

Sheriff's operating costs up

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JEFFERSON — While the overall proposed 2017 budget for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office is down, the operating levy for the department has increased by \$128,546.

Budget hearings continued Thursday, with the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors Finance Committee approving the sheriff's recommended budget, advancing it to the full county board.

The Finance Committee is recommending a countywide tax levy of \$27,068,827, of which \$1,134,343 is debt. The proposed levy represents an increase over \$26,743,522 this year.

Excluded are \$838,207 for the Jefferson County Health Department and \$1,070,311 for the county library system. Including non-countywide funds, the total levy is \$28,977,348.

The budget, if adopted, would result in a countywide property tax rate of \$4.2969 per \$1,000 equalized valuation, translating into a 3-cent-per-\$1,000 decrease from last year.

The Sheriff's Office has the largest departmental portion of the recommended 2017 budget at \$12,203,863, down \$27,262 from 2016. Included in the tax levy is \$95,031 for capital items in 2017.

The total expected to be spent on capital items, to be funded using the tax levy, Fund Balance, Jail Assessment Funds or a combination of the three, is \$517,045.

Capital items that will use tax levy include an unmarked squad vehicle (\$26,000), a K-9 vehicle (\$30,000), a transport van (\$30,000) and a UPS system (\$9,031).

"We are increasing levy resources going to the Sheriff's Office," Jefferson County Administrator Ben Wehmeier said. "We're trying to balance that out. Obviously, it shows it's going down a little bit, but last year, a lot of that was for capital. Operationally, we increased well over \$125,000."

The department's 2016 budget was \$12,231,125, with \$250,839 budgeted for capital items, many of them one-time purchases.

Not including the funds budgeted for capital items, the department's operational tax levy increased by \$128,546 from 2016 to 2017.

"For us, it's business as usual with the tagline, 'prices have gone up,'" Chief Deputy Jeffery Parker said. "We are experiencing, unfortunately, the cause and effect of things like the cost of contracts (going up). For example, our general communications contract had an increase of \$20,000 alone."

“The reason for some of those things is that we have expanded our communications capabilities, which was a necessity to ensure meeting the needs of meeting the fire and EMS as well as our own people,” he continued. “With adding that equipment comes the fact that you now have to take care of that equipment and it’s going to take more people-hours to make that happen.”

Another rising cost is inmate healthcare at the county jail.

“Just like everything else, we didn’t get to see the stability that our employee healthcare took,” Parker said. “Instead, we saw the typical 3.5-percent increase that raises the cost of the inmate health contract and, in return, we’re seeing a depletion of our Jail Assessment Fund.”

The Jail Assessment Fund is non-tax levy dollars. When a citation is written in Jefferson County, \$10 of that citation fee goes to the Jail Assessment Fund.

“We have always split costs for that (inmate health) contract because this year and next year, it’s \$151,000,” Parker said. “We’ve always had the luxury of dipping into the jail assessment to provide some of the reduction to that cost and that account is starting to deplete because we’ve done some other major things. As an example, the jail camera system this last year, which we took \$148,000 out of there.”

Parker continued: “We met with the county administrator several times to streamline things to make the cuts that we could, but the reality of it is, is the more technology you have, the more money it costs to make the upgrades and keep things running.”

He cited squad car radios as an example, explaining that they currently are in their 15th to 17th year of use and must be replaced.

“Instead of doing them all at once, we’re doing a couple at a time,” Parker said. “The other example would be the body cameras. That was an additional cost of \$22,000. We got a contingency grant from this committee (the Finance Committee) to pay for the first two-thirds of the cameras, but we still had X amount of cameras to buy so that everybody is issued one and the wear and tear isn’t as great. That equipment request was an additional \$20,000.”

Parker and Jefferson County Sheriff Paul Milbrath also cited overtime as a large cost.

“A couple different things actually play into (the amount of overtime),” Milbrath said. “Last year, we didn’t have the bodies, but you now have the worker’s comp and that’s been a very lengthy timeframe on just one alone, plus several others. So you’re paying for them not to be there.

“The other issue that we run into is, now we have new people (that we have to train),” he continued. “So even though we have the people, trying to get them on board and up to speed on everything they need is another issues.”

Parker said that there has been an increase in schooling/registrations in the department this year.

“What we’re now having is the changing of the guard,” he said. “We’re losing our old deputies who held certifications for decades in areas and now those deputies are getting near retirement age and they have to be replaced with new officers to obtain those skills.”

County Administrator

The recommended 2017 budget for Administration provides \$364,390 in tax levy, which is a \$99,361 increase from the 2016 amended budget. There are no capital items planned.

Included in the county administrator’s budget for 2017 is the Treatment Court, which is partially funded through federal and state grants. In 2017, a county position was added and funded by the county.

“The state grant that we submitted on behalf of the county received a \$174,000 grant,” Wehmeier said. “What this will allow us to do is maintain the OWI (operating while intoxicated) court and extended it to restricted substances OWIs, which we were not able to do before.

“In addition, we’ll start up a drug treatment court and add a full-time position of treatment court coordinator,” he continued. “Based on how the grants came in, one-third of that full-time position was not funded, so that’s part of the reason we had to increase that levy.”

Medical Examiner

The Medical Examiner’s 2017 recommended budget provides \$100,930 in tax levy, which is a \$1,610 increase from the 2016 amended budget. Reasons for the increase include salaries and fringe benefits, an increase in the number of autopsies and transportation costs. There are no capital items planned.

Human Resources

The 2017 recommended budget provides \$426,153 in tax levy, a \$28,934 decrease from this year. The primary reasons for the decrease was additional cost for contract negotiations in 2016 that is not budgeted in 2017. No capital items are planned.

County Clerk

The county clerk recommended budget for 2017 provides \$213,850 in tax levy, which is a \$13,124 decrease from this year. The primary reason is a decrease in the number of elections in 2017 from 2016. There are no capital items planned.

Parks

The recommended 2017 budget for the Parks Department is \$761,111 in tax levy, a \$944 increase from the 2016 amended budget. There is a total of \$95,500 planned in capital items, none of which use tax levy dollars.

Fair Park

The Fair Park's 2017 recommended budget provides \$53,118 in tax levy, which is a \$17,231 decrease from the 2016 amended budget. The primary reason for the decrease was due to salaries and fringes. There also was a reduction in charges, but a reduction in operating expenses as well.

There is a total of \$55,000 in capital items planned, none of which use tax levy dollars.

Finance

The 2017 recommended budget for the Finance Department provides \$465,350 in tax levy, an increase of \$14,194 due to salaries and fringes. No capital items are planned.

Planning and Zoning

The Planning and Zoning Department's recommended 2017 budget provides \$314,555 in tax levy, which is a decrease of \$9,082 from the 2016 amended budget. The 2017 budget includes an increase in licenses and permits as well as a reduction of carryover funds for the Solid Waste Program. No capital items are planned.

Veterans' Services

The 2017 recommended budget for Veterans' Services provides \$167,151 in tax levy, an increase of \$6,788 from the 2016 amended budget. No capital items are planned.

Emergency Management

The 2017 recommended budget for the Office of Emergency Management provides \$74,885 in tax levy, which is a \$661 increase in levy from the 2016 amended budget.

A total of \$481,220 in capital items are planned, to be fully funded by federal and state grants.

Library Services

The 2017 recommended budget for Library Services provides \$1,072,311 in non-countywide tax levy. It is a \$31,076 increase in levy from the 2016 amended budget due to an increase in circulations.

There are no capital items planned.

County Board

The county board's recommended 2017 budget provides \$439,288 in tax levy, which is an increase of \$47,086 from the 2016 amended budget. The primary reason for the increase was the contribution to the Jefferson County Economic Consortium, which went from \$1 per person to \$1.5 per person for a total increase of \$42,138. No capital items are planned.