

Policy Issues

The following items are presented for consideration March 4 as part of the proposed FY 2008-09 budget. The items result from hearings January 9-11 and February 19 and are in accord with court direction for public hearing and budget adoption on March 4.

1. Financial Policies

- a. Expenditures are to be budgeted and controlled so that at the end of the fiscal year the minimum undesignated fund balance for operating funds will be no less than 15% of fiscal year expenditures.
- b. Full disclosure and open lines of communications will be provided for rating agencies. A goal is sustaining the county's AA+ debt rating with a stable outlook. Decisions on financial matters are to consider this goal.
- c. Tax anticipation notes for annual cash flow purposes will be issued for the general operating fund. A recommended order will be presented to the court as an agenda item.
- d. Ad valorem tax requirements for operations and debt service are to be analyzed in conjunction with projections of taxable values by the Appraisal District. A recommended tax rate schedule will be presented to the court in September. Funding plans will be considered for Harris County, Harris County Flood Control District, Port of Houston Authority, and the Harris County Hospital District.
- e. The court will consider capital improvement plans and financing requirements at a review session to be held at 9 a.m. Tuesday, June 17.
- f. The Mid-Year Review will be held at 9 a.m. Tuesday, September 23.

2. Salaries, Allowances, and Positions

- a. **Cost of Living** It is recommended that the court authorize preparation for a 3% cost of living salary adjustment for positions effective with the payroll period that begins September 27. The approximate cost to the general fund would be \$9.4 million this fiscal year, FY 2008-09, and \$24 million for the next fiscal year, FY 2009-10. The court approved a 3% increase for FY 2007-08 and 3% the year before, FY 2006-07. Management Services will provide a recommendation to the court at Mid-Year Review as to whether final approval should be given for the COLA.

- b. **Allowances** It is recommended that allowances for FY 2008-09 be as follows: 50.5¢ per mile reimbursement for use of a personal vehicle on county business, subject to a maximum of \$675 per month; maximum monthly car allowances of \$575 for law enforcement officers, and, subject to court approval, \$550 per month for elected officials and appointed department heads, and \$420 per month for other non-law enforcement personnel. These amounts will be reviewed for any necessary changes that should be considered at the Mid-Year Review in September.

The maximum cellular phone allowance of not to exceed \$50 per month for authorized staff should not be changed at this time.

- c. **Positions and Salaries** Lists of new positions, salary changes, reclassifications, and part-time and temporary positions have been prepared for budget adoption and are attached. Further changes may be recommended as agenda items, subject to availability of funds.

The average annual salary of a full-time position in the county is \$53,690 plus benefits of \$19,644. The total annual requirement for salaries and benefits in the general fund, with 12,768 full-time equivalent positions, is \$936.3 million, which is about 72% of operating costs.

Recommendations have been prepared and are attached for maximum salaries for elected and appointed officials.

- d. **Group Health and Related Benefits** A status report by the director of Human Resources & Risk Management is enclosed for your review and reference. The total annual cost for employees, retirees, and dependents is projected to be \$181.2 million, an increase of \$18.3 million. The county's portion of the cost will be \$143 million, or 78.9% of the total.

The county's policy for basic coverage remains unchanged, with 100% of the cost for the employee and qualified retiree paid by the county plus 50% of the cost for dependents. A second option allows the employee or retiree to pay a higher premium for another level of benefits.

Effective March 1, 2008, the medical provider, Aetna, Inc., will begin the fifth year of a five-year agreement. Proposals will be taken later in the fiscal year for new agreements that will be effective in 2009.

Staff of the Office of Human Resources & Risk Management and the Office of Financial Services are reviewing with the Auditor and County Attorney requirements of the Government Accounting Standards Board to determine appropriate alternatives for financial statements regarding the expense of long term county-paid retiree health care benefits. An actuarial study will be updated and recommendations will be provided from available options for a formal funding policy.

The contribution by the county to the Texas County & District Retirement System in 2008 is estimated at \$77.3 million, or 9.64% of covered payroll. Employee contributions of 7% are estimated at \$56.1 million.

3. **Departments**

Public Infrastructure Recommendations are provided in the attached list for new positions and related adjustments for a portion of the department's various divisions and offices. Further recommendations will be made after review with the PID director.

A process for decisions on allocation of funds for generators will be submitted by PID as an agenda item. It will be part of a study by PID and OHSEM on the emergency capabilities of county buildings to determine their needs for back-up power for essential operations, their potential use during emergencies, and their ability to withstand hurricane force winds.

Another analysis for funding needs will be for assessment and corrective action for underground storage tank facilities and possible leaking petroleum storage tank sites on county properties.

A report from the director of PID's Facilities & Property Management Division concerning utilities has been submitted to the court. The director said the county's utility budget for the new fiscal year is projected to be approximately \$25 million compared to the amount six years ago of \$10 million. While the cost of energy has increased, the county has added new facilities with increased consumption and budget requirements. The director's report outlines energy conservation and management measures that have been implemented and are planned. He said further recommendations will be presented at the Mid-Year Review in September.

A summary report from PID's Architecture & Engineering Division concerning the status of building projects is attached for review and reference. The listing shows an approximate total amount of \$629 million in projects in various stages of plans or requests that would be for the period of FY 2008-09 to FY 2013-14. There are other projects listed without an estimated cost that are anticipated for this period. Library projects would also need to be added to the list.

The total amount shown includes \$185 million for two projects that were approved by voters last November, a Forensic Center and a Family Law Center.

The court will have to carefully consider the listed projects, timetables, and the county's limit on funding capabilities at the CIP meeting June 17.

- **Toll Road Authority** Recommendations for positions and reclassifications for TRA have been submitted as part of the budget adoption proposal.
- **Flood Control** An adjustment has been made for the Flood Control budget to increase maintenance of infrastructure. New positions and reclassifications have been presented for the budget. The director said the district's capital improvement funds are sufficient for work planned this fiscal year and partly into the next fiscal year. Management Services will address funding availability for the Flood Control five-year plan at the court's capital improvements session scheduled for June 17.

The Flood Control director submitted a report concerning the status of the FEMA Buyout Program. Since 2001, the Flood Control District has acquired 1,363 properties that were subject to repeated flooding in 15 of the county's 22 watersheds at a total cost of \$155 million. Funding came from FEMA grants and Flood Control funds.

Information Technology The court approved the transfer of records management positions from PID/FPM to ITC effective December 8, 2007. A recommendation has been provided for certain positions and for related items necessary for the process of providing digital records management. A report by the IT Chief Information Officer on the subject, including electronic mail, has been distributed.

A report regarding the status and funding for the JIMS2 project will be prepared for the court.

A concern that should be addressed is the status of the leased ITC Radio Shop at 2500 Texas. Radios are stored and processed at this location for the Regional Radio System which includes services for over 500 agencies. Safety inspections show the facility to be inadequate for its function. Another potential problem, as discussed in the PID/A&E buildings report, is a plan of Metro for a rail line that would go through a portion of the Radio property.

Public Health A recommendation has been prepared concerning positions requested for this department. Top priorities include an epidemiologist for disease surveillance and licensed vocational nurses for TB clinical services.

Another request is funding for two temporary buildings for certain Veterinary support staff to use, allowing kennel space to be expanded in the Animal Control Shelter at 612 Canino Road.

Community Services This department, formerly know as Community & Economic Development, has four divisions: Economic Development, Social Services, Housing & Community Development, and Transit Services. Social Services was merged with CED in March 2007. The director recommended that the name of the department be changed to Community Services while retaining the names of the four divisions. The court indicated no objections, and the name change officially occurs on March 1, 2008.

Salary changes and reclassifications have been addressed.

Library Recommendations will be prepared for funding for library materials for this year, a new generator, contract payment for the Tomball College & Community Library, replacement of self-checkout machines, and public access computer replacements for the branches.

The department has also requested that a salary study of positions be done.

New and replacement library facilities will be reviewed at the court's capital improvements session in June.

Law Library This department, with the approval of the County Attorney, has requested that a salary analysis be done.

Youth & Family Services Salary changes, positions, and other requests have been recommended for **Domestic Relations, MHMRA, Juvenile Probation, Protective Services for Children & Adults, and Children's Assessment Center.**

Juvenile Probation reopened its operations at Westside Detention on February 19, 2008. The facility provides 45 beds to absorb youth from the downtown detention facility in the Juvenile Justice Center at 1200 Congress. The 45 Westside beds will be added to the 210 individual cell beds in JJC for a total of 255 such beds. The department has 40 more beds available in multi-occupancy rooms in JJC. The goal is to keep the population under control so that if possible only single cell beds will be used.

Juvenile Probation has asked for assistance with upgrades to elevators in JJC to allow quicker response to emergency situations, and for replacement and addition of radios for use by staff in detention.

An analysis will be done for a recommendation on the need for therapeutic services for youth at post-adjudication facilities, Burnett-Bayland Home, Burnett-Bayland Reception Center, the Delta Boot Camp, and the Youth Village.

A management study for Juvenile Probation will begin after receipt of an initial report on findings and recommendations of the Casey Foundation concerning the Harris County juvenile justice system.

PID/A&E's buildings report said the cost estimate to repair the 3540 W. Dallas detention facility for juveniles is \$9 million. Jacobs Carter & Burgess provided the estimate.

MHMRA has requested an increase of \$617,403 for a total of \$23,151,310 in its allocation from the county for NeuroPsychiatric Center funding and related expenses.

Constables The constables have requested 111 new officers and 12 communications and clerical positions. A recommendation has been prepared for approval of certain of the positions.

In addition, the Constable of Precinct 1 has been asked by the Texas Medical Center to take over security duties from HPD in the Medical Center complex. The initial estimate is that between 17 and 20 officers, including supervisors, would be needed. The court agreed that the contract for the service should be on a full cost recovery basis.

Summary sheets showing the status of the contract patrol program have been provided. Policy recommendations for 2009 will be presented at Mid-Year Review in September.

Sheriff The department has requested 163 new positions for various divisions, and salary changes and reclassifications. An added request is for two administrator positions for the Computer-Aided Dispatch System.

The jail system remains under variances from the Texas Jail Commission. The department last year moved 600 prisoners by contract to a jail in Epps, La., to help relieve overcrowding in Harris County facilities.

Recommendations for continued improvements in jail medical and mental health services and continuity of care issues will be presented for the court's consideration. The contract with MHMRA for services in the jail program is at \$5.5 million for the new fiscal year compared with \$4 million last year. Recommendations will also be provided, as requested, for an alternative plan from the one that was defeated by voters last November for a central inmate processing facility and related jail improvements in the Detention Zone. Recommendations will also address the jail project at the Atascocita complex. Projects have been outlined in the PID/A&E buildings report.

A recommendation will be prepared for the Sheriff's Department to assume responsibility for security screening services in the downtown courthouse complex, and total responsibility for security in the Criminal Justice Center.

Fire Marshal The Fire Marshal has requested 16 positions, including a senior fire inspector and seven inspectors because of the volume of fire and life safety inspections for facilities in the unincorporated area. Such work is up 209% since 2005 due to population and business growth. Recommendations will be provided regarding these requests and other items sought for the Fire Marshal's divisions of Fire Investigation, Fire Prevention, Emergency Response, Training, and Administration.

Medical Examiner The Medical Examiner is seeking approval of two other phases of new positions during the fiscal year with 24 in the first group before summer, and 19 in the second later in the fiscal year. The positions would primarily be for forensic, toxicology, and DNA laboratory sections. He is also asking for reviews of maximum salaries. Recommendations will be prepared for positions, salaries, and related equipment.

County and District Clerks The County Clerk is asking for four new regular positions and 30 temporary positions. Management Services will work with the County Clerk so that funding is available as necessary to conduct the 2008 elections.

The District Clerk is working toward developing an electronic filing system, self-service initiatives for customers, and continuation of an imaging project for an electronic document management system. Management Services will work with the District Clerk regarding necessary funding.

County and District Attorneys The County Attorney is asking for eight new positions: an attorney for the Real Property Division for condemnation proceedings for toll road projects, and four attorneys and three administrative positions for the Children's Protective Division which has had an increase in caseload.

The District Attorney requested four positions, an attorney for post-conviction writs, a human resource officer for the Operations Division, an administrative assistant for the Misdemeanor Division, and an administrative assistant/receptionist for the divisions of Public Integrity, Information Systems, and Writs. The positions will be reviewed with the new District Attorney after that person officially takes office.

Community Supervision & Corrections CSCD is asking for security enhancements at regional centers and expanded or relocated facilities because of additional caseloads. These requests will be considered at the capital improvements session in June. The CSCD facility at 1307 Baker in the Detention Zone is in need of repairs. The Sheriff's Department is leasing the facility at this time. Management Services will prepare a funding recommendation in consultation with PID/A&E, the Sheriff's Department, and CSCD.

Pretrial Services Pretrial is requesting an application developer position and a data control officer. The director wants to implement a new risk classification system for its interview process with detainees.

A problem for this department has been inadequate working conditions at the HPD Reisner Street Jail, a difficulty that could be resolved with a new county inmate processing center.

Management Services will consult with the director and judges and their staff regarding Pretrial Services and changes in collected data for decisions for release of certain prisoners from jail when appropriate.

Justices of the Peace The County Court Manager's Office, working with the JPs, lists the following priorities for FY 2008-09: (1) Develop a court security plan for the JP courts including training of bailiffs; (2) Address the caseload increases in Precinct 5 with an additional court docket; (3) Provide full-time Assistant District Attorneys for JPs 3.1 (Parrott), 4.1 (Adams), 5.1 (Ridgway), and 5.2 (Yeoman); (4) Amend the staff salary plan for the JP courts by adding a separate category for licensed interpreters at \$75 per month; (5) Provide for support of a night truancy docket for JP 4.1; (6) Continue funding overtime for certain clerk positions for JP 5.2 because of caseload, and add a supervisor position by combining two existing clerk positions; and (7) Renovate Annex 11 on Clay Road to include a larger courtroom for JP 5.2 and provide the court with off-site storage for case files. In addition to the above, JP Courts 2.1 and 6.2 have each requested one new clerk.

Management Services and the County Courts Manager will prepare recommendations for the court to consider regarding the above items. A report by the Court Manager's Office regarding hearings and cases that have been shifted to JP courts with smaller caseloads is attached.

Probate Courts Requests for position reclassifications are presented for approval. Management Services will review positions and maximum salaries for each of the four courts and will recommend further changes if necessary for equalization.

County and District Courts The county courts are requesting two assistant coordinator positions for the civil courts to assist with an increased caseload. Another request by the county and district courts is for equalization of staff salaries with those in other justice system departments and offices. Recommendations will be prepared for the court's consideration.

A recommendation by the county courts is for creation of a Mental Health Coordinator position. The position, for an attorney with special training and experience in psychiatry and mental health, would assist the Sheriff's Department's Detention Bureau/Medical Services with protocols and mental health grievances. The position would help the judicial system at all levels with education programs, case intake procedures, and training for mental health specialists who would represent indigent defendants. Another task would be to assist with review and administration of contracts between the county and mental health providers and proposals for mental health services.

In addition, a psychiatric consultant has been recommended to assist in developing links to community mental health services and facilities for continuity of care for persons who have been in county custody. A goal would be to provide demonstrations of integrated services for care of indigent persons and others who, as indicated by previous behaviors, would be likely to return to county custody and detention.

The District Courts have said they will seek an agreement with the Justice Management Institute for a study of the courts for recommendations on ways to improve case flow management. Management Services and the county and district court administrators will seek an expansion of the contract with JMI for consultant services for an analysis of the criminal justice system.

Other proposals for the new fiscal year include an upgrade of presentation equipment for criminal courts so judges can use courtroom technology and evidence effectively during trials; development of a funding plan to sustain the two drug court programs; and development of specialized dockets for defendants with mental health illnesses so they can be linked to court-supervised, community-based treatment.

Another proposal by the District Judges trying Criminal Cases, labeled an Expedited State-Jail Felony Docket, would seek to expedite the resolution of minor felony drug cases. A separate docket would be established for the cases with a goal of release of defendants from jail when appropriate with placement into a facility or supervised program where treatment opportunities would be available.

Management Services will assist the district courts administrator and county courts manager in developing the recommended proposals shown above.

A study of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Program, requested by Commissioners Court, is underway and will be transmitted as an agenda item when it is completed.

Another analysis that will be done is for assistance to Family and Juvenile Courts for funding of necessary DNA and drug testing services to expedite cases involving custody of children.

Treasurer The County Treasurer is requesting that Management Services conduct a salary review of his department for equalization of salary maximums with those of similar positions in the county. He is also requesting additional space because of overcrowded conditions, and funds to replace computer equipment.

Tax Assessor-Collector The Tax Assessor-Collector is requesting an increase of \$772,700 over his budget of last year because of increased workload in divisions of Property Tax, Voter Registration, and Vehicle Registration, and increased costs for salaries, supplies, services, and postage.

Auditor and Purchasing Agent The County Auditor has presented a budget of \$13,802,023, an increase of \$379,202 compared to last year's budget. The budget includes salary increases for positions, title changes, and reclassifications.

The Purchasing Agent presents a budget of \$6,657,278, an increase of \$347,759 compared to last year. The budget includes a new contract administrator position that is funded by the Toll Road Authority, and salary maximum increases for three positions.

Management Services will review the workplace recycling program with Purchasing and the Recycling Committee for a recommendation to court.

Fleet Services An attached report from the Fleet Services director concerns plans for an evaluation with departments of conversion of county vehicles to more fuel efficient types, including hybrid vehicles, and a policy for the court to consider that would prohibit departments from retaining old, high mileage vehicles that have been scheduled for replacement and disposal.

OHSEM Position requests by this department, the Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, are included in the budget for approval.

Greater Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau A report and recommendation concerning the county's support for GHCVB will be placed on the court's agenda.

Harris County Sports & Convention Corporation A report concerning HCSCC, the Astrodome, and Reliant Park was placed on the court's February 19 agenda.

The HCSCC Executive Director is having a report prepared for the court concerning management and cost of utility rates for facilities at Reliant Park.

In a separate item, Management Services will work with the County Judge to provide funding as necessary in connection with the 2008 Final Four Regional Tournament games to be held in Houston. A letter from the Texas Comptroller on the subject has been transmitted.

Demographics An update of a population report by the EBusiness Results Team is attached.

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