

What do we know about the PBSO Budget?

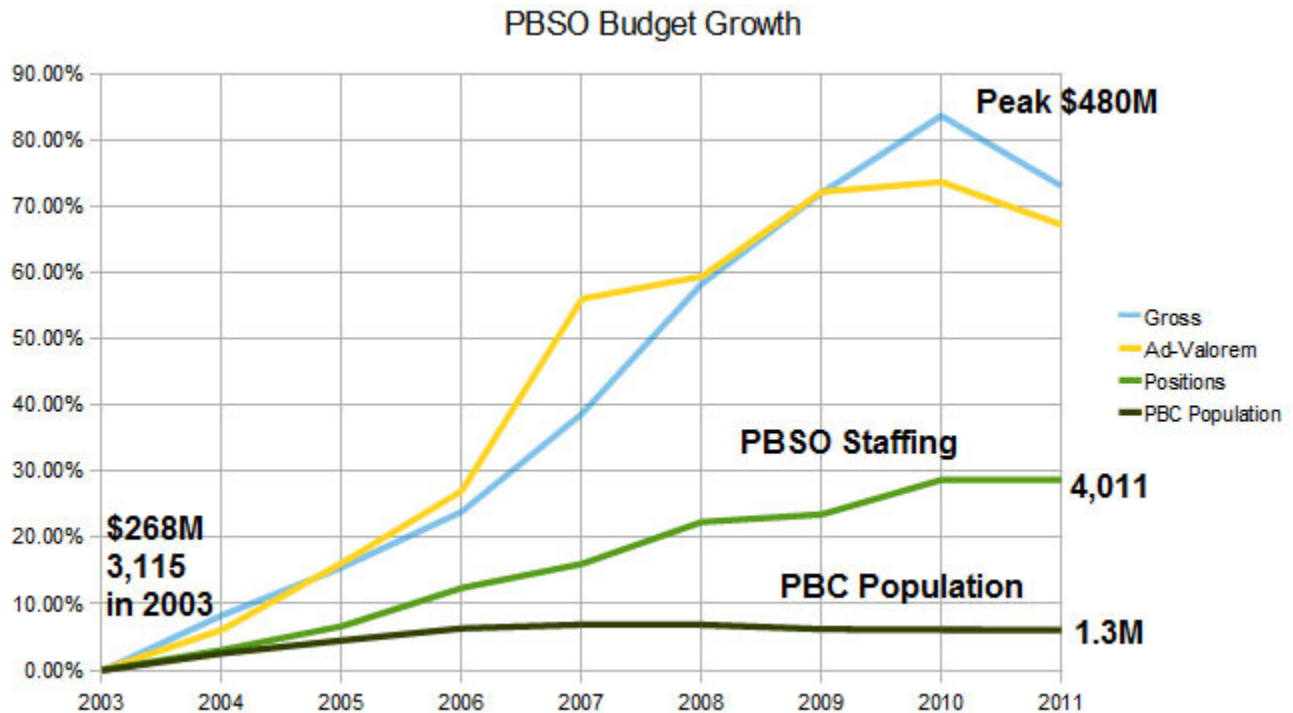
Not very much, actually. Each budget year a line item appears in the county budget that shows a summary for each of the constitutional officers. The line item provides Gross (Total appropriation), Ad Valorem Equivalent (Gross less line item revenue), and Positions, for the current budget year and the last. There is also a one or two line explanation for an unexpected change.

The current budget has this line item for PBSO:

	2010	2011	Change	%
Revenues	70,305,222	69,114,594	(1,190,628)	(1.7%)
Appropriations	480,062,486	463,565,606	(16,496,880)	(3.4%)
Net Ad Valorem	409,757,264	394,451,012	(15,306,252)	(3.7%)
Positions	4,021	4,021	(10)	(0.2%)

As indicated by the Sheriff's office, this \$15 million reduction results in the elimination of: Drug Farm \$3.3 million and twelve (12) positions, Eagle Academy \$4.5 million and thirty two (32) positions, and Parks Police \$7.2 million and fifty two (52) positions. FY2010 excludes \$8,461,142 carry forward.

So the budget is being cut by about 3.5% and staffing is unchanged. Is that a good thing or not? To find out, we need to put several things in context. If I go back to previous budgets and plot the "Net Ad Valorem" and staffing from 2003 up to the current year, and place the Palm Beach Population growth line on the same graph it looks like this:



Note that while population stayed relatively flat (we now have only 6% more people in the county than we did in 2003, and it's been declining since 2007), PBSO staffing went up about 29% and spending went up 67%.

To put that another way, in 2003 there was one PBSO employee for every 389 residents and PBSO charged an average of \$195 per person for their service, while in 2011 there is one for every 320 residents, and the bill was \$307 per resident (a 57% increase). Does that make us safer? We'll look at that question a little later.

2011 Proposed PBSO Budget Cuts

The Sheriff has proposed \$15M in cuts to the Ad Valorem Requirements for 2011. These cuts come primarily from ending 3 specific programs: the Eagle Academy, the Drug Farm (also known as STAR - Secure Treatment and Recovery), and the Parks Police. He is also being asked by the BCC to cut another \$3M to help achieve the 4.75 millage. Why these 3 programs?

The Eagle Academy and the Drug Farm have a "constituency" - ie. there is a very vocal group of supporters who believe in the programs and will fight to keep them funded. Already there is a website to "save the Eagle Academy" and there have been letters in the Palm Beach Post to save the Drug Farm. ([Click Here for an example.](#)) It is a well known technique during budget discussions to place programs on the chopping block, knowing that community support will provide the political cover to fund them. That is clearly to be expected for these programs in September.

So TAB issues a challenge to the County Commission and to the Sheriff: If you decide to restore funding for these programs, what cuts will you make instead so as to achieve a \$15M reduction to PBSO?

Why are we cynical about these programs? Let's take a look at what they are:

Eagle Academy

The Eagle Academy is a boarding school for children ages 13-16 who are "lacking self-discipline, motivation, or the desire to succeed" or have "poor grades, disregards house rules, make poor choices, or are starting to associate with the wrong crowd." It is a 24x7 environment run military style with "drill instructors" and provides instruction in "basic life skills and moral reasoning-right versus wrong" as well as a normal academic curriculum. Enrollment is voluntary, supported by the parents, and paid for entirely by the county. The budget is estimated to be \$4.5M/year with a staff of 32.

It should be mentioned that a brand new Eagle Academy facility was part of the West County Criminal Justice Complex



Expansion - a \$133M project.

The school has been operating there since the first of the year, and "if" the Eagle Academy program is ended, the building would revert to use for minimum security adult detention. As part of the jail expansion plan, the Drug Farm was to move into the old Eagle Academy facility.

At the current time, TAB has not seen any performance metrics for the Eagle Academy. We are curious as to how their budget has grown since inception, how many students have been served each year, and what measures of success have been tallied. This may be a great program that provides a valuable service to the community and is well worth the cost to the taxpayer. It may also be a boondoggle. We just don't know, but giving the Sheriff the benefit of the doubt, since it is being put on the chopping block, perhaps it is the latter. We will try to get some more information on the performance of the Eagle Academy.

To get a feel for the "constituency" which supports the Eagle Academy, [click HERE](#).

Drug Farm

The Drug Farm or "Secure Treatment and Recovery" program, is operated by PBSO and provides intensive drug treatment within a minimum security setting using a "boot camp" model. It is a multiple phase program that follows the

inmate from incarceration and into the parole setting after release. A 2009 Impact Analysis by the Criminal Justice Commission in response to last year's attempt at closing the facility presented the following facts:

- The SAAP program reports a 68% success rate.
- The SAAP program reports a 69% rate of no new charges or 31% recidivist rate, which is 20% better than the general county jail inmate population recidivism rate of 51%.
- The total number of participants in the SAAP program annually is approximately 4,600.
- The annual cost to the County for the SAAP program is \$2,643,148.52 (not including PBSO staffing).

Click [HERE](#) for the full report.

Like last year, the wagons are circling to save the funding for the Drug Farm. There is an [online petition](#), [letters to the Post](#) and other activities gearing up to do battle. Who can forget last year's parade of grateful Drug Farm alumni, coming to tell the commissioners their own personal story of redemption facilitated by their wonderful experience as inmates there. The Drug Farm is the PBSO equivalent of the county pools in terms of political theatre.

It should be noted that there are several other drug rehabilitation programs in the Department of Corrections. Is this one any more "worthy" than those? TAB will be looking into this question further.

Parks Police

From the PBSO website: ([Click HERE](#)) *"The function of the Palm Beach County Parks Enforcement Division is to provide law enforcement presence and security within the Palm Beach County parks system. Led by a PBSO Lieutenant, staffing includes 5 sergeants, 40 deputies, and an administrative secretary. The Parks Enforcement Division provides a high profile patrol of the parks during open hours and security of facilities after hours. The Parks Division adjusts coverage to deal with specific crowds and activities in the parks."*

This would seem to be a necessary function for public safety. With the extensive park system in the county there is a need for a law enforcement presence beyond what the rangers provide. It is not clear what the plan is to cover the gap left when this department is disbanded. Perhaps normal patrol operations is all that is needed. If so, one asks why the \$7.2M was being spent in the first place.

TAB will investigate this further.