

Public Hearing Comments
Oconee County Budget
FY 2009-2010

Workload Indicators

June 9, 2009

Request

- Require monthly updates on department workload indicators

Comparison 2009 Magistrate Indicators

County	Pickens	Oconee
2008 est pop	116,915	72,274
No Employees	8	11
'09 Budget	\$712,329	\$618,724
\$ per person	\$6.09	\$8.68

Considerations

- Efficiencies in larger numbers can produce cost savings
- Differences in operation of law enforcement may create additional expense
- If Oconee operated on similar numbers as Pickens - this year's Magistrate budget
- Oconee \$440,000 vs \$606,000 proposed
- (Does NOT include \$50,000 vehicle gas and maintenance; facilities maintenance; utilities)

Local Considerations

Offices	Seneca	Walhalla	Westminster
Warrants	2,980	3,519	171
Tickets	5,947	5,797	8
Fines	\$712,588	\$700,000	\$69,000
Revenues	\$298,756	\$398,789	\$65,000

Indicators Suggest

- Too many offices
- Too many magistrates
- Budget should be cut \$200,000?

Known

- Cases pushed to smallest office to support the expense of the office, examples
- Animal cases
- Civil cases, such as titles
- Inconvenient to the public
- Why?

Suggestion

- Monthly reporting requirements to show recent workload indicators
- Monthly report show average annual for the most recent 12-month period

Benefit

- Council is immediately aware of increases or decreases in service and public use
- Support to discuss changes with Administrator/Department Heads
- Support for budget adjustments to offer adequate, cost-efficient service to the public

Thank you for your consideration of this request for monthly updates of department workload indicators for use in Budgeting County Tax Dollars.

Susie Cornelius

June 9, 2009

Fire, Rescue & Safety Budget

Public Comments

June 9, 2009

No accountability in this budget for how the fire departments are funded

Allows arbitrary rewards or punishment to districts

Last year we knew where the funding went, this year we don't

\$750,000 now encumbered that was promised to rural districts

Moved money from one account to the other

Told us we're saving "100s of K" but actually cut about \$40,000

What do you expect from volunteers?

Explain how tax funds are spent in the two fire accounts

Fund 20 (2.9 mils) was for the use of volunteer fire departments, yet these funds are being used to contract with cities for outside city limits service at 4 mils and no accounting of the use of the money is required from the cities

Limit City of Seneca fire contract renewal to two years, ten-year terms

New county fire service is not yet fully established and contractual obligations should be limited for that reason. The County should maintain a flexible position on major financial obligations.

**Fund ISO survey this budget
year for individual
rural fire departments**

Many fire districts have sufficient records to support a survey that can help reduce insurance premiums. A countywide survey may cause some fire districts to suffer an undeserved increase in ISO rating in their area.

**Omit capital funding for a new
Westminster Fire Station,
pending further study**

This capital project can be made a part of a later supplemental budget.

Fund the Assessor's office to amend property tax assessments to acknowledge fire funding benefits

We fund certain areas in excess of the special district tax mills. This is proof of special access to county-funded resources. Properties should be taxed accordingly.

Funding for services is proof that incremental tax value is added, or consistently maintained.

Acknowledge provision of water management for fire purposes

Identify developments permitted without adequate existing fire service and/or water pressure for fire service.

Assign reporting to the Fire Marshall in Permits and require reporting for budgeting.

Reports will allow fire districts to budget for expansion.

*Thank you for considering these
changes to the Fire budget.*

*Also, please consider this as an
additional request for a review and
revision of the County Fire Ordinance
to be put on the Council work schedule.*

Susie Cornelius

Susie Cornelius
170 Old Mill Lane
Mountain Rest, South Carolina 29664

Date: June 9, 2009

Memo to: Oconee County Council for the written record at Public Hearing.

Re: Public Comments - \$610,000 payment to Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority

This is a demand that you remove the \$610,000 payment to the OJRSA from the county budget.

There was no notice to the public of the November 18, 2008 agreement whereby the county agreed to pay \$610,000 per year until 2038. Also, that agreement does not hold any party accountable for specific performance.

Furthermore, that agreement of November 18, 2008 is based, in part, upon the terms of another agreement of the same date between Oconee County, Seneca, Westminster Walhalla, West Union and OJRSA, with terms that extend until 2042. The public had no prior notice of this agreement. This second agreement violates the principles of county planning prescribed in the South Carolina Code of Laws and allows private entities to develop infrastructure to their private profit and purpose without considering the county's Comprehensive Plan and Master Infrastructure Plan.

The vote by the County Council on November 18, 2008, to spend county tax dollars, without legal notice of the terms, and without reasonable accountability from the parties involved, is causing me on-going stress in my effort to attempt to ensure the county's required compliance with a state Supreme Court order in this matter. Also, from my own pocket, I continue to pay amounts of money, substantial from my small pocketbook, to obtain copies of documents and financially support an effort of close observation of county operations where attempts continue to be made to violate public information laws.

I am hereby asking you, the new County Council, to put a stop to this on-going problem of illegal maneuvering by officials in the county who violate the Freedom of Information Act. These are willful acts, committed through conspiracy and offenders should be charged, arrested and prosecuted.

End.

Susie Cornelius
130 Old Mill Lane
Mountain Rest, South Carolina 29664

Date: June 9, 2009

Memo to: Oconee County Council for the written record at Public Hearing

Re: Public Comments - Oconee Fire and Emergency Services - Budget 09-10

Explain to the public which expenses are covered in the two fire accounts. I have been led to believe that Fund 20 (2.9 mils) was for the use of volunteer fire departments, yet these funds are being used to contract with cities for outside city limits service at 6 mils and no accounting of the use of the money is required from the cities. What do you expect from volunteers?

This is a request for the following changes, or adjustments to #107 and/or Fund 20:

Limit the renewal City of Seneca fire contract to two years, on ten-year terms. The reorganization of county fire service is not yet set and contractual obligations should be limited for that reason. The County should maintain a flexible position on major financial obligations until new fire service is properly established.

Fund ISO survey this budget year for individual rural fire department that have three years' records. Many fire districts have sufficient records to support a survey that can help reduce insurance premiums. A countywide survey may cause some fire districts to suffer an undeserved increase in ISO rating for their fire district and some fire districts may not have a sufficient record history to support a survey.

Omit capital funding for a new Westminster Fire Station, pending further study. This capital project can be made a part of a supplemental budget later in the year. Poor planning at the beginning is placing the county in an awkward position. The proposal to house two separate government units under the same roof is illogical. (Three different entities if you count the Medical Center.) Different hierarchy, separate standards and different ideology can create a morale nightmare as well as logistical problems.

Fund the Assessor's office to amend property tax assessments to acknowledge fire funding benefits. The county is regularly funding to certain areas in excess of the special district tax mils. This is proof of special access to county-funded resources and these properties should be taxed accordingly. Funding for services is proof that incremental tax value is added, or consistently maintained, through the expenditure of county resources.

Acknowledge provision for countywide water management for fire purposes in the budget. We need to identify which properties and developments are being permitted without adequate existing fire service and/or water pressure for fire service. Reports generated will allow fire districts to budget for expansion. Perhaps this provision may be temporarily assigned to the Fire Marshall in permits and should reflect a requirement for reporting responsibility for budgeting purposes.

Please consider this a *request for review and revision of the County Fire Ordinance*, which does not make sense for its intended purpose. The above budget changes will support needed revisions to the ordinance.

End.

The following information is from the South Carolina Association of Counties website, which can be found here: <http://www.sccounties.org/counties/county-statistics.aspx>

Oconee County is a member of the Appalachian Council of Governments, and this is the group of counties that we should be benchmarking ourselves against. Laurens and Greenwood are also close to us with comparable population and size. Pickens is our direct neighbor, and shares Jasper, Keowee and Hartwell borders with us, and in my opinion is the county that we should look at for comparison.

The SC Association of Counties compares spending per Capita among counties. If you look at this chart, you should be ashamed of how poor a job we do compared to Pickens. I am not advocating cutting our spending this amount today. However over the next 4 years, we should try and get our budget to a competitive point with the other upstate counties.

One does not have to be a rocket scientist to cut the budget. The council simply needs to direct the County Administrator to request that all department heads submit a budget that is in line with the surrounding counties. This could be done over a period of a few years. The data is readily available, and the degree that you want them to comply is up to you. I simply see no reason for us to spend so irresponsibly.

If you look at the great discrepancy between our taxes and Pickens, what you are seeing is the money that Duke kicks into our county.

As a last note: Raising the Assessed value of the properties in Oconee County shows that as a group, the Oconee government does not truly understand how the formulas determining taxes work. The same amount of money could have been raised with the voting public getting an overall decrease. I will be happy to discuss this with any councilman that is interested.

	Oconee	Pickens	Data	To Equal Pickens	To Be Cut	Cut %
Population	66,215	119,757	2000			
Assessed	\$457,165,825.00	\$403,240,558.00	2007			
Assessed per Capita	\$6,904.26	\$3,640.77	2007			
Millage	0.0695	0.0600	2008			
Value of Mill	\$438,081.00	\$404,390.00	2008			
Mill per Capita	\$6.62	\$3.65	2008			
Expenditures	\$39,780,286.00	\$48,676,079.00	2007	\$29,100,522.50	\$10,679,763.50	27%
Expend per Capita	\$600.77	\$439.49	2007			
Payroll	\$15,781,748.00	\$19,130,788.00	2009	\$11,461,069.98	\$4,320,678.02	27%
Payroll per Capita	\$238.34	\$173.09	2009			
Full Time Employees	415	504		361	114	27%
Part Time Employees	52	108				
Full Time Employees/1000 Pop	6.27	4.55				

COMMENTS ON FY 2009-2010 OCONEE COUNTY BUDGET

I do not have any specific comments on the proposed Oconee County Budget for FY 2009-2010. However, having attended all eight workshops held by the Budget and Finance Committee of the County Council, I would like to comment on the process. As we are all aware these are tough economic times for all of us. I would like to commend the Council for their thorough review of each line item of the budget and voting according to the appropriateness and necessity of these items. The proposed budget holds the line on costs, provides for virtually no cuts in services, no layoffs and most important provides for NO tax increase to the citizens of Oconee County.

This was only made possible by long hours by Kendra Brown and her staff as well as the various Department Heads who appeared before the committee to address their needs and reduce costs wherever possible. Even with these efforts, County employees will be furloughed 4 days during the year or suffer about a 1 ¼ per cent loss in pay. In turn, County Council members are also cutting one of their own paychecks or about a 4 per cent loss in pay.

I sincerely hope that the Council and County Staff will continue to find ways to save money wherever possible during the year. I did notice recently a sizable computer purchase was made by negotiating directly with the vendor instead of using the state contract thereby realizing a considerable cost saving. I have also noticed the exploration of purchasing good used or surplus vehicles and more fuel efficient vehicles for county use. These are examples of prudent fiscal management that benefit all of us.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to address the Council.

Richard E. Hughes

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