



Pen City Current

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Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Budget time

The Lee County Conference Board, a budget advisory board to the Lee County Board of Supervisors met Thursday night to discuss the Assessor's budget. The board recommended a 3% maximum increase for Assessor Theresa Murray and 2% increase for the staff.

Advisory board sets Assessor bump at 3%

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

MONTROSE - A recommending board to the Lee County Board of Supervisors has set a max 3% increase for the next fiscal year for the County Assessor's office.

Lee County Assessor Theresa Murray was looking for a 4% increase for her and department deputies, but the Lee County Conference Board passed a motion to set the max amount at 3% and 2.5% for deputies.

After about a 30-minute conversation on Murray's salary, West Point Mayor Paul Walker, who sits on the board, made a motion to set a 3% max and 2% for hourly employees in the department. The recommendation now goes to the Lee County Board of Supervisors, all of whom sit on the Conference Board, where

public hearings on the budgets are set prior to approvals.

In a letter to the Conference Board, Murray indicated the Lee County Conservation Board had recommended a 3% increase for supervisors; 7% increase for the County Attorney, 11% for Lee County Auditor Denise Fraise; 13% increase for Lee County Recorder Nancy Booten, 3% increase for the Lee County Sheriff Stacy Weber; and 12% increase for Lee County Treasurer Chris Spann. The recommendations still have to be parsed by the board of supervisors before finalizing the budget.

Murray said her salary ranks 33rd in the state of Iowa and she is appointed not elected. She said her position

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State budget shortfalls could hit DVIP

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

MONTROSE - Domestic Violence is being targeted by state funding cuts and the local advocacy group is looking for places to help fill potential gaps.

Kristie Doser, executive director of the Domestic Violence Intervention Program Region 6, addressed the Lee County Board of Supervisors at Tuesday's regular meeting asking for \$2,000 to help with mobility programs.

"That is the service that allows us to meet them where they're at," Doser said. "We meet them at a school, meet them at their bank, at the grocery store, coffee shops. To put it bluntly if that's the only place where they can get away alone... we'll meet you there."

Doser said the \$118 million shortfall the state's up against in the current

fiscal year has resulted in talks about reducing funding to local domestic violence programs by as much as 45%. The state funding portion only represents about 10% of the DVIP budget and Doser said although that doesn't seem like a lot, those funds trigger matching funds from the federal funding which is 49% of the DVIP budget.

"That's the real critical component here," Doser said. "There are matching funds from the federal government at stake when the state reduces its support. So it has the potential to be much more damaging."

The DVIP is the group that came in about three years ago after the Tri-State Coalition Against Domestic Violence left the area. Doser said at the

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FMAAA searching for artist's work for February feature

FOR PCC

Ft. Madison Area Arts Association is logging in items made by Charlene Bueker for a February feature at the gallery. She had an arts and crafts shop on west end of town in the 1970s. Her work was featured at The Emporium when it ran in Kingsley Inn. Her art specialization was her folksy renderings of Christmas and Easter scenes. She also was known as Charlene Langenbach. If you have a work of hers and wish to share for the February feature, bring it to 825 Avenue G and the FMAAA will log it in for you. Make it Ft. Madison.



Courtesy photos

Folk art

Ft. Madison Area Arts Association is looking for more pieces of Charlene Bueker's art to add to these two pieces and others they have obtained to include in a feature at the gallery in February.

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From the Front/Local News

DVIP wants \$2K from county

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same time that transition took place, a restructuring of funding also took place and the state helped out with filling some of the gaps.

"We do have bipartisan support in the state legislature," Doser said, "But right now what we're hearing out of the negotiations is that we could be losing up to 45% of our state funding. To lose half would be devastating, no other way to put it. It's not a statement on parties, it's just the information we're hearing right now."

She said the Board of Supervisors had a long history of supporting the Tri-State Coalition when they were in place. But Doser said she didn't want to go in heavy-handed and ask for a lot, despite saying services would likely increase 20% over

the last fiscal year.

"We've been here two and half years and have established great relationships with key players," Doser said.



DOSER

"But at this point we have to come back and talk a little about funding. We've known for some time that (President) Trump has had the Office of Violence Against Women and domestic violence programs in his cross hairs and we've heard in the last four days that he's planning on recommending those resources be closed down."

She also said the public energy on the state budget shortfall is focusing on higher education, corrections and public safety,

"We do have bipartisan support in the state legislature. But right now what we're hearing out of the negotiations is that we could be losing up to 45% of our state funding. To lose half would be devastating, no other way to put it."

-Kristie Doser
DVIP
Executive Director

but in the background are the other entities facing cuts. She said she couldn't ask the county to make up the whole difference.

"Bluntly, there's no way they could make up the

whole difference. This is the first time we've approached them for funding and I quite literally heard all this right before I met with them. I literally had a migraine."

The DVIP program services eight counties including Lee, Des Moines, Cedar, Washington, Iowa, Henry, Van Buren and Johnson. Doser said they do get funding from Johnson and she is working with the other counties.

"We do very well with local resources. We're very proactive about that and our budget is healthy not taking into consideration the proposed cuts."

The group will also be holding its first annual Keokuk Souper Bowl fundraiser on Feb. 7 where patrons can purchase a bowl created by local artists and then help themselves to as much soup as they can eat and listen to live music. Nine area restaurants will be providing soup for the fundraiser to be held at the First Christian Church in Keokuk, 3476 Main Street from 5:30 to 7:30. Cost is \$15 per ticket or a table of six for \$75.

Proposal still needs hearings, approvals

ASSESSOR - Continued from Page 1

is more akin to the county attorney or engineer because her position requires additional training by code and therefore the increase is warranted.

Walker and several other department heads in the audience took exception to the comparison.

"I don't care if you're elected or not, you can't tell me that these people don't have to be educated and trained to do their jobs," Walker said.

Walker also said the numbers being kicked around for raises in the county would be hard for him to swallow.

"I run a city, too and it would be very difficult for me to say here, 'Ok, we're gonna give you a 10% raise' and then tell my city, 'Ok you get at 2% increase.'"

Booten also took offense to Murray's statement.

"I don't have a reason for them not getting a raise," Booten said of the Assessors team. "But I think it insinuates that we're not as smart because we don't have to take a test. Anyone can come in with a two-year degree and take the assessor's test and get those jobs and that's happening. Denise and Chris both worked in the office and they learned their job. For myself, I've taken many exams in my life and I always have to take continuing education. Those gave me the experience to do my job. It doesn't make me any less smart. What we're talking about is running a department."

"The discrepancy came when we tried to make department heads closer in pay, but when a deputy gets more than someone that runs a department that makes it look like we're not getting paid what we should. We run the departments and handle a staff and do the budgets."

"The four of us work well together," Murray said.

"So I don't want to this to have any hard feelings. I just wanted to explain...why that is. We set the tax base and we have look at all houses and be comparable, we have to decide values. There's just so much we have to do."

"When we talk to the general public we get that you're being paid very well. But if you really want to rev it up throw those big numbers around and we'll get people calling. And they call us," board member Matt Pflug said.

Board member Ron Fedler said when the compensation board comes in with all kinds of different numbers it puts the supervisors in a bad spot.

"All county positions are important and the best we can do is try to find a compromise that works best for the county. But sometimes it's difficult to find that compromise."

Murray also asked that pay for people that sit on the Assessors' Review Board be bumped to \$200 per day over the current \$100 a day to help attract new members.

A public hearing was set for April on the budget.

The board also heard from Lee County Emergency Management Agency Director Steve Cirrina about his department's budget. Cirrina indicated during discussions that he would be retiring in the next year or two and the board should consider hiring an assistant to be trained to take over for Cirrina at some point.

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Local News/Classifieds

Lee County Narcotics Task Force nabs 2

PCC STAFF

FORT MADISON - The Lee County Narcotics Task Force reports the arrest of a Fort Madison, Iowa man on misdemeanor and felony drug charges.



JONES

Thomas Lee Jones, 29, of 3421 Avenue N Apt. 227, Fort Madison, Iowa was arrested on January 23, 2017 at the Fort Madison Police Department on misdemeanor and felony drug charges. Jones is charged with Possession of a Controlled Substance (marijuana), a serious misdemeanor, Maintaining a Drug House, an aggravated misdemeanor, Possession With Intent To Deliver Marijuana Within 1000 Feet Of A School, a class D felony with an enhancement, and Possession of Drug Paraphernalia, a simple misdemeanor. If convicted, Jones

faces up to 13 years and 30 days in a state correctional facility.

The arrest of Jones stems from an investigation by the Lee County Narcotics Task Force into allegations that he was involved in the use and distribution of illegal drugs in the Lee County area.

The Lee County Attorney's Office, Fort Madison Police Department, and the Iowa Division of Narcotics Enforcement assisted the Lee County Narcotics Task Force in this investigation.

MONTROSE - The Lee County Narcotics Task Force reports the arrest of a Keokuk, Iowa man on misdemeanor drug charges.



HOWELL

Kenneth Michael Howell, 23, of 1203 1/2 Bank, Keokuk, Iowa was arrested on Jan. 25th, 2017 at his residence

on misdemeanor drug charges. Howell is charged with two counts of Possession of a Controlled Substance (methamphetamine and marijuana), a serious misdemeanor. If convicted, Howell faces up to 2 years in a state correctional facility.

The arrest of Howell stems from an investigation by the Lee County Narcotics Task Force into allegations that he was involved in the use of illegal narcotics in the Lee County area.

The Lee County Attorney's Office, Keokuk Police Department and the Department of Human Services assisted the Lee County Narcotics Task Force in this investigation.

The defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty. The Lee County Narcotics Task Force is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Justice and the funds administered by the Iowa Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy.

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