

September 13, 2022 Press Release – County Budget

Lee County Judge Paul Fischer responds to comments made on social media and in public about Lee County Commissioners underfunding public safety in the county.

First, the proposed budget exceeds recurring expenses by over \$2,000,000 dollars. **Not one cent of current tax dollars or budgeted revenues is being used to pay for repairs to the courthouse.** Courthouse repairs are being paid for entirely out of reserves and grants specifically for the courthouse. It is wrong to blame the courthouse repairs for the County’s budget situation. Virtually 100% of the proposed projected deficit of recurring expenses over budgeted income results from budget requests from the Lee County Sheriff over the last two budget years and increases requested by Lee County EMS and local volunteer fire departments. The county has historically utilized reserves and savings from past budgets to cover shortfalls for recurring expenses and to pay for capital expenditures. This avoids taxpayer funded debt. At some point all county fund reserves will be spent paying for budgeted deficits unless the county controls spending or the Commissioners raise taxes.

To say that the Commissioners are underfunding law enforcement and public safety is not looking at the facts. The 2020-2021 sheriff’s office budget funded the requested 14 full time deputy positions, 1 administrative assistant, and 6 dispatcher positions. In the 2021-2022 budget, Sheriff Goetz requested budget increases in many areas, approximately \$1,500,000 for both the sheriff’s office and the jail. Commissioners budgeted an additional \$800,000 for the sheriff to be allocated as he requested. The budget funded an additional 7 deputy positions and 1 additional dispatcher supervisor. That was a 50% increase in deputies in one year, when Lee County’s population increased by less than ten percent from the 2010 census to 2020 (16,712 to 17,478). For 2021, the U.S. Census estimated the county’s population at 17,706. Commissioners also funded the sheriff’s lease of up to 8 new vehicles in the budget year 2021-2022, and is requesting 6 new additional vehicles for the budget year 2022-2023.

For budget year 2022-2023, Sheriff Goetz requested over \$1,600,000 in additions to his budget for this office and the jail. The proposed budget funds a \$1,200,000 increase to his budget and includes 4 new jailers and 1 deputy who will also be the School Resource Officer at Lexington I.S.D.

Budgeted positions:	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Deputies	14	14	21	22
Administration	1	1	2	2
Dispatchers	6	6	6	6
Jailers	20	20	20	24*

\*The maximum jail population has not increased since 2008. Further, the current jail population has averaged far fewer inmates than the pre-covid jail population in 2018 and 2019. In September, the Lee County Jail population has averaged around 50 inmates, some of whom are Hays County inmates.

With respect to budgeted funds, following are the annual budgets for public safety line items:

Department	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023 (proposed)
Sheriff	\$2,101,626	\$2,926,970	\$3,499,682
Jail	<u>\$1,668,949</u> \$3,770,575	<u>\$2,099,525</u> \$5,026,495	<u>\$2,813,761</u> \$6,313,443

From the 2020-2021 budget, the total increase for the 2 departments is an increase of almost 70%.

Budget Category	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
EMS	\$220,626.64	\$248,000	\$622,000 (includes \$188,000 ARPA funds)

In 2021, Lee County and the City of Lexington began funding an emergency vehicle based in Lexington resulting from the termination of the Lexington Volunteer EMS organization. The original contract funded the unit for 12 hours a day at a total cost of \$105,000 of which the county paid \$77,500 per year. For the budget year 2022-2023, that unit will be full time at a total cost of \$281,000 and the County's expected portion to be \$235,000.

Also, Lee County EMS has requested an increase for funding. There has been no increase since 2015. Under the current contract Lee County pays Lee County EMS \$168,960 per year. The requested increase will be \$375,269.00 per year.

Constables	\$216,235	\$321,649**
VFD	\$ 44,000	\$134,000 (Includes \$90,000 from ARPA funds)***
VFD Calls	\$ 25,000	\$25,000
First Responders	<u>\$ 7,000</u>	<u>\$7,000</u>
Total	\$5,566,730	\$7,423,092


\*\* The proposed budget includes making all three (3) constables full time – they are currently part-time --, which adds them to full time available law enforcement personnel.

\*\*\* This does not include funds paid by Lee County for insurance on fire equipment.

These numbers show that the County is funding law enforcement and emergency services. The \$7,423.092 for emergency services accounts for over 80% of all ad valorem taxes received by the county. This amount does **not** include amounts the county pays for emergency management, funding for DPS, funding for the courts, or funding for prosecution and investigation expenses.

For Law Enforcement, First Responders and Emergency services, the total expenditures from the general funds is approximately 58% of all funds sources.

Comments that the commissioner's court is ignoring and underfunding law enforcement and emergency services ignores reality. Commissioner's court over the last 2 years has enhanced law enforcement and emergency services. To say that Lee County ignores emergency service needs, disregards facts. We are stewards of tax dollars. Spending money does not solve problems. Spending money wisely does.

  
Paul E Fischer  
County Judge, Lee County