

# Bradford County Commissioners' Office



## Chairman's Report to the Taxpayers on the State of Bradford County

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# Introduction

It's hard to believe that it has been two years since being elected as County Commissioner. As I did last year I am taking this opportunity upon the release of the proposed 2010 budget to share with the citizens the progress by your county government in the past year. I also will discuss the year ahead and the issues that will be addressed.

## 2010 Budget Summary

The 2010 Bradford County budget is built on last year's budgetary decisions but also a year full of tough decisions in regards to several county programs. It represents positive decisions to move our county forward. This budget reflects the difficult decisions made in 2009 to keep the finances of the county under control and sustainable over the long term without a tax increase.

I would first like to address some of the challenges faced in preparing the 2010 budget. First and foremost, just as last year we had to budget with state cuts in Human Services that will have a significant negative impact on not only our budget but our residents as well.

For 2010 the state Department of Public Welfare has informed the county of a \$123,875 cut in Children and Youth Services, a \$23,734 cut in Drug and Alcohol Services and a \$145,698 cut in Mental Health Services. The county's Homeless Assistance Grant has been decreased by \$6,273 and the Bradford County Human Services Development Fund has been decreased by \$19,429. The county has yet to receive allocations for mental retardation services. To date the cuts to Bradford County in Human Services alone for 2010 total over \$319,000.

Contract reviews in Human Services have taken place at the direction of the Commissioners' Office. We have placed contracts that were not previously publicly bid out for open and fair bidding. The move to open bidding on all contracts results in substantially lower program costs and allows the county to fund other services more adequately.

The rising cost of health insurance has had a significant impact on this budget. Although we joined a health insurance cooperative to stave off the immense increases in premiums the county is still faced with a 14% increase in 2010's rates. This equates to a \$441,000 impact on the budget. To help offset the increase the county has modified employee healthcare plans for 2010 and increased the employee contributions. This, of course, is a burden to both the taxpayer and the employee that we must deal with on yearly basis.

As was the case in 2009 the 2010 budget has a significant focus on infrastructure projects. These include remodeling a recently purchased building for District Judge Timothy Clark, a roof replacement project at the library and various other large projects. This year capital projects will total \$736,560. The projects completed in 2008, 2009 and those projects to be completed this coming year will put Bradford County in a solid position on infrastructure for years to come. Added staffing represented in the 2010 budget consists of several temporary positions in the county Maintenance Department that will remodel the recently purchased building for District Judge Clark and several other county offices.

The county library received a 22% cut in funding from the state as a result of the budget impasse. This had a significant impact on the library forcing the county to operate the library at minimum hours required by the state as well as making significant cuts in numerous line items.

Despite the capital improvements to buildings we must recognize the financial straits that libraries across Pennsylvania have been put in by state budget cuts. Some difficult decisions have to be made to ensure the library itself can be sustained financially. Therefore Bradford County for the budget year 2010 will be discontinuing the bookmobile service. The vehicle utilized for the bookmobile is no longer in working condition and the cost of fixing the vehicle outweighs the value of it. Furthermore, the cost of replacing the vehicle is not an expense the county can afford at this point. This is a regrettable cut in service for our residents across the county. However, to keep library operations affordable and to fund improvements to the building this is a necessary decision. We do realize this is an important service. Therefore, we will continue to look at various replacement options over the course of the coming year.

Despite the challenges that we have faced there has been significant financial improvement in several areas over the course of 2009 that have placed the county in a very positive position for 2010.

A hard look at difficult decisions made regarding the county's daycare program will save the county nearly \$200,000 in 2010. We worked cooperatively with the school districts across Bradford County to negotiate a partnership and cost share to keep the S.T.A.R. program running and relocate the program to a more cost-effective location. This is an important program for the rehabilitation of children and adolescents saving money in the long term.

In my report to the taxpayers last year the Bradford County Manor was a significant financial challenge. During the last budget process we made several changes including staff cuts and moving laundry services to the correctional facility. There were very difficult decisions made and specific plans carried out. This along with new manor administration has resulted in a great success story this year. I am pleased to report that the Manor is now in a positive cash flow position. As expected the laundry move has saved the county over \$100,000 in 2009. Overtime at the facility has been reduced from over 1000 hours in 2008 to 340 hours throughout 2009. Staff retention has increased from 30% in 2008 to 90% in 2009. This progress is a testament not only to administration, but to all the workers at the facility. In short, costs are down and revenues are up and the facility is running as it should.

For the year just ending the budget and agenda called for cuts in staffing in various county positions as well as exploring costs and necessities of certain programs. As unfortunate as the cuts were I am proud to report that we had many successes and improvements. In 2010 we will address many new and outstanding issues that are affecting our county and continue to strive to make improvements.

I have pointed out the major issues in the 2010 budget for you, the taxpayers, to review. It is my hope that this explains in some detail the challenges we faced and the investments made within the 2010 Budget.

The Bradford County budget for the fiscal year of 2010 is \$56,202,433. The budget can be viewed in its entirety on the county website.

# The 2010 Agenda

## County Infrastructure

As stated at the outset of 2009 many of our county buildings were and in some cases still are in need of important and costly upgrades. The 2010 budget provides for several capital projects involving county infrastructure that are intended to be completed by the year's end. They are as follows;

**Guaranteed Energy Savings-** In 2009 the Commissioners created the "Bradford County Energy Committee" to review proposals from contractors for a large-scale guaranteed energy savings project for seven of Bradford County's buildings. After months of tedious review and work the committee selected Johnson Controls Inc. Since that time the committee has been working with Johnson Controls to finish a detailed audit of the county's energy costs and develop ways to reduce them.

The audit is due to the county before the end of this year (2009). Throughout 2010 the Energy Committee and county maintenance will be working with Johnson Controls to perform important energy saving upgrades to county infrastructure.

With rising energy costs and deregulation of energy companies coming soon we need to make our buildings energy efficient. This will ensure we are both responsible for the cost to the taxpayers and be environmentally responsible as well.

**District Judge/County Offices** – For years Bradford County has been exploring office space options for the District Judge Clark. In 2008, and throughout 2009, this Board of Commissioners continued to look at options which included renting, buying or building a facility. We have chosen an option which will include moving other offices to alleviate space issues within the courthouse and library as well as eliminate the use of another county run building. We have purchased a building in Towanda Borough which will require renovations to house the district judge and various other county offices to alleviate space issues.

**Courthouse Generator-**The project has been engineered. However the cost was more than our original estimates for 2009. This is a necessary replacement and upgrade to the courthouse and annex building. It will be placed in the 2010 budget and rebid in the upcoming year. The cost is estimated at \$75,000.

**Library Roof-** The county library roof will be replaced at an estimated cost of \$100,000. The roof has seen many repairs in recent years and it is due for complete replacement.

**Paving Project-** The parking lot at District Judge Wheaton's office has been patched and repaired many times. The parking lot needs to be completely repaved. The estimated cost of the project is \$20,000.

**Human Services Office Building-** Negotiations will continue via the contracted process for the purchase of the building that Bradford County Human Services is located at 220 Main St. in Towanda. Currently the county is leasing the entire second floor at a cost of \$71,000 a year plus maintenance, taxes and insurance. This lease, entered in to 9 years ago, denotes a process by which the county has the option to purchase the building. If the county fails to purchase the building the rent is increased to \$78,000 automatically plus the additional costs. Needless to say purchasing the building would be in the best long-term financial interest of the county.

### **Bradford County Library**

The Bradford County Library will see long overdue building improvements in 2010. These improvements are necessities which include roof replacement and handicap accessible restrooms. The county is in the process of pricing and planning for the implementation of both permanent sewer and water at the library. This will eliminate the daily maintenance of the sewer system and the non-potable water at the library.

Additionally the county will carry out the planned renovation of the restrooms at the library using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) money. This renovation will make the restrooms handicap accessible.

### **Bradford County Parks**

The Bradford County Parks Committee has met consistently over the past year to further the planning and development of the county parks. The parks' master planning process is currently underway with the hired consultant, YSM Inc. The planning is expected to come to a close in the spring of 2010. The end of this year long process will produce a comprehensive plan for the Bradford County Parks system. The plan will include not only new layouts and options for use of each park but also address on-going maintenance, not to mention the financial aspects of improving the county parks. Additionally, further individual improvements to each park will enhance the parks in 2010.

### **Information Technology**

Bradford County will be budgeting for the use of a consultant to evaluate the county's computer network and systems. Any recommendations garnered through this process will be planned for and implemented accordingly. The county information technology department is currently engaged in several software conversions for Assessment, Sheriff's Office and Accounting. In 2010 it will be necessary to purchase a new software package for the Prothonotary's Office.

### **Assessment**

New computer software was purchased for the assessment office as part of this past year's agenda. All county assessment information is currently being converted for this new system. Once the system is in place the information from the Assessment Office will be open to the public and be available via the Bradford County website.

## **Open Government**

In 2010 there will be a continued commitment to opening up Bradford County with more public disclosure of government business. Throughout 2009 Bradford County has made progress including the launch of the redesigned and updated Bradford County website. It has had over 30,000 visitors since its launch in early 2009. Several enhancements have been added since the release, including an open government webpage. Here citizens can find information regarding the operation of their county government such as meeting minutes, agendas and county press releases. In 2010 we will continue to add content to this page such as audio recordings of Commissioners' meetings. Also, we have continued the county e-mail newsletter which has doubled in e-mail subscriptions this year.

This coming year the Commissioners' Office will take several new directions to enhance communication with the public. We will, for the first time, budget money to allow the Commissioners' Office to participate in community events throughout the county. This will allow the commissioners to be active at events and interact with citizens in a new way.

## **Bradford County Correctional Facility**

In 2009 the Bradford County Prison Board approved a program called the Community Workforce Inmate Program. The correctional facility will be implementing the newly formed program to enhance communities across Bradford County.

## **Recycling**

In the coming year Bradford County will work to develop a recycling program to be utilized by all offices. Currently there is not a program that encompasses all county offices.

## **Bradford County Manor**

Building on the success of 2009 the Bradford County Manor will be focused on improving care and enhancing the quality of lives of its residents. The facility will be working throughout 2010 to implement improvements such as electronic record keeping, improving accuracy and consistency of care. Also small improvements for residents such as wireless internet access will be implemented. The Bradford County guaranteed energy savings project will have a significant impact at the Manor with several projects being proposed for the facility.

## **Employee Health**

In 2010 Bradford County will work towards creating a healthier workforce. To this end several initiatives will be engaged. First, the county will develop and implement a Wellness Program for its employees. This will include a employee health fair and ongoing incentives to get healthy and stay healthy. Second, as a major part of our Wellness Program, we will develop and implement incentives for employees to enter into a smoking cessation program. Third, we will work towards making all Bradford County property a smoke free environment. Long term goals of these initiatives are to develop a healthier workforce which is not only good for the employee health but also for the future healthcare costs incurred by the county.

## **Emergency Management/Response**

Bradford County will focus on the implementation of a Director of Public Safety to oversee and manage all emergency operations of the county. In conjunction with the new director, Bradford County will be evaluating the management structure of the county's emergency management departments.

Furthermore, the county will begin a project to improve radio communications for emergency response which will require several radio towers to be upgraded as well as some equipment in the 911 Center. The project will cost approximately \$40,000.

## **911 Readdressing**

Delivery of questionnaires throughout the county to addressable structures has been completed. However, the project has been delayed for several months by the post office pending their mandatory review of the addresses submitted by the county. We have received approval to move forward with final address delivery in the Canton and Troy area. The county has every intention of delivering final addresses to each resident by the end of 2010.

## **Conclusion**

It is my intention that you use this document to get an understanding of the 2010 budget and how it relates to the progress that we intend to make in this coming year. As last year, we have met the challenge of the state budget cuts to the best of our ability. The agenda for 2010 is again an aggressive one that requires much hard work from employees and elected officials alike. I submit this report and agenda to you, the taxpayers, for your review and understanding.

Respectfully,

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