

The Board of County Commissioners, in and for the County of Otero, State of New Mexico, met in a Special Meeting at the Otero County Courthouse in Alamogordo, County and State aforesaid. Meeting called to order by the Chairman at 3:00 p.m., October 30, 2001; and he announced that reasonable notice for this meeting was given to the Alamogordo Daily News, Holloman Sunburst, El Paso Times, Mountain Monthly, and to Radio Stations, KPSA, KINN and KYEE.

County Representatives Present:

Richard Zierlein	Chairman
Tim McGinn	Vice-Chairman
Michael Nivison	Member
Ruth Hooser	County Manager
LaDonna Adams	Administrative Secretary
Robyn Silva	Deputy County Clerk

City Representatives Present

Donald Carroll	Mayor
John Van Doren	Mayor Pro Tem
Ron Griggs	Member
Donald Cooper	Member
Stephen Easley	Member
Ed Cole	Member
Pat McCourt	City Manager
Teresa Gutierrez	Deputy City Clerk

The County Chairman called the meeting to order and gave the invocation. Mayor Donald Carroll led those assembled in the pledge of allegiance and Commissioner McGinn led those assembled in the salute to the flag of the State of New Mexico.

1. Commissioner Zierlein stated that this Joint County/City Meeting was scheduled by the City to discuss the PILT funding for the various programs provided to County residents by the City.

Commissioner Zierlein stated that the County's fiscal position has not changed even since we have received the additional funding from PILT. He stated that because of the incident on September 11, 2001 we have been informed that our insurance may go up an additional \$500,000. He further stated that the County has cut their budget in all departments and social programs and that even with the additional \$300,000 to \$400,000 from PILT, there won't be any extra. Commissioner Zierlein did state that the Commission would be willing to look again at the budget at mid-year.

Commissioner Zierlein asked the City what they are requesting from the County. Mayor Carroll stated that there are services that the City provides exclusively to county residents but are not compensated for. Several years ago the County stated that they would continue to provide and increase the funding for these services and yet there has been a dramatic cut. The two largest concerns are the "Meals on Wheels" and the "Library". The Library is the largest amount that causes us the most concern.

Commissioner Easley questioned the possibility of the County raising property taxes. Commissioner Zierlein stated that Otero County is at the maximum tax percent and that we have been for several years. He further stated that the County is in the process of preparing to have an election to implement a 1/8 percent gross receipt tax. Commissioner Zierlein stated that

if the bond passed then we would see between \$300,000 and \$400,000 benefit to Otero County. We would be required to spend one half of that amount on medical or indigent for the County.

Mr. Pat McCourt stated that he has concerns on the programs such as “Meals on Wheels” that serve the lower income people. He stated that some of the people that we deliver meals to out in the County rely on that meal because it is their only one of the day. If we didn’t have all of the volunteers delivering we couldn’t do it.

Commissioner Zierlein stated that all of the volunteers are critical to all of our social programs. Without them none of our programs would be as successful as they are. He stated that he thinks there is a perception that they tend to get earmarked and cut first. Commissioner Zierlein stated that they are not the first one cut and it is really tough to cut these programs that help so many people out and are such a benefit to the community.

Commissioner Nivison stated that the County has open budget hearings and anyone is welcome. If you will look at our current budget you will see that we did not fund any capital outlay to any department and we cut 7 positions. The County made a commitment for the first of the year to go back and revisit the budget to see if there is any extra money. The biggest part of the County’s budget is spent on law enforcement and the last thing I want to do is take officers off of the street or make them incapable of doing their jobs or provide their everyday duties. We would like to reinstate all of the social programs and the capital outlay for the offices to be able to do their jobs. But we can not end up at the end of the year giving out pink slips.

Commissioner Easley stated that the City understands the County’s problems because they work with the same conditions and they are not here to personally criticize the County. There are some programs that we will have to cut because we can’t fund them.

Commissioner Zierlein stated that he feels that maybe we should charge for some of

the services that we now give for free. He stated that this is the first town he has lived in that hasn't charged a fee on library cards. He said that in the past he has paid \$10.00 for that service and maybe we should think about implementing a fee for our library cards. If there are people who cannot afford to pay the fee then we could have them sign a waiver.

Commissioner Cooper stated that the economy around the country is in a down spin. Projection is that the insurance is going to go up. We do have a lot of problems in the County and in the City but we still have to provide the services to the people of Alamogordo and to Otero County.

Commissioner Zierlein stated that with the new private prison going in down in the south part of Otero County will give us some additional revenues flowing in but that won't be for another year and a half.

Mayor Carroll questioned whether the one eighth percent tax, if passed, will be on County, or City and County residents. Commissioner Zierlein stated that he would have to check on that.

Mayor Carroll stated that he thinks there is something that the county can impose that they currently are not and that would be an infrastructure gross receipt tax. He further stated that he knows that the county has always been reluctant about raising taxes but stated that is the price that the citizens have to live with if they want the services. Commissioner Zierlein stated that they would be glad to impose additional taxes if they can.

Commissioner Zierlein stated that the majority of our budget is spent because of action at the state level. They continue to mandate more and more requirements without any additional funding. Detention is the largest area and the most expensive is for juveniles. Another area is the funding to maintain county roads which had been dramatically reduced. They are taking

that money away from the counties to give to the state.

Commissioner Zierlein stated that he as a county commissioner is willing to do whatever he needs to do. There are only three options that we have and they are to increase our revenues, decrease our expenditures, or a combination of the two.

Commissioner Cooper stated that we are in a financial crunch and we are all in the same boat together. We need to row together to get out of this. There are a lot of the residents that are on fixed incomes and if we take away their services we will drive them away.

Commissioner Easley questioned when the County is considering having the one-eighth percent election. Commissioner Zierlein stated that possibly in July. Commissioner Easley suggested that the County campaign hard or it will never pass.

Commissioner Nivison stated that what we have to do is dedicate ourselves to working together and find a solution.

The Mayor stated that the County Commission had asked at the beginning of the meeting what the City's priorities were. Now the City is asking what the County's Priorities are.

The County's priority is to work with the City. The County's position is not that we want to cut the City but to do the best we can to get where we need to be.

Commissioner Easley stated that the biggest disparity is the library fund. Two thirds of the users of the library are City residents and one third are county residents. The library's budget is about \$800,000 per year of which the County should be responsible for about \$260,000 of the funding. This year the county signed a contract to pay \$40,000 toward the funding of the library.

Commissioner Griggs stated that the city has several areas that they support out of the General Fund. There are lots that are the quality of life things and we will look at these hard to

see what we can continue to support. We are using a fee structure at the golf course that possibly we can adopt for other services. The City residents pay less than someone out in the County or out of town. Commissioner Griggs stated that it does appear that there is a little bit of inequity on the part of the County. He stated that there may be other things that the county supports within the city, in fact he knows there is. Commissioner Griggs stated that he and the other City Commissioners would appreciate the County looking at their budget again at mid year to see if there are any additional funds that they can provide to the City.

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Mayor Pro Tem John Van Doren stated that we are brothers in our struggle for life. If my brother provides a service for me then I will pay him. If I can't pay him then he won't provide the service. The bottom line is if you can't support the program then we can not provide the program.

The Mayor thanked the County Commission for letting them express their concerns. Hopefully the economic conditions will get better in the future so that the County can provide the funding so that the City can continue to provide the services.

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Commissioner Zierlein thanked the City Commissioners for coming over and again stated that they will re-visit the budget in about 8 weeks.

The time being 4:10 PM the Chairman adjourned the meeting.

CHAIRMAN

ATTEST:

OTERO COUNTY CLERK