Official Proceedings of the Stutsman County Final Budget Hearing – October 3, 2023

At 4:30 p.m., the Stutsman County budget hearing was called to order by Chairman Mark Klose. Jerry Bergquist, Chad Wolsky, Joan Morris, Levi Taylor, and Mark Klose answered the roll call.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Jessica Alonge, Auditor/COO, presented budget challenges that were faced this year, such as employee and fringe benefit costs, increases in service contracts for county-wide IT related upgrades, sustaining capital improvement plan with increased cost and supply/demand issues, and balancing county-wide budget due to increased costs while attempting to maintain Capital Improvement plans.

Revenues increased by $66,738. Expenditures increased by $2,595,188. Significant expenditure increases include $1,348,515 in salaries which includes the Human Service Zone salary increases set by the state, $248,653 in health and dental insurance premiums, $713,350 in capital asset purchases, and $65,100 in election costs. Significant expenditure decreases include $127,060 general fund decrease due to Human Service Zone indirect costs allocated in direct cost formula. The total proposed mill levy is 78.89 and the total 2023 taxable value is $144,874,107. The total mill levy increased by 4.08 mills from 2022. This would result in a $27.54 increase for a $150,000 residential property and a $30.60 increase for a commercial or agricultural property.

Alonge presented an estimated 2023 property tax comparison for a residence located in the City of Jamestown from August 31, 2023 and October 3, 2023. The County decreased from 5.09% to 2.77%, the City of Jamestown remained at 4.07%, Jamestown Park remained at 1.34%, Jamestown School increased from 0.72% to 3.52%, and Soil Conservation, Garrison Diversion, and State Medical Center remained at 0.02%, making the overall increase from 11.29% to 11.77%. Alonge stated that the school district is the only taxing jurisdiction that has the authority to increase or decrease their budget within the preliminary to final budget hearing.

Morris asked Alonge for clarification on the changes made in the last week regarding the 6.69 to 4.08 mill decrease. Alonge stated that some of the revenues for 2023 that hadn't previously been budgeted for had a budget of 0, which have now been included. Commissioner Taylor had also identified a few line items that he had questions on and after being reviewed in detail and meeting with department heads many of those line items had been decreased, and election costs were reduced by approximately $20,000, district court fund was reduced by $30,000, health insurance in the general fund was reduced by $44,000, and in the non-departmental fund there was a temporary employee line item that was reduced, and service contracts in the non-departmental fund were reduced by $19,000. The general fund is using about 1 mill or $144,874 of reserve, which would bring general fund reserves to 73.6%. Morris also inquired whether the $322,000 in salary savings were still in place. Alonge stated that they had been included in the budget for the 2023 budget with $151,000 in the general fund, $24,000 in the road and bridge fund, and $15,000 in the weed department, and $47,000 in extension.

Morris clarified that when including salary and fringe benefits with the reserve spending, an estimated $550,000 will be spent in reserve funds to help with the increase in taxes. Alonge stated that it is

anticipated expenditure savings for 2023. There were large transfers into capital funds last year from the general fund due to savings. The current balance for the general fund is $10,015,000.

Klose opened the meeting for public input at 4:54 p.m.

Matt Davis, Stutsman County resident, is upset about tax increases and asked that the county hold the budget flat until the budget crisis has been resolved.

Aaron Roberts, Stutsman County resident, stated that it has taken years to create the inequity on salaries and wages and has 3 concerns with the proposed way of adjusting it. One is trying to adjust the problem with a single point adjustment, second is the ability of the taxpayer to be able to pay their taxes, and third was the unintended consequences of the final budget like the sheriff's salary being blamed for the increase. Roberts believes that fixing it withing multiple years instead of on a single point adjustment in one year.

Megan Rolowski, Stutsman County resident, vocalized her concerns with the sheriff's salary increase when she believes that taxpayers within the community are unable to pay bills or get second jobs. Rolowski presented comparisons she found for sheriff departments in other counties with similar populations to Stutsman County's. Rolowski brought up the turnover rate due to involuntary terminations and retirements. Rolowski stated that the people in the community can't absorb any more of the impact of an increased budget.

James Wheaton, Jamestown City resident, vocalized his concerns with the percentage of the increase and agreed with Davis that the county should keep the budget steady with what it has been. Wheaton expressed that he does not feel like the voice of the people in the community is being heard.

Henry Stienberger, Park Board member and Stutsman County resident, inquired about a rebate that decreased taxes, Klose and Alonge clarified that it was a 12% appropriation in the legislature that ended in 2015. Morris stated that the state legislature did expand qualifications for the Homestead Credit and there is a program beginning in 2024 where individuals will be able to apply for a $500 credit on primary residences to help offset some of the tax increases.

Bergquist stated that the cost of overtime has been a large factor in the salary portion of the budget, with another related cost being the amount it takes to train an employee. The road department and communications are the two main departments who have the most overtime.

Ryan Davis, Stutsman County resident, vocalized his troubles with staffing due to not being able to pay drivers or give them insurance. Davis stated that it is not only the county that is hurting, but all the residents who occupy it.

Klose stated that he would feel more comfortable adopting the budget if the proposed grade changes were capped at a 2 grade increase but is unsure whether that would cause him to reject the entire budget. Klose stated there has been a lot of time and effort into reducing the final budget from the preliminary budget from 11.23 mill increase to 4.08 mill increase.

A motion to adopt the proposed 2024 Stutsman County Budget was made by Wolsky, seconded by Taylor. Roll call vote: Wolsky, Taylor, Klose, and Bergquist voted aye. Morris voted nay. Motion carried.

A motion to adopt the 2024-2028 Capital Improvement Plan was made by Bergquist, seconded by Taylor. Morris stated that she did not receive a list of specific projects, and due to this is unaware of specific purchases involved in the capital plan. Bergquist stated that prior to purchase, department heads still go to the board for approval for capital plan purchases. Taylor stated that when going through the plan by line items, he was able to get an understanding of the projects and expenses. Morris requested an itemized list going forward. Roll call vote: Taylor, Klose, Bergquist, and Wolsky voted aye. Morris voted no. Motion carried.

Alonge presented the 2024 Budgeted Transfers. A motion to approve the 2024 Budgeted Transfers was made by Morris, seconded by Wolsky. Roll call vote: Taylor, Klose, Bergquist, Wolsky, and Morris voted aye. Motion carried.

A motion to approve the certification of 2023 property tax levies was made by Bergquist, seconded by Taylor. Klose, Bergquist, Wolsky, Morris, and Taylor voted aye. Motion carried.

A motion for the Auditor/COO to certify the Central Valley Health District levy with Logan County auditor was made by Morris, seconded by Berquist. Roll Call vote: Bergquist, Wolsky, Morris, Taylor, and Klose voted aye. Motion carried.

At 5:52 p.m. the Final Budget Hearing was adjourned.

ATTEST:

Jessica Alonge Auditor/COO	Mark T. Klose Commission Chairman