

## Letters to the Editor

Editor, The Independent:

If you're watching the slow motion meltdown of Shiawassee County government since the Nov. 4 election and believe it doesn't have to be this way, you're right. Sound budgeting principles combined with a bit of political will over the next few weeks can save our road patrol while giving a new Board of Commissioners time to work on the reforms necessary to right the ship.

It is absurd that the deficit is being framed in terms of cuts from a "requested" budget. A requested budget represents a "wish list" prior to an actual budget proposal. I may "want" \$30 instead of \$20 next year, but if I instead only get \$15, I'm not being "cut" \$15 – I'm being cut \$5 from the prior year. I never had \$30, I only wanted it. This false cut serves to mask real cuts being made to our road patrol.

Here is the true picture: Last year's budget was adopted at \$16.336 million. Next year's budget proposal is \$15.223 million, which is a reduction of \$1.113 million, not the \$2.163 million figure that is being thrown around. With a \$1.113 million reduction, it is hard to understand why there is a \$1.5 million cut proposed to the Sheriff's Office. This reduction is \$400,000 more than the entire budget hole!

Of course, \$1.113 million would be a lot of money to lose, but it is far easier to manage than the incorrect \$2.163 million figure.

In addressing the \$1.113 million deficit, let's look at assumptions. Increases in revenue sharing should exceed \$285,000 according to the Michigan Department of Treasury. It is unclear how much of this increase is budgeted. Assuming that this is accounted for in part (50 percent) that would mean \$142,500 in added revenue. \$970,500 remains.

Property tax collection increases are estimated at over \$100,000 assuming 2.25 percent growth. This is not reflected in the proposed county budget. Factor it in; \$870,500 remains.

The approval of the Veterans Millage replaces \$157,000 in prior General Fund expenditure as intended. This was not included in the budget proposal because the vote had not yet taken place; \$713,500 remaining.

The county's Delinquent Tax Revolving Fund has generated a 10 year annual average of \$765,000 in revenue and its \$8 million fund balance has remained largely steady through 2013. No, the fund has not been "exhausted." Transferring the 10 year average rather than the current proposal would add \$314,000 to the General Fund; \$399,500 remaining.

If the transfer just mentioned creates cash flow concerns, short term financing in anticipation of revenues should be explored. If cash flow is the problem, we are talking about "when" money comes in and not "if" money comes in. It is outrageous that people should lose jobs over something like that. If financing is not desired, cash out and hold some investments for cash flow. Maintaining \$2.6 million in low-yield CDs is not more important than maintaining our road patrol.

Beyond these suggestions on budgeting practices, here are a few other items to consider in the way of reforms. Let's return to the \$399,500 shortfall still remaining.

Reduce or eliminate building security and streamline

emergency services. These were only added in recent years and this could free up at least \$200,000 in favor of what many would consider a higher priority – road patrol.

Drastically cut pay and eliminate all benefits for commissioners if the county administrator model is to be maintained. This frees up at least \$100,000. In making this particular change, consider the elimination of the present cumbersome subcommittee model. Staff could then present budget and policy measures directly to the entire commission for consideration and debate as is done in many other jurisdictions. This also cuts down on the number of meetings and the added staff time required to prepare for those meetings. Remaining meetings should be scheduled outside of business hours so that the public can more easily attend.

In anticipated revenues, there is an unexplained \$400,000 decrease in charges for services and \$200,000 in other unexplained revenue reductions.

The board of commissioners is to be commended for their recent change to non-represented employee pensions. The board has estimated that this will save \$300,000 per year once fully implemented. With \$300,000 in projected savings, why lay off people now?

The rejected Headlee Override proposal in August was later described as a stopgap measure to get the county to 2016. I would assume that the changes above more than accomplish the same financial stabilization for the coming year and allow the new county board of commissioners the time that they need to thoughtfully approach future reforms rather than budgeting in an environment of immediate crisis.

These are not all new suggestions, nor are they terribly profound. Many of these ideas were shared with county leadership prior to the election and have been shared again since. If the current commissioners continue on their present path of cutting a large number of jobs, I urge the new commissioners to immediately reopen the budget in 2015 and make it right.

I acknowledge that there may be factors here of which I am not aware – the budget summary was released later than promised and left little time for a complete exhaustive review. The budget detail remains unreleased. Even if I'm only 50 percent correct in the suggestions above, however, road patrol can be maintained. The bottom line is that there are men and women being served layoff notices right now and it doesn't have to be this way.

It's time to get past the rhetoric and bruised egos and get this done.

Ben Frederick, mayor of Owosso

Editor, The Independent:

I am writing to all who are between the ages of 14 and 18 and interested in learning more about the fire service. The Shiawassee County Fire Service Explorer Post has expanded into surrounding fire districts within the



## WORSHIP SERVICES DIRECTORY



**ANTRIM BAPTIST CHURCH**  
4509 E. Lovejoy Rd., Byron  
419-888-8100 • www.antrimbc.org

**DURAND CHURCH OF  
THE NAZARENE**  
6735 E. Monroe Rd. #2