



From the Desk of Medina County Commissioner

Stephen D. Hambley

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EDITORIAL

Reports that the Medina County Sheriff has been cut a million dollars in this years budget and will be laying off 24 employees was not only impulsive, it was grossly exaggerated. Suggestions that our police officers arresting people would find no beds at the jail for their prisoners likewise were ill-advised statements of distraction. Medina County Commissioners did have to institute significant budget cuts this year because of declining revenues and increasing costs. Those budget cuts hit virtually every office and department in county government.

The Board of Commissioners made every attempt to minimize the impact on public safety in the Calendar Year 2009 (CY09) budget, as it remains a priority. At the same time, Commissioners are legally mandated to fund certain county operations and programs regardless of their popularity or their ranking in our own collective priorities. But as we know, everything can't be a priority or nothing is.

First let's talk about the Sheriff's budget. We gave him \$428,759 less than he spent last year. That is an overall 4.4% reduction, not 10%, and certainly not as dramatic as most other departments and elected officials. The Sheriff has several divisions or departments that are budgeted separately, so let's see where the cuts occurred and where he received increases. The Sheriff's Road Patrol in the CY09 budget received \$39,882.06 or 2.6% more than it spent last year. The Sheriff's Detective Bureau, Civil Division and Scales Divisions all received increases from last years expenses: \$15,703 or 4.1%, \$15,146 or 6.5%, and \$3,152.38 or 5.9%, respectively.

Obviously, several Sheriff's Departments did receive less in the General Fund CY09 budget than they spent last year. The largest and most significant was the Jail where we budgeted a reduction of \$421,067 or -7.0% less. That is because the Sheriff closed a pod last year, due to a decline in the jail population, but didn't lay-off the associated personnel to go along with that closure. Based on the calculations by our Finance Department and County Administrator, keeping five pods open for this year provides a total daily capacity of 220 beds. The January 2009 average daily jail population was 167. Even using a higher average number from last year would provide him with an average 17 empty beds per day available for new prisoners. That is how we budgeted the amount of salaries needed to run the jail. Any additional closures of jail pods by the Sheriff are at his discretion.

Other budget reductions for the Sheriff's Administration and Dispatch Departments were offset by revenues from other non-general fund sources: like 9-1-1 and Concealed Weapon Permits. In our letter to the Sheriff regarding the final budget last week, the Board urged him to consider other cost cutting measures involving reductions in the use of county vehicles for non-peace officer personnel, re-opening of union contracts for consideration of concessions, as well as stringent review of travel expenses. In the final analysis, the Board of Commissioners provide the revenues the taxpayers

make available to us, for the Sheriff's various divisions. The Sheriff manages the use of those finite resources. A summary analysis of the budget entitled "Top CY09 Budget Gainers and Losers" is provided on the Medina County website and can be found at www.co.medina.oh.us, if you are interested in the reductions and gains of other county departments.

Lastly, it was amazing to see the reaction to our Board postponing the Courthouse Expansion and Renovation Project indefinitely. Several public officials, aided by sloppy reporting of some local TV stations, had convinced many people that there would be no lay-offs or big reductions in the budget this year if we just postponed the construction. For whatever reason, the undisputable financial facts didn't seem to matter. There was no money to be saved, no county jobs that could be maintained, no Sheriff's employees to continue if we postponed the construction this year. Our decision to postpone or eventually going forward will be based on the financial facts available to us in the middle of this year, as we plan for next years (CY10) budget.

If everything goes as planned, our CY09 budget will be balanced with an anticipated carryover of \$4,244,176 or 11.75% of our total General Fund budget. That is not as fiscally healthy as we would prefer nor what we have historically been able to achieve. But in the scheme of things and in comparison with other counties in Northeast Ohio, it is not bad. It is a fiscally conservative budget that will maintain our basic and mandated services, without destroying many of the valuable and worthwhile services and programs provided to our citizens. What we do to keep expenses down this year, to carefully plan for future and necessary capital improvements, and manage anticipated tax revenues for next year, are part of the process that starts now. Our fellow county public officials need to work with the Board to ride this financial storm out, so that their departments and the very necessary and valuable services they provide to the public can be maintained. Ultimately, that is what will benefit this county and the public we have all taken an oath to serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Hambley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve Hambley, President
Medina County Commissioner