



TAB Holds Public Meeting on County Budget

Last evening, September 2, in the county library on Lantana road, 60-70 interested citizens turned out to listen to a presentation by TAB on the county budget. ([CLICK HERE](#) to view the presentations).

Many people were surprised to see that even in these tough economic times, with 12.2% unemployment in the county and plunging real estate values, the county spending is projected to increase yet again, by \$56M in fact.

The county firefighters, already paid an extremely generous average compensation of \$140,000 / year – are going to get another raise – to an average of \$146,000, at a time when pay for other county employees has been frozen. Their level of pay has risen 50% since 2003, while inflation has only been about 20%. The feeling of outrage in the room was palpable as this was explained by Realtor and TAB member Christina Pearce.

Federal stimulus money (also know as ARRA – the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) has been flowing into the county at a prodigious rate – over \$100M this year, allowing the county to increase spending while ad-valorem taxes are (modestly) declining. One of the items on this spending list is \$50M for “Neighborhood Stabilization” grants – basically money to give or loan to people who are buying up foreclosed properties and fixing them up. Would the county be spending this without the federal funds? Hard to say, but if this spending level was done without the ARRA money, our taxes would have to rise by 31% according to calculations by SF 912 and TAB organizer Fred Scheibl.

The county has assumed too much debt for questionable reasons and much of the requested new borrowing for capital projects in the FY2011 budget should be deferred or canceled, explained Lower Taxes Now and TAB member Sherry Lee (who is also a candidate for county commission district 2). Sherry described almost \$100M in potential deferrals, including money being allocated for airport expansion, even though the whole project is tied up in a lawsuit, and the FAA has not approved the project.

The time has come for defining our “core services”, explained former PBG councilman Hal Valeche, also a member of SF Tea Party and TAB. Citing examples from around the country where progress has been made in trimming outdated or extraneous items from budgets, Hal called on the county commission to require a thorough categorization of all county spending to determine what is “core” and what is “discretionary”.

The whole structure of our county government should be subject to scrutiny, argued SF912 member and TAB member Iris Scheibl. She applauded the county commission for calling for a charter review next year and proposed that TAB be a part of that effort. The relationship between the commission and the constitutional officers, particularly the sheriff need to be examined, for example, to bring more transparency to the internal workings and spending priorities of the PBSO.

After a summary of the “TAB Proposal” to cut \$171M from the 2011 budget, moderator and SF 912 founder Shannon Armstrong took questions from the audience. Many pointed out areas that TAB has not so far examined and should (like the School Board), and others added valuable insights into areas like the Fire-Rescue “Kelly Day” concept.

Commissioner Jess Santamaria attended the meeting and spoke briefly at the end, suggesting that we are only addressing half of the problem – that there is still a lot of corruption surrounding the way the county spends its money and he gave some examples where the grass roots have been effective in stopping it, as well as other areas where they could.

It should be noted that all the commissioners were invited, along with the constitutional officers and the county Administrator. Commissioner Shelly Vana said she would attend but did not. Property Appraiser Gary Nikolits was in the audience, as was Budget Director Joe Doucette, and Communications Director Linda Culbertson from the Clerk and Comptroller organization, representing Sharon Bock.

TAB wishes to thank those who participated in the meeting and asks that everyone who is concerned with the excessive levels of spending in the county attend the budget hearings on 9/14 and 9/28, and to ask their commissioners to “Adopt the TAB Proposal”. [CLICK HERE](#) for the “Call to Action” containing contact information for the Commission.