

## County avoids layoffs by cutting longevity

Written by George Browning

Tuesday, 12 February 2013 00:00 -

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It took the better part of two full-day meetings, but the Washington County Council came up with a plan to cut \$329,000 out of the 2013 budget.

In the end, the council went through the budget line item, by line item and took money from a number of departments.

The remainder of the shortfall came from eliminating county employee's longevity pay.

All county employees receive a bonus for the number of years they have served.

The minimum for one year of service is \$60 but the maximum is \$1,200.

For this year only, county employees will not receive that money.

Council President David Hoar said all the cuts are for one year, but said many things will be considered when they meet over the summer to put the 2014 budget together.

The council received a 1782 notice from the state that they had budgeted far more money for the 2013 fiscal year than they would take in.

In response to the mandate a joint meeting was held with the County Commissioners on Friday, Jan. 25 to discuss all of the options.

One of the options was to eliminate nine county positions.

The council decided at that meeting to give department heads the opportunity to come to their regular meeting on Feb. 4 to defend positions in their office.

Each department plead their case to keep the staff levels the same.

One department, the Auditor's office will operate with one less person, which will save the county approximately \$18,000.

The opening is due to a staff member from the auditor's office taking a job as a 911 dispatcher. Her salary will be paid from the 911 fund and does not affect county general.

At the end of the Feb. 4 meeting, the county council was left with three options on the table.

They were deciding if the county government could operate on a four-day work week, which would have cost employees a nearly \$5,000 a year loss in pay.

The second option on the table was to eliminate longevity for just employees who are paid out of the county's general fund, which would generate \$80,000.

The third option was to eliminate longevity pay for all county employees, even those who are paid from other funds outside of the county's general fund.

Ben Bowling made a motion to go with option number one and Randall Bills seconded it, but later took back his second because he thought that the employees wouldn't lose time in going to four day weeks.

He thought they would just work longer hours.

In the end the council decided to go with option number three so all county employees would help with the deficit and not just a few.

The other funds that took a cut to off-set the shortfall follow.

They took \$179,000 which was in a line item marked Mental Retardation.

That fund is what the county used in the past to handle emergencies and appropriations as they would arise.

There was \$2,000 eliminated for a part-time animal control officer; \$4,400 was eliminated from the election budget; \$18,000 from auditor's office employee; \$10,000 from the \$90,000 the county provides for operation at Delaney Park; \$9,000 from the Public Defender; \$24,599 for janitorial position; \$12,000 from the plan commission budget and \$4,000 from the assessor's budget.

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The council's next meeting will be March 4 at 9:30 p.m.