

# Bradford County Commissioners' Office



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

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# Introduction

One year ago I had the good fortune of being sworn in as your County Commissioner. Furthermore I had the honor of being elected as the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners. Both of those opportunities presented me with great opportunity to serve this county in a way that has challenged me and given me great pride.

I am taking this opportunity at the release of the 2009 Budget to share with you, the voters, point by point and issue by issue where we have been over the last year. Just as importantly I want to layout the agenda for the coming year. This includes a statement on the 2009 Budget and how it relates to the agenda for next year.

# The 2009 Budget

It has been a challenging year in Bradford County, especially in these financially uncertain times. All county departments and elected officials have had the duty of balancing the cost of services and infrastructure against the cost to the Bradford County taxpayers. In these economic times it has been more difficult to budget than usual. I would like to take this opportunity to share certain aspects of the challenges we have faced as County Department Heads and Elected Officials with the 2009 Budget. Furthermore I would like to discuss the positive aspects of the budget and the strides that will be made toward the future and how the 2009 Budget relates to the agenda for the coming year.

The largest contributor to the budget challenges, as in many prior years, is the continuous stream of unfunded mandates from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The difference between prior years and this year is - it is worse!

For the first year we have been left to pay the full time salary of the district attorney which will cost the taxpayers of Bradford County \$154,000.

We are facing tougher regulations, inspections and citations from the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. In the process of inspection performed by state Interim Warden Wayne Gavin it was discovered that the Bradford County Correctional Facility is understaffed for the number of inmates housed. According to state regulations we are obligated to have 1 officer for every 15 inmates. We do not currently meet that obligation. In discussions with the current warden, previous interim warden and the Bradford County fiscal department we have calculated that the overtime to cover staff deficiencies will cost Bradford County over \$150,000 by the end of this fiscal year. Furthermore, some Corrections Officers are working 60-80 hours a week on a regular basis and the County has also been engaged in using excessive amounts of part time worker hours. The added staff we have budgeted for will cost Bradford County \$200,000 and it will consist of a total of nine new positions, three sergeant and six officer posts. This will meet the state regulations for a facility of our size and population. By meeting this obligation Bradford County is decreasing its liability by following the regulations. Furthermore we are meeting our obligation to the taxpayers and the workers for running a safe and secure facility.

The most unfortunate display in the lack of state funding is realized in the field of Human Services, particularly in Children and Youth Services. We have struggled the last few weeks to meet the standards of service provided in the past and also hold the line on the County's direct financial support. The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare had issued cuts to county funding. At 3:00 P.M. Monday, December 1, yesterday, the day before this budget was due, Bradford County Human Services was notified by the Department of Public Welfare that our Children and Youth budget was cut by over \$316,000. Decisions had to be made and some services within the Children and Youth system will no longer be able to be funded by Bradford County as this county can no longer afford to fund if it is not receiving reimbursement from the state. Our county allocation to Children and Youth programs will be \$1,500,000. Although this figure is a \$200,000 increase over last year's budget there are now cuts in services in 2009.

We are also obligated to fund \$210,000 in Domestic Relations which is part of the state court system. This is a state required obligation in which we will have to pay 33% of all costs in that department.

These areas of county government and taxpayer funding are required by the state. They represent the largest share of increased costs to the local taxpayers. However, there are other important obligations at the county level that must be met.

There are several areas of staffing, investments in departments and training that we are allocating funds to and others in which we will be making cuts. These areas reflect the agenda we intend to pursue in the coming year.

Changes in staffing will include changing four County Maintenance workers from a thirty-five hour work week to a forty hour work week. There is never a lack of work for county maintenance workers and we have many structural and routine maintenance issues. These are overdue for being addressed, some for a very long time. An increase in hours for these positions will allow us to utilize their time more appropriately and make serious progress on projects for 2009. The increase in hours will cost \$15,750.00 for an additional 1,040 work hours.

This budget also provides for Commissioners' Office staff to be increased from a thirty-five hour to a forty hour work week. We are setting an ambitious agenda regarding many avenues of County business for 2009 and the added staff time is critical to moving projects and business along in a more aggressive and organized manner. Furthermore, the office work load has increased over the past year as some restructuring of positions and responsibilities have been added and modified in my first year in office. Changes in Commissioners' Office staff will cost \$14,000 for an additional 780 work hours.

These two areas represent the largest investments in employee reclassifications in the 2009 Budget. This budget also allocates money to other departments and elected officials for some requested staff reclassifications. I realize these represent a significant sum of money. However, this will be in the best interests of the county to invest in these positions as they will play a significant role in moving our county forward and carrying out an aggressive agenda in 2009.

The other considerable investment in staff will be carried out in the Department of Information Technology. We currently do not pay competitive salaries in the department and staff training has not been a priority in the past. This has resulted in the serious issue of staff retention especially in entry level positions. Therefore this budget provides for the first part of a three year plan to phase in competitive and up-to-date salaries in the department. This plan will allow current employees the opportunity to advance into those positions based on completion of the required trainings. The total cost for the investment in training in the 2009 Budget will be \$9,500 plus any paid time spent training. This cost will be offset by the decreased need for hiring outside consultants. We have decreased the consultant budget by \$5,000 in 2009. In today's world of constantly changing technology and the expectation of instant and up-to-date information and knowledge this is a department that is critical to the future operation of our county, therefore significant efforts must be made in this department to ensure we are meeting the needs of our time and the future as well.

Cuts in staffing and reallocation of responsibilities are taking place in various parts of the county government. At the Bradford County Manor 18 positions will be eliminated. The County Manor will be restructuring staffing and female inmates at the Bradford County Correctional Facility will be utilized to do most of the laundry services. The restructuring will save the Bradford County Manor an estimated \$200,000.

Also, we will be eliminating the position of Safety and Risk Management/HIPAA (*Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act*) coordinator. This position is actually a combination of two different positions. It was in place from the previous Boards of Commissioners and has been a struggle to define and manage as a dual position. Therefore Safety and Loss will be handled by Human Resources and HIPAA Coordination will be done in each respective county office building. Eliminating this position and reallocating the responsibilities will save Bradford County \$36,324.

As a result of leasing county owned property for natural gas drilling we have received nearly \$2.5 million. With the exception of capital projects that money will not be used to offset any revenues and expenditures within the 2009 budget or in future budgets. It is a onetime payment that cannot be used to artificially increase budgetary revenue for only a year or two. That would create a situation where at some point in the close future that money would be gone and taxpayers would have to make that difference up with a large tax increase. The money instead will be used to offset taxpayer's exposure to large capital projects.

In following with that policy we will use \$200,000 of the lease payment to allocate to the capital projects fund. This allows us the ability to decrease the exposure to the taxpayer's general fund by \$200,000 for 2008 and 2009. The yearly exposure was \$100,000 a year for capital projects fund.

In summary I have pointed out the major issues in the 2009 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 2009 Budget. The Bradford County budget for the fiscal year of 2009 is \$57,327,972 and includes a .5 mill tax increase.

This budget is the culmination of much thought, deliberation and tough decisions. Counties across the state continue to bare the burdens of state funding cuts which only serve to either cut services or to increase the burden to local property owners.

# The 2009 Agenda

After taking office almost one year ago I have had the opportunity to shape the previous Board of Commissioners' agenda and priorities to be more in line with what I would have liked to see accomplished this past year. In reflection upon the busiest and most challenging time in my life to date I can say that I am proud of the work we have been able to accomplish.

I am excited to lay out an agenda of how progress will be made in Bradford County government in 2009. I fully intend to see that the following gets accomplished and followed through on over the course of 2009. There are certainly ambitious goals and it will certainly require a great working relationship with all elected officials, department heads and county employees.

When I ran for this office I communicated to the people the things I thought were priorities. The following agenda is representative of those ambitions. I will strive to be sure that I am constantly working hard towards those goals and the agenda for 2009 is a large part of that.

## County Infrastructure

Many of our county buildings are in need of important and in some cases costly repairs. For decades there has been limited investment in our county infrastructure. It is now time to meet the challenge of getting our county infrastructure in shape. The 2009 Budget provides for several capital projects involving county infrastructure that are intended to be completed by the year's end. They are as follows;

**Courthouse Roof-** This area has been in need of repair for several years. It is the section of roof that Lady Justice rests on. The area is directly over the recently finished dome restoration project. The project is estimated to cost \$80,000.

**Courthouse Cornice Repair-** This area has been in need of repair for many years. It is the section of the courthouse rotunda beneath the dome. The plaster is in disrepair and is falling similar to the dome. The attempt was made to accomplish the project in conjunction with the dome this year. However we did not have enough budgeted funds to meet the cost. The estimated cost is \$150,000

**District Justice Office (Towanda) -** The office has long been in need of a new space to operate from. In 2008 this Board of Commissioners continued to look at options which included renting, buying or building. However no solution seemed to fit. We will need to resolve this issue in 2009. We are also exploring options which would include moving other Bradford County offices to alleviate space issues within the Bradford County Courthouse. The Budget amount for the office has been adjusted to reflect the pricing on buildings and materials that are more current. The estimated cost is \$425,000.

**Courthouse Generator-** The replacement of this piece of equipment is long overdue. The current generator is in the basement of the courthouse annex. It provides the back-up power for the courthouse and the annex. However the current generator is old and outdated. Although the generator provides power to the courthouse it is not currently hooked up to run the computer systems, nor is it large enough to do so. The replacement will be relocated outside the building. The estimated cost of the generator is \$40,000.

Beyond capital projects for 2009 there are other County infrastructure issues which we will address in the coming year.

**Energy Upgrades and Efficiency**-We are also going to be working towards energy efficiency in county buildings. With rising energy costs and deregulation coming soon we need to make our buildings energy efficient to ensure we are both responsible for the cost to the taxpayers and be environmentally responsible as well. We are currently in the process of working with the Pennsylvania Department of General Services in performing the necessary steps to hire a firm to perform the related energy upgrades to county buildings. This project has been talked about for some time and we have struggled throughout 2008 to get this project moving in a direction we are satisfied with. However, this year this project will be a top priority.

## **Bradford County Library**

At the beginning of my term of office the library was a burning political issue and the question of expansion still loomed. The Commissioners' Office hired library consultant Richard Bowra to evaluate our current status as a library system as a whole. His report was comprehensive and revealing. It identified issues with our system that needed to be addressed long before any expansion should be considered and we learned there were many service improvements that also could be accomplished. Following the report the Commissioners and the Bradford County Library Board agreed to meet on a bi-weekly basis to determine how to make progress at the Library.

We have made progress over the last few months on a number of issues regarding how to improve our service to member libraries. We have also identified building maintenance issues that will be addressed over the next few years, such as the water and sewer issues. In 2009 we will be working towards planning and accomplishing some of those improvements such as, handicap accessibility in the restrooms.

## **Bradford County Parks**

This year the Bradford County Commissioners created the Bradford County Parks Advisory Committee, created a full time parks director position and hired a consultant to create a master plan for all three county parks. The planning part of a grant process that will require the county to match \$40,000. That money will draw down from the existing parks logging revenue. In 2009 the process of planning the county parks will begin. Routine maintenance at county parks will continue but on site improvements will be limited for the reason that we will reserve any reserved capital expenditures in the parks for the implementation of the master plan.

## **Information Technology**

This year the staff in information technology worked on converting the accounting system, worked on installing new servers and replaced all Windows 98 computers throughout the county with Windows XP systems. In the coming year we will make significant improvements in staff training, retention and pay through a three year plan as discussed in the budget section. We will also be remodeling the office space which is in disrepair. Projects this year will include another software conversion in the Bradford County Assessment Office.

## **Assessment**

Bradford County assessment will be implementing a new software package throughout 2009. The cost of the conversion and the software will be \$175,000 and this was budgeted as a capital expenditure. The software will replace the antiquated system that the county has been working on phasing out across the county. The new program will allow for many internal improvements in keeping track of assessments on an up-to-date mainstream system. This will also allow for online access for the public of records that citizens would normally have to travel to the courthouse to receive. This is another project that has been overdue and we will be working on achieving this project through 2009.

## **Open Government**

Throughout 2008 significant progress has been made in achieving a more open government in Bradford County. The Bradford County E-mail newsletter was launched in April and has accumulated 897 subscriptions over the course of its first 9 months of its existence. The newsletter has provided residents with information about what is going on inside Bradford County as well as how Bradford County government works.

Also work has progressed on the update and redesign of the Bradford County website. The site construction was started in May of 2008 and has been a process of gathering information, developing creative ways to present information and offer online services to residents. The site is expected to launch in January of 2009.

I have also started an online blog in which I share information about the happenings inside the Commissioners' Office. The website has been much more of a success than I anticipated and the practice will be continued through 2009.

In 2008 the Commissioners decided to meet on a weekly basis to improve the flow of work through the office and to allow more opportunity throughout the year for people to take advantage of being a part of the Commissioners' meetings.

## **Appointed Boards, Committees and Commissions**

There are numerous boards and committees that are appointed by the Commissioners in Bradford County. In 2008 Bradford County Commissioners created two committees the Bradford County Parks Advisory Committee and the Natural Gas Advisory Committee. Both Committees have been effective at addressing their respective areas. The work from both of those committees will continue to be vigorous in 2009.

The Bradford County Tourism Committee has seen some changes in 2008. By laws have been created for the committee and official appointments by the Commissioners were accomplished for the first time. Also the Committee has received two grants and will be working on updating and redesigning the Bradford County Tourism Website.

In regards to all boards, committees and commissions appointed by the Bradford County Commissioners I have seen the difficulty in recruiting individuals to serve on various boards. We currently have no mechanism in place for individuals across the county to know what positions are open and what is required to serve. It has generally in the past fallen on people who are involved in government or people that are known by the Commissioners. This limits the pool of people to draw from for service on the boards, committees and commissions. Therefore in 2009

an application process will be instituted which will be available on the Bradford County website. In conjunction with the application on the website a list of descriptions of each board, of the board positions, the entity they represent, current appointees, terms of appointment and any open vacancies will be displayed. This will allow people across the county access to information regarding the boards and allow them to apply to the Commissioners' Office for service on those boards, committees and commissions.

## **Bradford County Correctional Facility**

At the beginning of 2008 Bradford County experienced many challenges at the Correctional Facility. The first issue to be resolved was that inmates were sleeping on the floor. The issue was addressed in the first few weeks of 2008. We also had the unfortunate suicide followed in later weeks by the resignation of the warden. Following this situation the Bradford County Prison board appointed Sheriff Steve Evans as interim warden, a post in which he made great improvements with the facility and the employees.

Following much deliberation on how to proceed, it was decided to contract with the Department of Corrections for a state warden. This allowed Bradford County time to look for a full-time replacement warden. More importantly we gained the expertise of the state corrections system. Many experts were brought in from the state system to evaluate the facility in terms of maintenance, security, officer training and other important areas. Bradford County hired a new warden in July of 2008. Many improvements due to the recommendations have been carried out in 2008 such as radio replacement, facility cleanliness, improved union relations and upgrades to the security systems. In conjunction with the prison board and the Bradford County Commissioners the warden will be working into 2009 implementing the recommendations of the Department of Corrections.

One of those recommendations was to follow the current regulations in meeting staffing requirements as discussed previously in the statement on the budget.

In 2008 much progress has been made regarding utilizing inmate labor. In 2009 we will continue this practice. We are expecting to have the county print shop moved to the jail and operational in January of 2009. Female inmates will be utilized in 2009 to do the laundry for the Bradford County Manor. Throughout 2009 inmates will continue to be used in all relevant and possible areas as a county workforce.

## **Human Services**

As discussed previously in the budget statement Human Services will continue to be the largest financial challenge in 2009. Many of the programs are mandated and the county has little control over their funding. However there are certain areas that need to be evaluated and addressed.

The Bradford County Daycare owned by the county will be evaluated and areas will be looked for to decrease the programs exposure to the general fund of Bradford County. This year the cost of the program will be \$159,865. The daycare system is an important part of Human Services in Bradford County. However, we also need to make significant efforts and tough decisions to make the program much more solvent to the taxpayers of Bradford County. This will include assessing the South Towanda Annex building the county owns in which the county operates a day care operation.

The building also accommodates the S.T.A.R. (Student Transition and Recovery) program. Yearly costs for that building will reach \$32,000 in 2008 and it is in need of many repairs including a roof that is estimated to cost \$100,000 to replace.

The S.T.A.R. program and its cost to the taxpayer will also have to be addressed. Currently the county pays for the program, although well over half of the referrals come from local school districts. Bradford County will actively pursue funding partnerships for the program through the school districts. Taking into account the cuts to Children and Youth from the Department of Public Welfare it may be unrealistic to keep the program in operation without additional help from outside the county taxpayers. It is a good program that does produce results and has demonstrated that it does keep a number of children out of costly Children and Youth placements. It may come to a point of whether or not Bradford County can afford it.

## **Bradford County Manor**

The financial challenges of the Manor are ever increasing. The outsourcing of laundry and the elimination of 18 positions will provide some relief to the situation. Throughout 2009 the Commissioners and Complete Healthcare Resources, the management company for the Manor, will be working on ways to more efficiently operate the facility to produce a more positive fiscal result. The cash flow loss for operations at the Bradford County Manor has been "\$146,000 and \$180,000 for the years 2006 and 2007, and the cash loss for 2008 is projected at \$299,000." This is not sustainable in the long term. As stated in the press release regarding the reorganization "market conditions have impacted the population at the nursing facility which has seen a drop in residents over the past three years. In addition, current financial concerns at the state and federal levels have limited reimbursement to nursing facilities across Pennsylvania. Decreased recuperation time following surgery has impacted the length of stay for therapy residents and even though the number of admissions to the facility..." It will be a priority over the course the year to seek other ways to improve operations at the facility.

## **Conclusion**

It is my intention that you, the taxpayer, can draw from this document an understanding of the budget and how it relates to the progress that 2009 will bring in relation to some of the major issues we will face in this coming year. We have encountered a number of budgetary challenges and made some extremely difficult decisions on staffing changes. We have met the challenge of the state budget cuts to the best of our ability. The agenda for 2009 is aggressive and appropriate. I submit this report and agenda to you, the taxpayers, for your review and understanding.

Respectfully,  
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