for one new social worker and one new investigator to help manage the increasing caseload.

The social worker would help expedite inmates out of the jail and would help combat overcrowding by providing information about services like drug treatment and mental health treatment that the public defender does not have time to find.

They also asked for a 2 percent raise because that is what the state is giving their employees, according to a representative.

Teka Earnhardt and Rick Story represented the Tourism Development Authority (TDA), the Welcome Center and Development Authority of Rabun County and discussed the different developments that are happening, the sale of Rabun Business Park and the three entities coming together under one office.

Tammy Whitmire, elections supervisor, was the last workshop of the day and discussed the new voting machines that the state is getting. She said that without knowing the specifics of the equipment and the cost of the equipment and resources she will need, she does not have an accurate budget

number. She was optimistic but said that she might have to come back in front of the board to ask for additional funding.

Commissioners briefly discussed revenues before adjourning.

The preliminary budget will be presented to the board at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, May 22 and a special called meeting will be held at 8:15 a.m. that same day to approve the preliminary budget for FY 2020.

There will be a public hearing on the budget on June 13 at 5 p.m. and a special called meeting to adopt the final budget for FY 2020 will be June 25 at 5 p.m.

Save the date!

2019

Rhapsody in Rabun

