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County Eye Newsletter

Decision time is near for commissioners to approve a budget and tax rate for the next fiscal year. After a series of budget workshops and input from elected officials and department heads, the county fathers will be faced with several difficult decisions in the next few weeks.

The new fiscal year begins Oct. 1 but the budget and tax rate must be decided in a timely fashion to allow staff in the tax office to send out tax bills in October. Many people like to pay their taxes early while others wait until the deadline of January 31st. After that date then a penalty is incurred by the property owner.

The projected revenue available based on appraised property values must be calculated as soon as the Kerr County Appraisal District provides the property values to the county and other taxing entities in the county, probably sometime this week.

Commissioners must then look over all the budget requests and make difficult decisions on how the projected revenue will be divided. This year the requests exceed the projected revenue by over one million dollars. It's not unusual for requests to be significantly more than the projected revenue.

For several years during the economic downturn the county's policy was to not increase the tax rate and dip into reserves to cover the additional budget needs but that policy is risky. The state recommends the county maintain 25% of the revenue needed in a budget year in the reserve fund.

Kerr County now has about 23% in the reserve fund...up from about 16% just a few years ago. Budgets and staff were reduced for several years during the downturn to help keep the tax rate down and the reserves increasing.

Now, with the population increase in the county plus the many new mandates handed down from different state agencies and/or new legislation passed creating unfunded mandates for counties, some elected officials are asking for additional staff in this year's budget requests.

Voters approved a 1 ¾ cent tax increase for the new jail expansion project which will begin with the 2016-2017 fiscal year, so property owners are already facing a tax increase. Requests submitted by staff would increase that amount significantly and, if every request were approved, would raise the rate enough to trigger a rollback election.

Nobody likes to see a tax increase and certainly nobody wants to see the county have to go through a rollback controversy, so commissioners have some very difficult decisions to make in the coming days. Balancing the financial needs to keep county government serving the citizens with the need to keep taxes low is certain to create a major challenge.

Difficult choices will have to be made...some people will be happy...others not. Such decisions sure to be difficult will include a COLA for all county employees and/or adding staff to departments who are struggling with more services to provide with the same number of employees.

County government is basically a service industry...we serve the people of Kerr County in dozens of different ways every day. Once the proposed budget is approved it will be posted on the county website.

The proposed tax rate will be posted and published in the local media. Public hearings will be scheduled on both before they are finally adopted.

Community support is vital and community input is encouraged.