??? ? The Washington County Council met in regular session on Monday, July 7 with all members present. The minutes of previous meetings were approved unanimously.

The ongoing debate between the County Council and the Washington County Board of Commissioners continued and was marked by a heated and lively exchange between Commissioner Lana Sullivan and Council Members Mark Manship and Mignon Mashall.

This issue began back in May when Manship asked Sullivan to explain why the Auditor's Office did not notify the Council that the county's budget had been cut by the State of Indiana in 2006; Sullivan was Washington County Auditor at the time in question.

In addition, Manship asked for an explanation of what appeared to be overspending for the year 2006 of over $850,000. Sullivan said that she would provide an explanation by the June 2 Council meeting. But assured Manship that there was not a problem.

At the June 2 Council meeting, Manship again asked for an explanation but Sullivan did not provide one siting a very busy work schedule. She told the Council she would have the answers by the July 7 meeting.

When Manship asked for the explanation again at last week's meeting, Sullivan said that she would be willing to meet with Manship privately to explain the report from the state to which Manship replied, "I am not comfortable meeting in private to discuss public money. This issue needs to be discussed in a public meeting."

At that point, Sullivan said she was not willing to discuss the issue in a public meeting and refused to comment on it any further. According to Sullivan the explanation is too complex to be laid out in a public meeting.

Marshall stated that the Council had asked Sullivan (as the County Auditor) several times if her office had heard back from the state about the budget. According to Marshall, Sullivan never indicated that the state had cut the county budget. The official minutes of the Council meetings following the notification of budget cuts in 2006 show no mention of those cuts being brought to the attention of the Council members.

In response to Marshall's and Manship's questions regarding notification to the Council about the budget cuts, Sullivan said, "There was nothing to notify you about."

In response to Sullivan's refusal to discuss the issue, Manship made a motion to table all EDIT Fund spending until the questions are answered to the Council's satisfaction; the motion was approved by a vote of 4-2, with one abstention.

After the meeting, Sullivan was asked to comment on the official documents from the state showing overspending.

"Those documents are in error." responded Sullivan, "I explained that at the Commissioners meeting (June 18).

In a telephone interview, Manship was asked to comment on the exchange at the meeting:

"I want an explanation of why the State of Indiana is wrong when it says that Washington County overspent by more than $850,000 in 2006." said Manship. "When a public official will not answer questions about apparent overspending of public money in a public meeting, I get very concerned."

In other business, the Council heard from Randy Lindauer, CEO of Washington County Memorial Hospital. Lindauer informed the Council that the hospital had bought two new ambulances and asked the Council to approve money to help pay for the vehicles. Council President, John Fultz told Lindauer that the budget for this year is very tight but that the Council will put it in the budget for next year. A motion to that effect was made, seconded, and passed unanimously.

The Council heard from Chris Jackson whose company in conducting the archeological dig east of Salem where the proposed truck bypass and Highway 56 intersect. After answering several questions about his findings and historical significance of those findings, Jackson told the Council that his work should be done on schedule and he sees no reason why the project cannot continue as planned.

According to Sullivan, 70 percent of cost of the required archeological dig is being covered by the State of Indiana as a reimbursement to the county. The Council voted to approve half the funds now and the rest when funds become available. Bid letting for construction of the by pass is scheduled for February of 2009.

Newly appointed Assessor, Jason Cocker and Christine Hensley gave an update on the property assessment process and indicated that it should be completed close to the deadline date.

County Highway Superintendent, Rick Graves told the Council that the rising cost of asphalt has caused the county to pave only 20 miles in 2008 as compared with 40-60 miles in previous years. According to Graves, Washington County has 670 miles of paved roads.

With no further business to discuss, the Council adjourned until its next meeting on Monday, August 4.