

County's proposed budget keeps same tax rate

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RUTHERFORDTON — The proposed Rutherford County budget for 2021-2022 maintains the current county tax rate of 59.70 cents per \$100 valuation. County commissioners received the budget proposal from County Manager Steve Garrison at their meeting Monday evening.



Steve Garrison
county manager

The total general fund budget is \$70,460,185. The total budget for all funds is \$91,284,583.

The budget includes \$15,524,972 going to Rutherford County Schools (RCS) operations, \$1 million for RCS capital outlay and \$285,404 to fund school resources officers. This represents a 2.6% increase for their current expense budget and a 3.7% total increase.

The proposed budget includes an appropriation of \$2,593,991 for Isothermal Community College (ICC) operations, and \$550,000 for ICC capital expenses. This represents a 2.6% increase for current expense and a 3.8% total increase.

In preparing the budget, Garrison said he and his staff kept in mind the fact that “The commissioners have clearly stated in previous budget cycles that the county government should serve to improve the quality of life of the citizens we serve while being good stewards of their tax dollars.”

The budget, according to Garrison, represents the vision, objectives and values of the county government, including fostering and sustaining thriving communities and maintaining public trust.

“During the development of the Fiscal Year 2021-2022 budget, we established as priorities to present a budget that did not recommend increasing the tax rate, did not require a fund balance appropriation to balance the budget, that permits the county to continue to chip away at the critical capital facility priorities defined in our capital facility plan and our IT (information technology) software/hardware plan, to ensure our IT Department has the tools and resources they need to continue to protect our network, and ensure that we continue to adjust our employee salaries to

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offer competitive wages and to adjust for inflation,” Garrison said. “Due to the uncertainties created by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, a higher-than-normal unemployment rate and other factors impacting our local community, this is a conservative budget that reflects an overall percentage increase of county expenditures of 1.966% that is commensurate to the projected County revenues and that ensures that the County has the financial capacity to adjust for inflation each year until the next revaluation cycle.”

Garrison said expected revenues are not enough to address all identified needs.

“The projected revenues continue to be inadequate to address all of the identified critical operational, capital facility, equipment and technology needs of the county, the school system, the community

college and the court system,” Garrison continued. “All total, the County Capital Facility Plan identifies approximately \$5.6 million in project requests and the IT Capital Equipment and Technology Plan identifies approximately \$379,916 in project requests. This budget proposes \$500,523 for county capital outlay and \$100,416 for IT.”

The budget also proposes a 1% cost-of-living adjustment for county employees.

“Now that we are a couple of years out since the last rollout of the pay and class increases, it is critical that we adjust the wages of our employees commensurate with the cost-of-living increases and to remain competitive in the regional job market,” Garrison said.

Garrison pointed out that the total amount of county funds initially requested came in at \$86,160,973, which left an initial gap of revenues needed to cover the requested additional expenditures of \$15,700,788. The value

of 1 penny of the county tax rate is \$652,815.

“To accommodate this increase to the budget would require the addition of approximately 24.05 cents to the tax rate, which would increase the current tax rate of 59.70 to 83.75 cents per each \$100 of appraised values,” Garrison said.

The proposed budget represents an overall 1.966% increase from the 2020-2021 budget.

Garrison expressed optimism regarding tax collections. But challenges remain.

“We continue to be optimistic that the county tax collections will remain stable going into the next budget cycle although we are budgeting conservatively, recognizing that our unemployment rate and poverty rate continue to be higher than the state and regional average,” Garrison said. “We also continue to be optimistic that the sales tax collections will remain stable going into the next budget cycle.”

He acknowledged that the COVID-9 pandemic

created unique challenges, and anticipates there will be lingering effects moving in to the 2021-2022 budget cycle.

“Rutherford County employees and our leadership teams have demonstrated an ability to persevere and weather this storm, for which I am very appreciative and proud to be included among their ranks,” Garrison said.

Garrison thanked the staff at the county office, as well as various department heads.

“I look forward to working with the board to review these recommendations and adopt a budget ordinance in June,” Garrison added.

Commissioners thanked Garrison for his work on the budget.

“I know you worked hard on this. I appreci-

ate you all,” said Vice Chairman Alan Toney. “I know you are concerned about the citizens of this county.”

Commissioners will hold an official budget workshop meeting May 17 at 4 p.m. A public hearing on the budget will be held June 7 at 6 p.m. The final 2021-2022 budget is expected to be adopted June 10, at 4 p.m.