

2010 CEO Budget Meeting

Cedar Grove High School

February 4, 2010

CEO's Comments – The CEO thanked the communities for coming out to the meeting. He stated that tonight is an opportunity to have an ongoing conversation with the citizens. He thanked judges for their attendance. Introduced Commissioner Connie Stokes and thanked Commissioner Kathie Gannon for coming out. CEO Ellis stated that we're facing an economic crisis that we all can feel. He stated that the County is not out of money as some papers have reported.

Commissioner Stokes Comments: Commissioner Stokes stated how important it is for citizens to be here in order for their ideas to be considered as the Board of Commissioners sit down to discuss the budget. She encouraged citizens to come to the podium to speak. She stated that the County will consider these ideas.

CEO: Slide presentation of DeKalb County 2010 Budget

Questions/Comments:

1. Ellenwood Community has asked for Parks and Recreation to expand in the County Line area. The Spokeswoman for County Line stated that County Line is a growth area with a lot of new homes and a lot of children. She also stated that they are getting a new library but are concerned that there's not enough sidewalk space for accommodations so they want the CEO to consider that when they look at spending in that area. She asked, for safety reasons that another road be cut to enter and exit the neighborhood park that exists there. Finally she requested the building that was put in place on flakes mill and river road to be staffed with a police officer due to crime in that area.

Response from the CEO:

This is the CEO's proposed budget. The actual budget will be documented by the Board of Commissioners and they will be the ones who determine what we do. My concern is this; because of the decline in revenue, we had to cut the budget that is already down from 636 million to 583 million down to 552 million. That's another 31 million in cuts. One of the things I'm organizing is a new revenue panel that will look at new revenues as we move into 2011. Particularly, an issue as to whether we should incorporate ourselves as a city four years ago,

anticipated that we would be eligible for 31 million dollars per year additional revenue with DeKalb County unincorporated. DeKalb were to incorporate as a city. As it stands now, we're about 31 million short and so we would have to do that much more in cuts if we don't raise our millage rate. You mentioned having a building, but not being staffed, but without a millage raise imagine what would happen if we have to cut 150 police officers. And if they don't understand what's important to you then it will not happen.

2. Regarding the budget, the Fire and Rescue has 1.25 Mill increase in fees. There was an article in the AJC where Fire and Rescue will adopt a fee of \$250 for a person to be extracted from their car. It also indicated that it would generate \$750,000. The citizen assumed it was per year. She stated that this really maps out to 3,000 accidents per year that would require people to be extracted from their vehicles. She wanted to know how they came to that conclusion in charging, particularly homeowners a fee for something like that if they are in an accident, if they've already paid their taxes for it.

Response from the CEO:

The paper is often very inaccurate. You can't rely on the newspaper as an active source of information. If you would have balanced this budget without a millage increase, we would have lost our officers, parks closed, fire dept, etc. Now we did increase our fees and that does include that extraction for people in accidents. Our Fire Department compared what other jurisdictions were doing and then it was taken to the Board of Commissioners and they voted on it. The 1.25 mill increase is not just for Fire and Rescue. It's so that we can restore and retain 151 police positions, 86 fire and rescue positions, 143 sheriff positions, and 30 DA positions. Without that increase, those are the reductions you would see. The extraction fees do not sit alone. Those fees are one part of a whole that is calculated in that Fire and Rescue group.

3. Question regarding Property tax assessments. Is there a time limit as to when you can reassess your new home once it's purchased and why? If the taxes are too high, they should be lowered at any point.

Response from the Chief Financial Officer:

When a property owner fills out their appraisal and it was set too high, then they have between Jan 1st-March 31st to file a return. That's the law. You have that time period to return and then you go through the appeals process.

Response from CEO:

That's an annual opportunity for you to reassess your home.

4. Are we collecting fees for monitoring systems' false alarms? Have we reviewed that line item to see if it's time to increase those fees? Is there a way to view that line item because it will let us know how accurate they are? The community policemen have been instrumental in cleaning up

crime in the neighborhoods throughout DeKalb County so it is hoped that it's an area that remains intact.

Response from the CEO:

The false alarm billing process review papers are in front of the Board. The full budget is online. This is just a summary of the budget. And if we have to balance this budget without a millage increase, you're going to see a reduction in officers. There's no way we can have the same number of employees in any public safety area without a millage increase. Also this is why we're putting the information online; we want people to understand what we are trying to do.

Response from Judge Perdum: Public Safety has felt an effect from the proposed budget. The CEO has attempted to reduce the impact but the public says they want anything but a millage rate. If there's no millage rate, it'll be like making an arrest but not following through which would be worse than not even making an arrest in the first place. What I've been hearing is that the Commissioners say the public doesn't want a millage rate increase and ultimately you'll get what you want if you let your voices be heard.

5. Citizen proposes changing procedures and policies of code enforcement where the County fines the person that posts illegal signs. Also, officers should proactively remove such signs. Take advantage of making people pay to post these signs. I think Fayette County has a system where people actually pay to post signs for yard sales and things of that nature. This will bring in revenue from citizens who insist on advertising with signs. Could we be deputized by code enforcement with something on our backs so when we are approached by folks that are posting signs, we can inform them and let them know what the county expects? (Cheryl Burnett)

Response from the CEO:

Thank you for sharing those great ideas. Please know that one of the things that the Public Safety Director and I have been talking about is working on a voluntary neighborhood code enforcement team. We had it in the past. We'll look into it again. I believe that's a great idea.

6. During the CEO's presentation, he mentioned that when revenue is cut in our individual homes we do a cost analysis to figure where we're spending unnecessarily. Has the County conducted a cost analysis and if so, where can we view this? AJC stated that employees will have 8 unpaid holidays. Is this true? The County's budget crisis has become employees' nightmare. At what point will average employees(not the six figure employees, but the employees that are struggling to make ends meet) have a say in what they're willing to cooperate with?

Response from finance:

When you say cost analysis, the structure of the budget is really based on activity wages and performance wages. So when we have to adjust the level of revenue, we have to look at increases and decreases, cases filed, citations, etc. So it's not a one time cost analysis.

Response from the CEO:

The CEO supports downsizing in the workplace so we won't have to adopt 8 unpaid holidays. That is a reduction in pay, instead of making X amount of dollars you'll be making something less. I think that is the wrong message to send. To tell someone "Now you have to do your same job with less resources and with less support." It goes against morale when you tell employees you're working with less coworkers, bigger workload, and unpaid holidays. You cannot run a government that way. That's not the government I want to run. I think that is one of the things that they want to consider. You have to let us know how you feel because the board will allow it to happen unless you come forward and voice your opinion.

Response from Commissioner Gannon:

That proposal was made at the last meeting. Like the CEO said, everything is on the table. The budget contains a lot of budget cuts. There's a strong feeling though of less layoffs rather than more. The budget does contain a lot of position cuts. And some employees have said they'd rather have a job than a paid holiday. So that's one of the things we're considering. No paid holidays as a way of restoring some of the money so that the positions that are being cut wouldn't all have to be cut. And it's out there early because it would be the 7th holiday starting in March. You need four votes for anything and right now there are not four votes for a millage increase. So email us your ideas and concerns about the millage increase and the unpaid holiday.

7. (Judge Mobley) Constitution states that once a person is arrested they have 72 hours to go to court. If those Constitutional laws are not met due to budget cuts on Magistrate Court, those persons in particular could face release from jail. What impact would that have on the concept of increasing the safety of victims?

Response from the CEO:

One thing I've been saying is that I need you to express something that you have not already said. What you're saying is we can't cut the millage rate. Without a millage rate increase we will have people committing more crimes or sitting in jails longer costing us more money. Or people will be released because they didn't go to court within that 72 hour timeframe. So what the judge is saying without a millage rate increase, things are going to be even worse than what I described.

Response from Judge: Increasing the millage rate would be about \$6 more per month and you rent movies for more than that. You must decide your priorities and speak up to the Commissioners and the CEO.

8. The CEO is asking employees about Early Retirement and eliminating positions. But at the same time The Expected Generals would bring in four new positions. Is that something the County needs this year in this economy?

Response from the CEO:

We're not adding four new positions; we're transitioning positions from other departments to create the Expected Generals. We used to meet with outside auditors and they would say you need to have an Expected General. When I talked with some of my colleagues (mayors, county executives of other large cities and counties, etc.), I was surprised to learn how many well run governments have an independent arm built within that government to investigate claims, waste and fraud abuse. The Elected General will be that individual arm to handle those allegations. This REAL tool will promote fiscal accountability and ensure everybody outside and in that somebody's watching. Some things we need to continue to operate this government. And I think this is the right time to do this.

9. Is it a part of public safety to teach kids about laws so they won't break them? Did DeKalb County receive any stimulus money from President Obama and where is that in the budget?

Response from the CEO:

DeKalb County got 85 million of stimulus grants and 90 million in borrowing totaling 175 million of funding from the Obama Administration. Now we did much better than governments two and three times our size. That's also a direct result that we have a executive who overseas county government. For the large urban counties throughout the United States, this is the most progressive form of government. And as far as the youth, we do provide programs for our young children to give them activities and things to do to stay out of trouble.