

Department budgets reviewed for more cuts

By Tom Betz
nt.betz@nwkansas.com

Commissioners went through the budgets looking for additional cuts or places to shift money for the next year during their special budget meeting on Friday morning.

In the special alcohol fund the commissioners agreed to move about \$4,000 from Goodland Regional Medical Center to assist a youth prevention program and Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Sherman County.

Commissioner Cynthia Strnad said it was her opinion that if the county can help kids, “we are better off than helping someone who is 60 and probably would not change.”

Commissioner Max Linin said he agreed it is better to keep the money with the kids programs.

The commissioners talked to Sheriff Kevin Butts and Attorney Bonnie Selby about moving the salary for the investigator to the county attorney budget.

Commissioner Chuck Thomas said it was his understanding that if Sheriff Butts needs Burton Pianalto he can schedule that with Selby.

Selby said that was her understanding.

Butts arrived at this point and Thomas went through it with him to make sure everyone was on the same page.

“What about the law enforcement part?” Butts said. “If he is not under me I cannot use him. In an emergency I can use him, but if he is out patrolling he needs to have a deputy card from the sheriff’s office.”

Thomas asked if the investigator can be paid through the attorney’s office and be a deputy.

Butts said he had to check on that part.

Strnad said if the investigator is working out of the attorney’s office he does not need a vehicle.

Butts said the investigator can use the equipment he has now, and when he is working for the sheriff he will have a vehicle for use.

Thomas said the commissioners felt there was enough left in the sheriff’s budget to give the deputies a raise to make them more competitive.

Butts said that will be for the starting deputies.

A question was asked about the sheriff getting by with replacing one pickup instead of two.

Butts said he could sell two older trucks to help put money back in the fund. He said he has two push-

ing 100,000 miles and would be pushing 140,000 if he delays one for a year.

Linin said Butts budgeted \$55,000 for two pickups.

Butts said that is to buy two new vehicles and does not include the sale of the two older vehicles. He said the ones he wants to replace are a 2001 and a 2004.

Thomas asked if Butts would be replacing two vehicles the following year.

Butts said with replacing two next year he would only need to replace one the next year. He said every four years he needs to replace two vehicles.

Butts later came back and said Pianalto can work out of the attorney’s office as long as he works for the sheriff’s department one day a month.

On the noxious weed budget the commissioners agreed to put \$23,000 in the budget as a possible down payment on a new spray truck, but said they are not convinced the new truck is the way to go.

Doug Hall brought some figures to Linin about spraying the county. He said it costs about \$26 per mile and there are 1,200 miles the county maintains and another 250 miles of minimum maintenance.

Linin said the county is not going to do a first mowing of weeds next year.

“We cannot spray for that,” he said. “All that mowing does is make it look pretty. We cannot afford to look pretty. That is why we are not doing the first mowing.”

Thomas said he did not want to cut the budgets to the bone.

“We have to remember the more

we cut the harder it is to bring things up next year,” he said. “We need to have a carryover. Just because we put the money in does not mean it has to be spent.”

“We were too good last year,” Strnad said. “Many counties are in the same place we are.”

Thomas said people need to understand they were trying to improve services with the weed spraying.

Strnad said she hopes people understand the county is trying to get into a system that will be less expensive in the future.

The commissioners have decided to end the neighborhood revitalization program at the end of this year. They feel it is hurting the county rather than being an economic development incentives.

To end the program the commis-

sioners will rescind a resolution passed in August to renew the program for the next three years. The program has been in place for more than five years, and the county feels it is costing the county about \$40,000 a year in property taxes.

Thomas said he felt if someone can afford to build a new house they should pay the taxes.

Strnad said countywide it is costing almost \$90,000 including the city and schools.

She said she does not feel it is working to help those in the manner it was set up.

Thomas said he felt the commissioners had reviewed the budgets, and is not sure they have done that much. He said the department heads do a good job and so do county employees.

He said the budgets do not include

any salary increases for next year. He said the county is already looking at 3 percent increases in costs for benefits.

Strnad said the closer budgets will make it easier for people to see what is being spent.

“We need to let the public know why we have carryovers,” Thomas said. “We got caught this year because we did not have a carryover.”

Rumpel said she would find out if the county can do a bond issue for the chip seal of the roads and the courthouse work. She said the county can go up to \$300,000 without an election.

Strnad asked to have the chip seal guy check out Eighth Street to see if the street needs to be sealed. She said it would be good if it could be delayed for a year or two.

Stress of time warps windows



The glass has been long gone and the pressure of time has warped the wood in opposite directions on the side of this old house that sits off I-70 a couple of miles into Colorado. The old wood frame house was probably a wonderful place

in its day, and the grey wood shows the years of weathering. The old house could probably tell a lot of stories about past evens on the High Plains.

Photo by Tom Betz/The Goodland Star-News

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