

**MINUTES
LANCASTER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
BUDGET MEETING
TUESDAY, JUNE 7, 2022
IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE BOARD OF EQUALIZATION MEETING
COUNTY CITY BUILDING, ROOM 112**

Advanced public notice of the meeting was posted on the County-City Building bulletin board, the Lancaster County, Nebraska, website and emailed to the media and published in the Lincoln Journal Star print and digital editions on June 2, 2022.

Commissioners present: Deb Schorr, Chair; Christa Yoakum, Vice Chair; Roma Amundson and Rick Vest

Commissioners absent: Sean Flowerday

Others Present: David Derbin, Chief Administrative Officer; Kristy Bauer, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer; Dennis Meyer, Budget and Fiscal Director and Meggan Reppert-Funke, County Clerk's Office

The meeting was called to order at 10:10 a.m. and the location of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act was announced.

AGENDA ITEM

1) APPROVAL OF BUDGET HEARING MEETING MINUTES FOR MAY 24, 2022

MOTION: Vest moved and Amundson seconded approval of the minutes. Vest, Amundson, Yoakum and Schorr voted yes. Flowerday was absent. Motion carries 4-0.

2) DEPARTMENT BUDGET HEARINGS – Dennis Meyer, Budget and Fiscal Officer

A. Corrections

Brad Johnson, Corrections Director, was available for the discussion.

Meyer said within the next few weeks he will present a Resolution to the County Board to amend General Fund appropriations. Corrections may need an additional \$800,000+ to cover increased costs related to labor negotiations. Meyer is working with Johnson on a few items that are under budget and he will have a better idea later this month regarding the total amount needed.

Schorr asked which items are under budget. Johnson stated hospitalizations and heating costs. Meyer added that training was cancelled due to Covid. Vest asked for clarification on the estimated additional appropriation amount. Meyer confirmed that \$800,000 is the amount that would need to be transferred to the Corrections budget. He added there are a few things that could change that estimate such as additional holiday pay (Juneteenth) and overtime pay.

Meyer stated expenses are increasing 15.17% and revenues are decreasing 21.13% (see agenda packet). Of the \$4,650,000 increase, \$3,500,000 is for payroll costs. Johnson added the budget

includes 147 Correctional Officers (COs). As of June 6, 2022, Corrections had 136 COs but this number could increase by 4-5 in the next few weeks. Meyer inquired about the change in overtime hours. Johnson explained that in the last contract, premium pay was calculated after 86 hours. The new contract calculates premium pay after 80 hours which will cause an increase in overtime pay.

Johnson stated the budget includes a total of 213 full-time equivalents (FTEs). Meyer said budget documents show a request for 215 but it should be 213 (see agenda packet). He explained that an Information Technology (IT) position and a Drug Treatment Clinician were approved by the County Board at mid-year.

It was noted that most of the budget increase is attributed to labor and service contracts.

Schorr inquired about the reduction in revenue. Johnson stated the phone contract went from \$0.21 a minute to \$0.10 a minute. This revenue goes into the Inmate Benefit Fund which is then used for various programs benefiting the inmates.

Meyer inquired about other potential revenue sources or grants. Johnson stated he has not seen any grants that would be beneficial to pursue. A contract with the U.S. Marshals Service or other counties to house inmates is a possibility but there is currently no room at the facility. He added Federal grants come with a lot of requirements that would potentially increase costs.

B. County Clerk

Dan Nolte, County Clerk, was available for the discussion.

Meyer said the budget request reflects a .22% increase in expenditures. Revenues are budgeted at \$84,900 which is the same amount as the current year (see agenda packet).

Nolte explained the reason for the low increase is due to the completion of a remodel project. He added the budget is a standard level of service budget.

Regarding personnel, Meyer stated there are 13 FTEs and two temporary employees. Nolte stated the two temporary employees assist the office with property valuation protests.

Meyer inquired about other revenue sources. Nolte stated additional revenue sources are out of the Clerk's control since fees are determined by the Legislature.

C. District Court

Amanda Phillips, District Court Administrator, and Judge Jodi Nelson, Lancaster County 3rd Judicial District Court, were available for the discussion.

Meyer inquired about current year numbers. Phillips stated there was a concern at mid-year about additional costs related to moving a trial to Platte County. Costs were not as high as anticipated, therefore, she felt District Court could adsorb them within the current budget.

Phillips said new courtroom technology is being funded by the State. There have been some delays due to supply issues. Meyer inquired about the cost of upgrading speakers and microphones. Phillips stated that should also be covered by the State.

Meyer said expenses are increasing 8.70% and revenues are not expected to increase (see agenda packet). Staffing levels, salaries and benefits were discussed. Phillips said District Court has 13 County and 11 State employees.

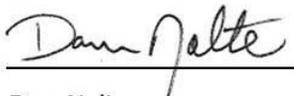
Meyer referenced comments provided by Phillips about the increase in legal services (see agenda packet). Phillips stated Judge Nelson put together a working group of stakeholders to discuss legal services as Lancaster County continues to lose competent legal representation due to low fees. A 25% increase was estimated at the time the budget was submitted. On June 6, 2022, the District Court Judges met and approved the following new hourly rates: \$125 per hour for base line cases; \$175 per hour for homicide cases; and \$60 per hour for legal assistants. Schorr inquired about the current rate for legal assistants. Phillips said it is \$25 per hour.

Vest asked how the County will fund these increases. Meyer stated property tax. He added the working group only discussed fee increases but perhaps there are other ideas or options. Schorr noted the importance of preventing the loss of good legal representation. She felt a plan is needed to review all court costs and potential solutions.

Judge Nelson said she understood the Board's concerns but felt the County is in a crisis as legal fees have not increased since 2014. She added the court is somewhat at fault since it did not discuss fees over time and she welcomed any type of study to help figure out why Lancaster County is losing so many competent legal representations. It was noted that attorneys are losing money at the current rate as some cases are complicated and time consuming. It is also difficult for them to cover overhead expenses at the current rate while a private pay case could offset these costs. Judge Nelson emphasized that the courts are constitutionally obligated to appoint competent counsel.

3) ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Vest moved and Amundson seconded to adjourn at 11:00 a.m. Amundson, Yoakum, Vest and Schorr voted yes. Flowerday was absent. Motion carried 4-0.



Dan Nolte
Lancaster County Clerk

