

STATE OF WYOMING)
) ss.
COUNTY OF FREMONT)

LANDER, WYOMING
OFFICE OF THE FREMONT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
MARCH 16, 2021

WORK SESSION

The Board of Fremont County Commissioners met in Special Session at 9:00 a.m. with the following Elected Officials present: Commission Chairman Travis Becker, Vice-Chairman Larry Allen, Clarence Thomas and Mike Jones, County Clerk Julie A. Freese, Assessor Tara Berg, Clerk of District Court Kristi Green, Sheriff Ryan Lee, County Attorney Pat LeBrun, Coroner Mark Stratmoen and Treasurer Jim Anderson. Commissioner Jennifer McCarty joined later in the morning.

Travis stated the purpose of the Work Session is to discuss the upcoming budget session by reviewing assessed valuation and anticipated revenues for the upcoming fiscal year. At this point, any suggestion is on the table.

Commissioner Jones stated the importance of getting to a budget that is equal to revenues. This has not been done for some time and the surpluses that have been used in the past are not sustainable. To have a budget under the revenue picture enables us to build and save and be able to do bigger things. There will have to be hard decisions made this year.

Tara distributed an assessed valuation spreadsheet. 2021 estimated amounts are up slightly other than for state assessed minerals, which are estimated to be \$100,177,462, compared to 2020 of \$180,698,735, resulting in a 12 mill estimated amount of \$1,202,130, compared to 2020 of \$2,168,385. She reviewed SF60 that changes how mineral industries pay, which will change from quarterly to monthly. The County will receive 50% of the taxes in November 2021 and then will begin receiving monthly payments in January of 2022. The companies have the option of paying fully but she doesn't expect that. This will be a \$900,000 revenue hit basically up front. This will be a change for the county and they will work through it, the concern is we just don't know what revenues will be coming in from the oil companies and production is estimated to be 5% down. The confusing part for citizens is that property taxes will be up (some between 20%-30%), while overall county valuation is down (minerals). She held a town hall meeting in Dubois to explain to citizens there, and asked that people be referred to her with any questions.

Jim stated sales tax looks really good and is up compared to projections. The estimate was \$2.9 million in sales and use tax and as of February, it is \$3.4 million.

Travis stated the local government distribution that allocates funding to counties and municipalities looks to be cut about 10%, which will equate to a reduction to the county of \$300,000. Other funding is PILT (\$1.5 million); and SRS. There is funding from the American Rescue Plan the county could receive (\$7.6 million) over two years, however, there have been no guidelines on how it can be spent and he would recommend it be put in reserve until rules are finalized.

Julie stated there have been some audit issues regarding Sheriff's Office payroll and benefits that was submitted for CARES funding through the state. The auditors stated some of the reimbursement were from grant funding and will need to be paid back (estimated at \$30,000) to the state. The state rules were not very clear to follow and it was a very frustrating process. She stated that even if all the revenues anticipated are received, we don't want the perception things are good and return to normal. Last year the Cash Reserve was reduced to \$4.76 million and should to be paid back. Still spending more than bringing in. Employees will be paying more for their Retirement contribution, health insurance rates will most likely increase, she's frustrated that we cannot do more for them. Would like to thank them but how? Countywide decisions need to be made. The County Clerk's office made a lot more in revenue this year, \$112,000, which also equates to a larger work load considering those fees are \$15 and \$18 each. Land sales are also crazy. She has a vacancy she has not replaced yet but will have to in the future, especially when the Riverton Office opens back up.

Tara noted she still has a part-time position unfilled. One employee will be retiring in April of next year and she is using up her time so that there will not be a large payout. She asked the Commissioners what their priorities are and stated what her statutory obligations are, she is doing her part to keep within budget. She expressed concern about the Library budget.

Larry stated the Commissioners received a proposal from a private entity to provide Title XXV transfers (about \$1500/trip) which is very high. Need to look at hiring our own person through the SO. To him Vehicle Maintenance is a priority to keep our aging fleet operating. Would like to discuss possibly moving Emergency Management under the Sheriff's Office administration too. Ryan stated Emergency Management Department is needed and Travis stated both positions should be kept.

Julie noted an upcoming transfer of \$150,000 from the state to the Library Foundation, which is to be shared with Teton County. She agreed that the Library budget is still a concern, as being the third largest budget in the county. She has had several meetings with them. Clarence said that a move has taken place in the 1980's and 1990's to move hospitals and libraries into the private sector and they can secure private funding, foundation dollars, grant monies, etc. Mike stated the librarian is statutory required, need to look at all their assets and have them raise more revenue. 65% of their services are electronic.

Julie continued by stating front line employees in the Treasurer and Clerk's office are at or below \$30,000, how can we reward hard work?

County Ambulance services is a gorilla the Commission is dealing with. RFP's are being sought for a new provider, the current provider AMR has stated they will not submit an RFP under the current contract.

Mike said non-statutory departments total \$1.5 million. Need to determine our pain threshold. Need to look at service levels, raise fees, look at consolidating departments (span of control), be more creative and look at normal attrition.

Mark stated the Coroner's Office is at bare bones.

Kristi said filing deadlines continue to be a concern. Travis asked if the Commissioners could set a time (9:00 -4:00) for the office to be open, giving them time after 4:00 to get documents filed for the day.

Julie stated the Elected Officials raises were set to increase yearly for four years. She doesn't want that again, just set them the same amount for the four-year period. By getting an increase yearly, there are employees who talk about Elected Officials getting raises when they do not.

Ryan said Dispatch is 2-3 positions short and three deputies short. Will be asking for at least six new vehicles through the Capital Revolving Fund since no requests were taken last year.

Patrick stated the Attorney's Office has the minimum amount of employees to do their job. They plan to remain status quo, he recommended cutting the off-line boards if needed.

At 11:00 a.m., Department Heads and Off Line Board Directors joined the Elected Officials. Present was Public Health Nurse Supervisor Becky Parkins, Fair Director Pat Hart, Extension Educator Chance Marshall, Library Director Anita Marple, Emergency Management Administrative Assistant Vonda Huish, Transportation Superintendent Billy Meeks, Vehicle Maintenance Supervisor Brad Meredith, Treatment Courts Director Melinda Cox, Museum Director Scott Goetz, Building Maintenance Supervisor J.R. Oakley, Planning Director Steve Baumann and IT Supervisor Kevin Shultz.

Tara reviewed assessed valuations for the new group, there will be an estimated negative \$500,000 coming into the county budget. She reviewed SF60 and the statutory change in the way mineral industry will start paying, monthly instead of quarterly, and as a result, will not be able to have an assessed valuation to report. She will be meeting with some of the departments to help them understand how their cash flow will be affected from January - April 2022. When the conversion begins, the county won't get a payment until April. The spreadsheet details 2020 valuations compared to estimated 2021 valuations, which are up in all categories except state assessed minerals, which has been decreasing for the last 10 years. People have a hard time understanding why valuations are down when property taxes increase, public awareness is very important and she has already had one Town Hall meeting in Dubois to explain the situation. Some properties are selling anywhere from 20% - 30% higher than market value. Tara stated public awareness of the financial situation is important, it is a really hard concept for people to understand if their property taxes are increasing.

Jim also reviewed SF60, stating that in a normal year, taxes have two due dates of which ½ is paid each date. The November 2021 payment will come in as expected, the May 2022 payment won't happen, then the monthly payments will begin April. When setting mill levies in August, only ½ of the tax bill will be

known, the other one will be based on current production and prices. He will have to rely on the Consensus Revenue Estimating Group (CREG) reports. They projected a bad sales tax year, however, that has not been the case, figures are up 20-25%. On line sales are now taxed and the closure of businesses due to COVID did not have the negative effect projected. Other revenues include State Direct Assistance, where a 10% cut is expected, PILT is \$2.5 million and expected in May or June. Last year's deficit was \$1.4 million, took \$914,000 from Capital Revolving Fund and \$500,000 from Cash Reserve to balance budget. These sources are not sustainable and we cannot continue to hit them.

Julie stated that without firm figures, it creates a problem for her because by statute, she has to come before the Commissioners with assessed valuation and estimated revenue, budget carry over, etc. by May 15th. The amount determined can be adjusted, but she would like to go up and not down.

Travis stated there is another bill in the legislature that will possibly provide additional funding to the County Attorney's Office for attorneys. Reductions in the veteran's property tax and motor vehicle registration exemptions and motor vehicle registration exemption for tribal members are both in the legislature and an outcome is unknown at this time.

Travis stated the Commissioners' priorities remain the same – statutory required departments first; departments that assist statutorily required jobs second; and then all other departments and programs. He asked if there were any ideas on consolidation between departments, ideas on saving money, elimination of programs, etc. The Ambulance contract with AMR expires the end of June and we are asking for RFP's at this time.

Mike agreed that consolidation, reduction in management, etc. should be looked at. Need to look at level of service (fees, automation) tighten belt, look at non-statutory departments and cost sharing opportunities and normal attrition.

Larry agreed that level of services should be what we can afford to do, are we paying rentals outside of the courthouse, etc.

Clarence agreed with level of service comments, need to do more with less, focus on what government is supposed to be involved in, should be government business only. He has an issue with government regulating community oriented departments and they should be allowed to move towards private funding, foundation funding (hospitals, museums, libraries, fairs). May get more community interest if not a governmental department.

Julie hoped that the ½% Economic Development Tax can help these entities as well.

Travis reviewed the American Rescue Plan Act, which is estimated to fund the county \$3.8 million over the next two years. At this time, guidelines are not available so don't know exactly how this money can be spent. His suggestion is to put it in reserve until rules are known.

Becky Parkins reviewed her departmental situation stating she has been down two nurses during the pandemic, they are operating with herself, her assistant and three other nurses currently. They operate on a lot of grants.

Pat Hart stated the Fair is trying to bring in revenue from all events they sponsor, if they can't make money they won't bring it in. They have reduced rental rates but feel this creates more interest in using the facilities which in turn brings in more revenue. The Rodeo Committee is on their own and responsible for all their funding. Friends of Fair are sponsoring all the Jackpot Shows. Other counties are going to a manager only and seeking assistance of Building Maintenance department to help with grounds and maintenance care. An upcoming event is a Barn Bash hosted by Friends of Fair to help raise money for a \$62,000 lighting project.

Chance Marshall stated Extension has changed their service structure and more remote activities are being used. They take advantage of grants and each educator is charged with getting a percentage of their salary from grants for services.

Anita Marple stated the Library is working on identifying places to do more with less. They have consolidated positions due to attrition and redefining responsibilities. Salary budgets were trimmed, reviewing all service agreements, totaling \$90,000 - \$100,000 in cuts. Evaluating staff and services.

Library Foundation doing fund raising and key partner with Friends of the Library. Looking at seasonal positions, everything is on the table. Looking at coming in under budget.

Vonda Huish, representing Emergency Management, stated the Coordinator position is statutory. A Notice of Funding opportunity presented itself in 2020 and they submitted a grant to Homeland Security for funding to cover the office. Kathi is retiring April 1st, there is no pork in their budget. All training is taking place on line. Need to have five exercises per year to qualify for FEMA funding and they have been able to participate with other partners (CWC) to meet their quota.

Billy Meeks stated they have 1% funding and Road Construction Fund monies that need to be spent on certain things. Concerned about the allocation for RCF this next fiscal year. Grant funding cuts have made it hard to do larger projects. The 1% is allowing roads to have a band aid repairs. Only way to cut his budget would be to reduce personnel.

Brad Meredith said their department continues to think outside the box, they do as much in-house repair as possible. They now install all their own windshields. Had an auction of surplus items netting \$41,00 last year. Ambulance repair revenue is \$41,000. All training is through You Tube and in house training (CAT and PSSR). Had a carryover of \$58,000 last year and expects \$17,000 this year. As the fleet gets older, maintenance costs will increase.

Melinda Cox is looking at partnering some programs with Public Health, is coordinating with the state on data bases. If positions are cut, services will suffer which leads to increased costs in other areas (Detention, Attorney, etc.). There are a lot of opportunity for assistance.

Kristi Green stated business is getting back on track with three jury trials conducted within COVID guidelines.

Tara Berg – She is down one and one-half positions, will need full staff in the future. Has to meet statutory mandates, she is revamping wherever she can (double teams traveling to Dubois, etc.). They had a pass on educational requirements last year due to COVID and that will not happen this year, will have to travel and need budget for travel.

Scott Goetz – have worked to increase self-generated funds for the last seven years (admission fees, rental, program fees, sponsorships). Friends of the Museum play a large part in the funding stream. Has been able to decrease the General Fund request from \$700,000 to \$477,000. Each Museum has only two full time staff and the rest is part-time (all on reduced hours at all Museums). The ultimate goal is to be able to remain open seven days per week, all year long, but at least from May thru September. Increasing visitation and revenue due to a rebranding trend to more dynamic names. They are in the process of creating the Fremont County Museum Foundation, there are Friends groups at each Museum. Looking at the fee structure, self-generated revenue is not as bad as expected but it is still down. Staff pay their own mileage and no training budget is available. Non-resident visitors bring in \$300,000 which total 65% of the visitation. Clarence thanked Scott for what he does.

Pat LeBrun had no comment.

J.R. Oakley expressed frustration that they are receiving the same message as in previous years, every department is told to keep thing status quo, he is as low as he can go without affecting employees or services.

Steve Baumann stated a valuable benefit is the ability to provide more sharing of employees.

Julie stated she and Tara shared an employee last year and she will think about it again. Cross training with the Treasurer would be beneficial particularly when the Riverton Office opens up again. Need to have some kind of program to enable us to help employees, have not been able to give employee increases for some time.

Kevin Shultz expressed appreciation to everybody for the phone transition and problems that were experienced for some. He is a one man show and has looked at every cost saving possible.

Travis stated the Commission priorities remain statutory first, departments that provide assistance second and thirdly, extra programs and departments.

Julie stated she would need to request \$20,000 in her new budget, she has to get the on-line time card system usable. Travel was cut last year, the word she is hearing is if it is required for your job, add it in and be prepared to discuss in your budget message and defend at your hearing. If it is part of doing business, put it in.

The Executive Health Insurance Committee members provided an update on the plan benefit for the upcoming year. Margy Irvine joined Jim Anderson, Julie Freese and Larry Allen to discuss several changes that have been researched by NOVO: Increasing everybody to the high deductible plan would only be a savings of \$83,000. Various deductible increases could be made, which could result in a plan savings of \$114,000; office co-pay of \$30, this amount would not go towards the deductible; \$5 increase in prescription costs. Overall, those changes to the plan would not make a huge difference. We are going out to bid on stop loss carriers and can expect a 14% - 25% administrative fee increase. Looking at a slight increase from our third party administrator (NOVO). Jim Anderson stated plan changes could result in a \$100,000 savings, the plan pays out \$5 million in claims per year. Suggested a 3.5% increase to both employee and county. They stated the Executive Health Insurance Committee meets tomorrow and they will put suggested savings on paper for the Commissioners to consider, after which time it will be sent out to employees.

Julie noted the employees will be paying an additional .25% of Wyoming Retirement costs, along with the county matching .25%. Elected Officials are talking about Town Hall meetings in the future and she stated everybody has their 1st Amendment right, but sometimes employees get caught up in negative issues and she stated supervisors should be aware of their employee actions especially with social media outlets.

The work session adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

/s/ TRAVIS BECKER, CHAIRMAN
FREMONT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

ATTEST:

/s/ JULIE A. FREESE, FREMONT COUNTY CLERK AND CLERK OF THE BOARD