

County begins budget work with hearings

Water, sewer rate hikes are projected for next year

By Megan Broome
Staff Writer

CLAYTON— The Rabun County Board of Commissioners has begun meeting with different departments in budget workshops to discuss budget proposals for Fiscal Year 2020.

The final budget is scheduled for approval by commissioners on June 25, 2019 at 5 p.m.

The first meeting was held on Tuesday, April 9 and meetings with departments are scheduled through Monday, April 22.

The budget meeting last Thursday was the second in the series of sessions, and commissioners went over budget proposals for county departments.

The Rabun County Water and Sewer Authority estimated a budget of \$337,00. This went down from \$375,00 the prior year.

"We're looking at adjusting our rates,"

said Brendan Thompson, general manager for the Rabun County Water and Sewer Authority, to commissioners.

He said there will be a water increase of 6 percent and sewer increase of 8 percent.

"[We're] trying to stay reasonable," Thompson said.

The Tax Assessor's office has requested an increase in board member compensation of \$1,400. It was noted that this rate would be closer to other counties. They also requested \$700 for contract labor because they have an employee of many years who is retiring.

The Rabun County Golf Club's expenditures were shown to be in line with prior years. They requested a trim mower and are in the process of getting a new clubhouse. Fred Derrick, director of golf, represented the golf club at the workshop.

Please see **COUNTY**, A11

COUNTY

> CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

Mike Carnes, EMS/911 director, said his department is asking for one new employee because the number of calls is increasing every year. He said that Emergency Medical Services (EMS) drives to Gainesville on average four times a day.

He also said they are requesting one new truck and remount at an estimated \$325,830 and a new cardiac monitor at \$30,815.

It was also noted that overtime wages might come down after a new employee is hired.

Carnes also represented E 911 in the budget meeting. It was stated that projected revenues for the department are \$370,000 and salaries are up

about \$21,000.

They are asking for \$16,950 for small equipment, an increase from the \$800 budgeted last year.

The goal is to improve communication on Lake Burton and throughout the county during bad weather. There was also discussion to increase entry level pay to \$12.75.

The Senior Center reported that the number of part-time employees is up and discussed the new flooring installed. They requested funding for upkeep of this new flooring.

Emergency Management (EMA) requested safer equipment such as a washer and dryer system that can be used to clean clothes firefighters wear to a scene. They also discussed purchasing a dual camera drone.

Small equipment at \$4,000 was also part of the proposed budget to

use for rescue equipment because it has an expiration date and needs to be replaced.

"Thank you for everything you do for emergency management and rescue," a commissioner said.

The Rabun County Health Department requested additional funding to help support a low-income adult dental program at the facility.

"We're that first line of defense when it comes to health," said a representative from the Health Department.

Budget meetings continued on Tuesday and Stephen Arbitter, county commissioner, sent a statement to *The Clayton Tribune* highlighting what happened at the meeting.

The Library Board reported that they have seen an increased demand for electronic books and audio recordings that are

generally 75 percent more expensive than traditional books.

They also proposed replacing the book drop because the current one is in disrepair after being hit by cars. To offset the increase in the budget, the library board has used part time help and volunteers to help with used book sales, copier and fax services and late fines.

The Road Department requested capital outlay for a mini excavator because the current 17-year-old machine is no longer functional.

They reported a turnover in staff due to economic pressure from private industry and began working on spring paving projects around the county as well as keeping up with routine mowing.

Projects around Lake Burton specifically are a high priority.

The Fire Department

requested three new full-time employees to cover one full additional shift.

There has been increased pressure to add more part-time employees to help cover times when full-time employees are off.

The need for more full-time employees has increased as there is a decreasing number of available volunteers and increasing workload.

The proposal also requested a new tanker for south Rabun and will start to look for a ladder truck.

The Solid Waste/Recycling department said there is a need for a compactor and the Recycling Center needs to replace equipment boxes.

FAITH, Fight Abuse in the Home, had no changes in their budget and said funds are primarily used for trauma therapy for

children. They noted that services provided are valuable to Rabun County.

The Recreation Department requested a new athletic director to work with new programs like state baseball tournaments, pickleball and tennis programs. They stated that this will bring revenue and economic impact to Rabun County.

The Clerk of Court's office included the need for computer upgrades in their budget proposal. They mentioned that storage has become less of a problem with an e-file system.

A special called meeting to approve the preliminary budget is scheduled for Wednesday, May 22 at 8:15 a.m. A public hearing will be held on June 13 at 5 p.m. before the final budget is adopted on June 25.