

?Wide range in proposed pay increases for county employees and elected officials

Written by

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??? The recently concluded 2009 Budget Hearing meetings were the public part of the long and tedious process of preparing a budget for the county that has some relevance to anticipated revenues and makes a good faith effort to balance the immediate wants of the community with the long term needs of the community.

The hard copy of the budget is summarized on 80+ pages of size 10 font covering all county government expenditures for the 2007 and 2008 to date, plus the 2009 request broken down into line items of considerable detail.

Taken in its entirety, this document seems overwhelming and after only a short time can cause blurred vision and

pounding headaches. However, if a person were to glean any wisdom from the old East Indian saying that goes

something like, "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." some interesting information begins to emerge. Of specific interest is the proposed pay increases for some county employees and some county elected officials.

It is important to look at numbers as relative rather than raw entities. In other words, paying \$500 for a pair of shoes may be irresponsible for a person who makes minimum wage and has four kids at home. However, the same pair of \$500 shoes may be an impulse purchase and quite inconsequential for someone with the annual income of a celebrity like Brad Pitt or an athlete like LaBron James. So too should the following numbers be viewed in comparison to something that gives those numbers meaning and relevance.

Take for example the proposed raise for the County Attorney. Currently, that position pays \$26,581 per year. The

proposed salary for 2009 is \$27,081 or an increase of 1.88%. To the casual observer that increase of less than 2% is

modest and reasonable in light of the recently publicized financial difficulties being experienced by the local

governments. However, considering that the current annual rate of inflation is running somewhere in the 5%-6% range

(according to the Department of Labor), that is an actual decrease in buying power. A review of some other proposed

increases in salary are worth examining as well. While some individuals are keeping up with the cost of living increases others are dramatically falling behind and still others will be getting an increase over six times the rate of inflation. It is worth noting that some government officials have foregone an increase altogether either out of economic necessity or a sense of public service. Many of the officials getting little or now increase in pay are the individuals responsible for developing their departments' budgets in the first place.

- ? County Health Department, Nurse—10%.
- ? Enhanced 911 Dispatcher—1.9% .
- ? Park and Recreation Department, Park Ranger—6.3%
- ? Solid Waste Management, Manager—17.8%
- ? Highway Department, Supervisor—1.9%
- ? Superior Court, Judge—0%
- ? Chief Probation Officer—38.3%
- ? Public Defender, Attorney—2.1%.

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- ? County Commissioner–3.1%.
- ? County Council Member–9.5%
- ? Circuit Court Bailiff–4%
- ? Director, Emergency Management–2.5%
- ? County Assessor–0%
- ? County Surveyor–4.1%
- ? Correctional Officer–1.1%
- ? County Sheriff–0%
- ? Treasurer–0%
- ? Courthouse Janitor–2.0%
- ? County Auditor–1.6%
- ? County Clerk–0.1%

It should be noted that a wide range of criteria go into the decision making process in determining salaries and increases. Obviously, available funds, expected revenues, and state mandates impact the process. The aforementioned information is provided solely for the purpose of making the public aware of where their tax dollars go.