

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS, WASHOE COUNTY, NEVADA
TOWN HALL BUDGET MEETING
03-379**

THURSDAY

6:00 P.M.

APRIL 10, 2003

PRESENT:

David Humke, Chairman

Jim Shaw, Vice Chairman

Jim Galloway, Commissioner

Pete Sferrazza, Commissioner

Bonnie Weber, Commissioner

Amy Harvey, County Clerk

Katy Singlaub, County Manager

David Watts-Vial, Deputy District Attorney

The Board met in special session in the Commission Chambers of the Washoe County Administration Complex, 1001 East Ninth Street, Reno, Nevada and conducted a Town Hall Meeting concerning Washoe County's Fiscal Year 2003-2004 budget.

Chairman Humke welcomed the citizens present and those watching the meeting at home on SNCAT. The Commissioners introduced themselves and described the area of Washoe County they represent.

Kathy Carter, Community Relations Director, facilitated the meeting. She advised the purpose of the meeting was to receive input from the citizens concerning Washoe County budget issues. She encouraged comments from the citizens who were present, as well as by telephone calls and e-mails from the viewing audience. She advised an online budget survey was located at the County's Website and written surveys have been placed at different locations around the County. She encouraged the public to participate in those methods for submitting comments to the County. Ms. Carter introduced Chris Matthews, E-Government Information Officer, who would be recording tonight's comments and displaying them on the screen.

John Sherman, Finance Director, conducted a PowerPoint presentation and discussed Washoe County's 2003-2004 budget. He reviewed the budget challenges facing Washoe County and the actions taken over the last couple of years to reduce costs. He stated the County would like to know what services are important to the citizens in order to assist in making budget choices. He advised the County is faced with an \$18-million shortfall going into the 2003-04 fiscal year budget. To eliminate this shortfall, the Board directed that each department present plans to reduce their budgets by seven percent, which was the amount needed in order to balance the budget. Mr. Sherman then

reviewed the proposed budget cuts of each department, and the impacts those cuts would have on current service levels.

Rob Calderone, retired Director of Washoe County Juvenile Services, advised he was representing the Foster Grandparent Program Advisory Board. He spoke in support of retaining the Foster Grandparent Program for Wittenberg Hall, and discussed the benefits and cost effectiveness of the program.

Muriel Skelly, Family Court Facilitator, spoke in support of Judge Hardesty's proposal for the Court budget that would result in a ten percent increase in revenues for the Court system. She said it is important to seriously consider Judge Hardesty's budget, as cutting programs from the Court system would be devastating to the community.

Virginia Kersey, Reno resident, said she is an advocate for Parks, Recreation and Open Space. She stated the citizens voted for tax increases to support parks, recreation, and libraries, and it is important that the County support their position.

Ralph Furr, Reno resident, commented that Court Security employees do a good job but he believes these positions are overstaffed during evenings and weekends when there is very little activity at the Courthouse. He said privatizing this service would save a lot of money for the County.

Martha Gould, retired Library Director, noted that the citizens voted four times to support library issues over the last twenty years. She said, if the Library has to cut its budget by seven percent, library system hours would be reduced by approximately 150 hours a week. She commented that a new library branch is scheduled to be opened next month that would have to be staffed and urged the Board to think carefully about keeping faith with the voters that supported the last bond issue for parks and libraries.

Eddie Anderson, area resident, said he thinks library hours could be cut, especially on weekends. He suggested the \$200 General Assistance cash vouchers for indigents only be given to single working women with children. He said budget shortfalls would not be a problem if the County would be more industry friendly. He suggested that faith-based organizations in the area might pick up the shortfall in some social programs.

Bill von Phul, Truckee Meadows Trails Association, appealed to the Board on behalf of the Parks and Recreation Department. He said their programs add tremendously to the quality of life in Washoe County. He then stated he believes road sanding has become excessive and suggested this service could be reduced.

Joni Kaiser, Washoe Library Foundation, spoke in support of more hours for the libraries, not less. She said the libraries provide a prevention aspect because when children are in the libraries, they are not out committing crimes or getting into other kinds of trouble in the community.

Tyrus Cobb, area resident, said all possible ways for departments to perform their services better and at less cost should be explored. He spoke in support of Judge Hardesty's proposal for the District Court system and said he supports innovative, outsourcing, and entrepreneurial approaches to cutting costs.

Ms. Carter advised that Sharon Taylor, Sparks citizen, telephoned her comments in and requested that public safety be spared, as it is a number one priority. Ms. Taylor suggested that cuts might be made to the motor pool, Commissioner salaries, or libraries.

Juanita Cox, representing Citizens In Action, advised that zoning enforcement inspectors are using the Sheriff's RAVEN helicopter, which costs at least \$125 an hour plus employee cost, to fly over and snoop into people's backyards. She requested these agencies pay RAVEN. Ms. Cox commented that the helicopter use is definitely needed for felony-type crimes, but to inspect a private citizen's back yard is a questionable activity that she considers an intrusion of privacy and amounts to harassment.

Susan Seidl, Sparks resident, said the budget survey she recently acquired at a library branch indicates the County spends 62 percent of its budget on law enforcement, the courts and the judicial system, which seems excessive. Ms. Seidl suggested a survey be done in other major cities to determine what percentage of their budgets are spent on public safety. She then asked where the budget is for vocational training and drug rehabilitation. She said children should be sent to libraries instead of being put in jail, and the libraries should be open more hours, not less.

Ted Harris, Incline Village resident, said he would like to see some tax cuts, commenting that Incline Village pays a huge disproportionate share of the taxes in Washoe County. He suggested the Board look at what services are truly essential and expressed concern that the Sheriff's Highly Intensive Supervision, Training and Education Program (HISTEP) is going to be cut.

Elaine Steiner, Reno resident, stated that outsourcing services is not always the best way to go. She said the County is making an effort but may need to do more to assure there is no duplication of services.

Ron Woyciehowsky, Sparks resident, asked if there would still be a Health Department after the budget cuts are made. He said Health Department services are very important, and he would hate to see those services lost to the community.

Darlene Cunningham, North Valleys resident, said she does not recommend outsourcing health services. She expressed concerns about cutting Health Department programs and discussed some of the health challenges facing the community. She said the Health Department provides a valuable service that should not be cut.

Sally Fry-Woyciehowsky, Sparks resident, spoke in favor of programs that support women and children. She said the County must have a good public health program to avoid further problems. Ms. Woyciehowsky stated the County cannot afford to keep the libraries open seven days a week and then cut back on immunization and prevention programs.

The Commissioners then responded to the comments made by the public. Chairman Humke said he believes the Board members strongly support the Foster Grandparent Program, and he was not aware there was a proposal for cuts to that program. County Manager Singlaub advised there is a proposal to cut some funding for the Foster Grandparent Program. She noted all of the proposals are up for discussion and final decisions have not yet been made.

Commissioner Sferrazza stated he supports Judge Hardesty's proposal, noting it is contingent on the legislation and other things in the proposal actually happening. Chairman Humke stated Judge Hardesty's proposal fits his philosophy of letting elected officials control as much of their budgets as possible, and he believes best management practices should be applied.

Chairman Humke noted that maintaining parks, recreation, libraries, and animal control services have been successful bond issues in the County, and he is happy to work with the departments to provide those services in a better way. He noted, however, that the County still has to provide other necessary services that people would not vote for in a bond issue, such as some of the law enforcement functions and the court services; and that these services are more difficult to accomplish.

Commissioner Galloway said he thinks Courthouse security warrants an investigation for privatization, but cautioned that may not be the best thing to do for this service. Chairman Humke stated his understanding is the security guards are necessary to protect the public records, citizens, and employees related to offices that are open after hours and on weekends. Commissioner Sferrazza stated he believes some outsourcing for security for some buildings has been done and thinks this should be uniform throughout the County.

Commissioner Weber commented that many County programs are mandated and cannot be cut. She said citizen volunteerism is definitely needed to keep some programs from being cut or reduced. Commissioner Shaw advised the School District and the Library have partnered to place libraries in the some of the schools. He said this partnership extended library services and has had a positive impact on the Library budget.

As Chair of the District Health Board, Commissioner Shaw advised that health and safety are very important issues for the citizens of Washoe County. He said it was challenging to cut the Health Department budget by seven percent, but, ultimately, the budget was cut only four percent. Commissioner Shaw emphasized that the Health Department and health services are not being eliminated, but some services are being

reduced. It is hoped that local hospitals and other community agencies will be able to pick up some of the services the Health Department is not able to fund.

Commissioner Galloway said he supports reducing the Health Department budget by only four percent. He advised this add back would restore some of the services to families and provide the staff needed to provide immunizations. He noted, however, when one department is cut less than seven percent, a greater burden falls on another function of Washoe County, and it becomes a difficult balancing act.

Commissioner Sferrazza commented that Washoe County will be considering the formation of a Mosquito Abatement District, and this could release some County funds needed for other programs, such as in the Health Department. He stated he is a library user and would like to see night hours and more weekend hours. He noted the founding fathers of the Country were strong believers in libraries and supported self and public education. He does not believe the County can ever look the other way in terms of its library services.

Lt. Gregg Lubbe, Sheriff's Office, discussed issues relating to the use of the RAVEN helicopter by Zoning Enforcement and other agencies within the County. He stated the RAVEN helicopter is a personnel multiplier for law enforcement agencies in the community. Agencies, such as the District Attorney's Office and Zoning Enforcement, may request the assistance of the helicopter when it is flying, and they pay for those services. He noted there are instances when the Zoning Enforcement Division may request the use of the helicopter for something the Sheriff's Office may have brought to their attention.

Commissioner Galloway said, relative to the issue raised about reducing taxes, he could not promise tax cuts, but would continue the custom the Commissioners have followed, which is to practice tax restraint. He advised the Board has been extremely reluctant to raise rates, especially property tax rates, but has had to raise some taxes. He noted that increases in County taxes have been about one-third of what has occurred in the two cities over the same period. Commissioner Galloway then commented the cut of the HISTEP program was a choice made by the Sheriff. He said this program is more appropriate to the less hardened prison population that is already outsourced on alternative sentencing programs. He stated there is a more hardened prison population now and HISTEP was eliminated because there are not enough inmates that qualify for that type of program.

Chairman Humke stated the high budget cost expended for public safety is an indicator of the County's role to protect people, and police and court functions are the first line of defense in any society. He noted that drug rehabilitation is primarily a State function and vocational training is a School District function. Commissioner Sferrazza commented that he supports the suggestion to look at the budgets of other cities and counties to determine the average percentage spent on courts and law enforcement, as well as parks and libraries. Chairman Humke stated the County is always looking for areas of duplication and appreciates any suggestions concerning that issue.

Ms. Carter read statements received from citizens that telephoned in their comments. Matt Bayer said the Hay Study of a few years ago resulted in increased County salaries across the Board. He said many Registered Nurse positions in the Health Department could be reclassified in order to save money. Helen Walters said further cuts in the Sheriff's Office would increase danger and havoc in the jails. She suggested the Pioneer Lot be utilized as a parking lot or other use that would produce revenues. Jim Barth suggested the Commissioners talk to the Men's and Women's Club regarding the golf courses. He said golf course money is supposed to be for the County golf courses, but it appears that is not happening. Sam Dehne said it did his heart good to save the Easter Egg Hunt by starting the donations bandwagon. Gayle Mair advised that Courthouse security is run by the Sheriff's Office, but security officers are not sworn deputies, which reduces the cost to the County. Vivian Freeman expressed support for keeping the libraries open as much as possible and for full funding of the Health Department. She said privatizing is a bad idea and would cost the County more in the long run. Ms. Carter advised that an e-mail was received from Jack Trainor asking how much of the Sheriff's budget is for public relations, audio visual, helicopter pilots and other extraneous items, and what percentage of inmate and attendant criminal justice costs are for nonviolent drug offenders that would be better dealt with through rehabilitation or probation.

Commissioner Galloway explained that, before the Hay Study, the County considered what salary levels would be needed in order to provide good service to the public without undue turnover and still maintain some budget efficiency. The Board decided to pay average salaries in order to avoid discontent and inefficiency in the organization. He said he supports the Hay System and believes the County will be moving right along with the community, which is where it needs to be to retain good employees.

Ms. Carter advised another comment came in from Shirley Canale, Reno resident, asking why the golf course budgets should have to cut seven percent and then increase fees in the summer. She said this is unfair to the residents and the golfer, and they should be involved in decisions made for funding golf courses.

Chairman Humke noted that the County is still looking at all the budget issues, and no final decisions have been made. He said the County wants the continued input from citizens.

Commissioner Sferrazza thanked everyone that expressed his or her priorities relative to the County's budget. He said the County has to cut the budget approximately seven percent, and if everything could be cut across the board, it would make their job easier. However, that cannot be done, as some services are mandated and necessary and cannot be cut. His philosophy is to stick to the seven percent across the board as much as possible, but in some areas, such as the Health Department and the District Court, there is an opportunity to increase revenues to offset costs. He stated that

the Board is taking a hard look at ways not to cut, and there is a commitment to avoid laying off employees to the extent possible.

Commissioner Shaw thanked everyone that participated and said the comments presented were resourceful and productive. Commissioner Weber thanked everyone for being involved and participating. She said the process does not stop tonight and the public's input is needed. Commissioner Galloway said he has learned from the comments made tonight and there are additional ideas to consider.

Chairman Humke thanked everyone present and watching at home. He said his philosophy is that the citizens of his District elected him to critically probe the issues. He noted that County staff are the best employees in all of Washoe County.

8:00 p.m. The meeting adjourned.

DAVID E. HUMKE, Chairman
Washoe County Commission

ATTEST:

AMY HARVEY, County Clerk
and Clerk of the Board of
County Commissioners

*Minutes Prepared by
Barbara Trow
Deputy County Clerk*