

MINUTES
LANCASTER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
LANCASTER COUNTY PROPOSED BUDGET FOR FY 2001-2002
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS CHAMBERS, ROOM 112
TUESDAY, AUGUST 7TH, 2001
7 P.M.

Commissioners Present: Kathy Campbell, Chair
 Bob Workman, Vice Chair
 Bernie Heier
 Ray Stevens
 Larry Hudkins

Others Present: Bruce Medcalf, County Clerk
 Trish Owen, Deputy County Clerk
 Dave Kroeker, Budget and Fiscal Director

Commissioner Campbell welcomed those attending the budget hearing and opened the hearing at 7:00 p.m. with general remarks and some statistics from the Lancaster County Budget Highlights handout prepared by Dave Kroeker.

Campbell stated that a portion of the increases faced by the County were due to items such as a 41% increase in health insurance costs and a corresponding 72% increase in group dental premiums. Campbell discussed the County's budget process and commented that they were able this year to add five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) to the General Fund cash reserve. Some additional funding highlights of the proposed budget were also laid out by Campbell.

Campbell briefly outlined some of the Board's funding priorities and differences in this year's proposed budget. Campbell added that a copy of the full budget document was available and those interested in obtaining the document could request one through the Budget Office.

Rural Libraries

Carol Connor, Director of Lincoln City Libraries and John Dale, Assistant Director, appeared and stated that they are requesting five hundred fifty-five thousand four hundred and eighty-one dollars (\$555,481) for the 2001-2002 proposed budget. She explained that this request would fund various library services such as the bookmobile, summer reading programs, home outreach program and provide access to all libraries. Connor highlighted many of the services provided to rural residents and commented on the many communities that are served by the bookmobile program.

Connor stated that this year the Summer County Outreach program was not only held in Davey, Denton, Emerald, Holland, Panama and Raymond, but was also held at Waverly schools. Connor stated that she did not have this year's attendance figures available yet, but for last year they had 2206 participants. Connor also stated that her service area for bookmobile services included Hickman, Sprague, Martell, Cheney, Bennet, Hallam, Firth, Rokeby, Malcolm and Waverly.

Connor stated that the two new libraries would be available to the public in 2002. Connor introduced John Dale as not only the Assistant Library Director, but also the project manager for the two new library branches and asked him to update the Board on their progress.

John Dale expressed his excitement over the construction of the two new branches and stated that their locations should serve the county residents well. Dale stated that each branch should be slightly in excess of thirty-one thousand square feet of space. Dale stated that they are currently planning on the branches being open to the public in February of 2002.

Campbell asked if anyone had questions regarding this item.

Commissioner Larry Hudkins stated that he wanted to make the comment that the bookmobile was a tremendous asset for rural communities and that while it may seem expensive you cannot place value on this learning. Hudkins commended Connor and Dale for their work.

Campbell opened the floor for general comments on the budget.

County Budget

Campbell asked if anyone wished to provide testimony regarding the 2001-2002 Proposed County Budget.

Dan Alberts, representing the Lincoln Independent Business Association (LIBA), appeared and distributed his comments in writing to the Board. Alberts thanked the Board for the opportunity to appear and speak on the proposed county budget.

Alberts explained that the LIBA organization monitors and reviews three main budgets, Lincoln Public Schools, City of Lincoln and Lancaster County. This is done to see how these budgets will affect Lincoln and LIBA members.

Alberts stated that they have attempted to find a principled way of evaluating these proposed budgets. Alberts commented that LIBA would like to see the three budgets together reduced by twelve million dollars (\$12,000,000), with Lancaster County's share being two million dollars (\$2,000,000) from what has been proposed in the County's budget.

Alberts commented on the process the LIBA budget monitoring committee used to come to the recommended reductions. He stated that using their formula a 5.7% increase would be allowed which accounts for inflation of 3.2% and also a percentage increase in the community's population of 2.5%. Alberts stated the County shows about a 6.64% increase in their proposed budget.

Alberts expressed appreciation for Dave Kroeker attending their meetings and explaining the budget and areas in which the County has no real control over budgetary increases. Alberts further stated that LIBA understands the external factors that make budget control difficult. Alberts offered LIBA's help in working with the County over these difficult budget issues as a partner in the process.

Alberts expressed LIBA's support for the Lancaster Events Center and reiterated his and LIBA's understanding that at some point this operation would be self sustaining and hopefully profitable.

General discussion was held on LIBA's role in the budget monitoring process and appreciation for their efforts in helping the County in the budget process.

Campbell asked if there were questions or comments on this testimony.

Commissioner Bernie Heier commented on an approximate two hundred thousand dollar (\$200,000) increase in lawyer's fees in the District Court budget.

Commissioner Bob Workman expressed his appreciation to LIBA for their involvement in the budget process. Workman also commented on the expanding budget for the Justice System.

Campbell discussed Lancaster County's involvement in a pilot project that will help to determine whether court appointed attorneys are needed based on an income assessment. Campbell further stated that Lancaster County is the pilot for this program for the State of Nebraska. Campbell stated that the County needs more programs such as this one that allow us to work on budget control in many small ways.

Alberts stated that LIBA has noticed the costs in Juvenile Justice have decreased.

Commissioner Ray Stevens stated that the cost of court appointed attorneys has increased 42.8% from a year ago, only one example, and asked how can Lancaster County hold to 5.7% when also dealing with increasing health and dental insurance costs?

Alberts stated that he understands the factors over which the county has no control and that LIBA is not critical of those issues.

Hudkins commented on the Board's pride that they could finally place money into the County's cash reserve, which keeps the County's bonding authority strong, a goal they have had for several years. Hudkins also applauded LIBA's work and contributions.

Heier added the comment that Lancaster County does not control the Events Center itself, that operations are the responsibility of the Agricultural Society Board. Heier stated that there is added value beyond the actual Events Center revenues from business brought into the community by events hosted.

Hudkins indicated that corrective actions were being undertaken and encouraged LIBA through their mentoring program to offer their assistance to the Agricultural Society Board.

Campbell suggested that LIBA may consider working with the county board at mid-year budget time and also participate in the county's legislative retreat.

Alberts indicated that given the dates and times they would be interested.

Campbell asked if there were others who would like to provide comments on the proposed budget.

Dan Ludwig approached the podium and expressed his appreciation for the Board's efforts to reduce the tax rate in light of the increase in assessed values. He indicated that he saw this as a very positive step for government. Ludwig also expressed his appreciation for LIBA and their involvement in the budget process.

Campbell thanked Ludwig for his comments and expressed the Board's appreciation for his work on the Ecological Committee.

Workman commented on the increasing insurance costs and the inability to cut benefits across the board when working under a labor contract. Workman indicated this increase was the cost of meeting the employees needs and working within the labor contract.

Workman also commented on the Lancaster Manor budget and brought Dave Kroeker forward to discuss the change in their budgeting process.

Campbell asked for any additional testimony.

Ron Ecklund, representing the Lincoln Independent Business Association (LIBA) came forward and expressed his appreciation for the ability to exchange ideas freely with the county board. He commended Commissioner Campbell on her initiative to set up the first budget monitoring committee and starting that process. Ecklund stated that the interplay between Lancaster County and LIBA was the best of the organizations they work with.

Heier stated that this was his third year on the county board and his third budget and commented that he had learned a great deal about the budget process. Heier further stated that LIBA, Commissioners Campbell and Hudkins had helped a great deal in that learning process.

Hudkins thanked Commissioner Heier for his diligence in monitoring the county's maintenance agreements.

Campbell offered her thanks to all department heads and elected officials for their long hours and hard work in the budget process, and expressed special appreciation to Dave Kroeker for his work on the budget.

No additional residents appeared to present testimony on the proposed budget and Campbell closed the public hearing on the 2001-2002 Proposed Lancaster County Budget at 7:45 p.m.

Bruce Medcalf
County Clerk