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Supervisors Address Budget Woes, Raise Concerns About Future Spending

Sue Hall, Reporter

The county's budget season for FY27 is winding down. Two budget-related public hearings were held at the courthouse on March 24. One was the annual new proposed property tax asking levy for the county budget that occurs prior to the actual budget public hearing on April 14. The other public hearing was Conference Board approval of the assessor's budget.

Supervisors also turned to their human resources consultant attorney Mike Galloway for his views on current and future budgeting processes. Legislative new property tax relief measures and expected additional action have left governmental entities struggling to cover their mandated responsibilities with sufficient funding.

Chairman Jon Bell said most governmental "growth" is internal with more personnel created as a result of legislation that creates more supervisory or oversight positions.

Bell said Cedar county government continues to spend more than it takes in as revenue. It has been tapping into reserves that have dwindled to the point that carryover isn't enough to pay beginning fiscal year bills. The county is facing uncharted territory.

How are the other 50 to 60 counties served by Galloway's firm responding to continuing business as usual with reduced revenues?

Galloway told supervisors on March 24 that Cedar county government is ahead of the curve in being proactive about cutting expenses to preserve ending fund budget balances. Other counties, especially those with more population and industry, are still able to spend down reserves for FY27. Cedar county and other rural counties have had to face the new reality sooner than urban counties, but all 99 will be making operational changes eventually.

Discussion began with his advice about proceeding with the county's dissolution of the current two-person environmental and zoning department and its incorporation into the public health department—a first but not likely the only such cost savings plan the county will be considering.

There are two components to the environmental and zoning office. Under Director Phil LaRue is planning/zoning land use and, also, sanitation/environmental duties associated with wells, septic, and business inspections.

Sanitation/environmental will migrate into the public health department. Some environmental tasks will be assumed by the nursing staff. Some of the more technical responsibilities associated with inspections will go to a new permanent part time 20 hours per week position without benefits. This person will be a public health employee. A job description is being prepared now.

Galloway said frankly that most counties do not have "permanent part time" staff positions. This technical inspection job is being advertised as 1,040 hours of flexible scheduling, dependent on program needs, because more hours will be necessary in warm weather than in the winter season.

Galloway wanted clarification on who this county employee, the sanitation/ environmental inspector, will report to—board of health or board of supervisors.

Since LaRue reported to both the board of health and to supervisors, Galloway advised a 28E agreement between supervisors and the board of health for this public health department's new permanent part time position.

As the current fiscal year draws to a close over the next three months, LaRue will, in two weeks, soon become the solo employee

for the remaining weeks. A second employee is concluding employment early.

Therefore, Galloway advised hiring this environmental technical inspector as soon as possible to work under the current department director while LaRue is still available.

Regarding the planning/zoning component of this stand-alone department being phased out, the current plan is to contract or share someone. Galloway had advice for this procedure, too. He called for requests for job qualifications with applications to come to the auditor's office as a position under the board of supervisors. Low bid does not apply in this instance.

Future Budgeting

After concluding environmental and zoning department matters with their human resources consultant, supervisors expressed to him their budget concerns. Chairman Bell asked Galloway where the board ought to be addressing future cost-saving actions, now that FY27 has been settled and FY28 is looming next fall.

Galloway was direct. His reply was for every county department in every Iowa county. While much of the future still does depend on more property tax reform legislation, these are strategies he advises.

No new re-hires without supervisors' authorization.

Focus on mandated versus elected services with the caveat that not all "elected" services can be excised without public outcry. Citizens want to retain local county access to drivers' license services.

Seek staff reduction based on mandated service requirements. Employee cuts will be inevitable. At least three positions have recently ended in Cedar county's departments due to property tax

SEE SUPERVISORS, P8



No Kings Protest

Approximately 70 people attended the No Kings Protest on the Cedar county courthouse lawn on Saturday, March 28. Protests were held across the country in opposition of policies of the Trump administration. The rally in Tipton was the second to be held since the beginning of President Trump's second term. Several people spoke to the protestors who then moved to the intersection of Cedar and 5th Streets.

City Taxes To Increase on Higher Property Values

Tipton's proposed city budget, which is expected to be adopted on April 13, will have a slightly lower tax rate per \$1,000 valuation, but most residents will see a property tax increase due to higher valuations.

The overall tax rate per \$1,000 will drop from \$15.55 per \$1,000 valuation to \$15.53 per \$1,000.

However taxes on a residential property valued assessed at \$110,000 will increase from \$738 to \$761 in city tax, an increase of 3.12%

Commercial property will see a more substantial increase of 10.89%, with a property assessed at \$330,000 going from the current \$3,206 to \$3,555.

Overall taxable valuation is for non-debt service is rising from \$136,824,540 to \$141,466,496.

Taxable value for debt service is increasing from \$146,195,880 to \$151,242,517.

The public hearing on the 2026-27 city budget is set for 5:30 p.m. Monday, April 13 in the meeting room at the Tipton Fire Station.

Mathews Memorial Airport

City council members approved a resolution Monday evening, March 23 setting the bid letting date and public hearing for the Mathews Memorial Airport project to reconstruct the taxi-lane and expand the airport apron.

A prebid conference will be via teleconference at 11:30 a.m. April 1, followed by electronic submission of bids for the project at 2 p.m. April 14 and the public hearing and bid award at the Monday, April 27 council meeting.

Amended Natural Gas Agreement

Council members also approved an amendment to a 30-year agreement for the natural gas supply from PEFA, Inc., known as the Public Energy Facilities Authority. The organization is a 28E, an Iowa joint powers agency and non-profit corporation designed to acquire long-term gas supplies from J. Aron and Co. LLC, and an affiliate of The Goldman Sachs Group.

The amendment approved involves a reset of the available discount received for natural gas supplied and approving issuance of bonds by the organization.

Tipton signed the 30 year agreement in 2019. At that time there were 82 communities participating. There are now 103.

Gas Superintendent Darren Lenz said the amended agreement would be good for Tipton in receiving discounted natural gas prices and asked for council approval.

Picking several months of gas purchases, Lenz said the current agreement saved the city around \$4,000 one month and \$5,000 for another month.

New City Hall Renovations

City Manager Tom Doermann discussed possible improvements to be made at the old US Bank building at Cedar and Fifth streets, which will become the new Tipton city hall.

Doermann, Building Inspector Terry Goerdts and Finance Director Melissa Armstrong completed a walkthrough of the building and prepared a list of potential improvements to meet operational needs, safety standards and functionality for staff and the public.

Potential improvements were divided into three categories: based bid, alternate bid one and alternate bid two.

The list was approved by the council and a request for cost estimates will be made to V and K Engineering, West Des Moines.

Base Bid-Building Updates

- *Security updates to building (security, cameras, video)
- *IT updates
- *Panic bars on Fifth Street door and possibly on Cedar Street doors
- *Signage on walls outside city hall
- *Flag pole

SEE CITY OF TIPTON, P10

Kirkwood Cedar County Leadership Council Meeting Set for Wednesday, April 8

Kirkwood Community College will host its next Cedar County Leadership Council meeting at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday, April 8 at the Cedar County Historical Society Museum in Tipton. Kirkwood Board of Trustees Chair Tracy Pearson, Kirkwood President Kristie Fisher, college administrators and staff and local community leaders are all expected to be in attendance.

The meeting will feature college-wide updates as well as the latest Kirkwood developments in Cedar county. Attendees will also hear a presentation from Kirkwood's Continuing Education and Training Services division highlighting results from the Skills 2027 survey. The survey gathered input from businesses across Kirkwood's seven-county service area to better understand workforce needs from 2025 through 2027, including credential requirements, industry-specific talent demands, and strategies to support regional workforce development and career pathways.

Additionally, a panel discussion will include perspectives from local high school students, a Kirkwood graduate from Cedar county, and a local area business partner.

"We really value these meetings because they help us stay in touch with the communities we serve," said Kirkwood Regional Center Director Sharon Grice. "It's a chance for people to come together, hear updates from the college, ask questions and share what they're seeing and needing locally. Hearing directly from residents and employers

helps guide how we shape our programs and make sure we're preparing students and workers for real opportunities here in Cedar County. We hope people will come, be part of the conversation and share their feedback."

The Cedar County Leadership Council meets twice a year, once in the fall and once in the spring. The public is encouraged to attend and participate in the discussion. Community members will have the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on local educational needs and workforce challenges.

To RSVP, contact Sharon Grice at sharon.grice@kirkwood.edu or call 319-887-3947.

I-80 Lanes Restrictions Near Iowa City Began March 30, Run Through July

If you travel on I-80 through Iowa City, you need to be aware of a construction project that may slow down your trip, according to the Iowa Department of Transportation's District 6 Office.

The contractor is shifting traffic for a bridge deck overlay across the CRANDIC rail lines that will reduce traffic to two lanes in both directions. Starting Monday, March 30, westbound I-80 at mile marker 242.0 to 242.2 lanes was reduced to two lanes. On Wednesday, April 1, the eastbound lanes at that same location will reduce to two lanes. These lane reductions are expected to be in place until the end of July.

The Iowa DOT reminds motorists to drive with caution, obey the posted speed limit and other signs in the work area and be aware that traffic fines for moving violations are at least double in work zones. As in all work zones, drivers should stay alert, allow ample space between vehicles and wear seat belts.



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