County adopts 2019-20 budget
Commissioners approve revenue neutral tax rate

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ASHEBORO — The 2019-20 Randolph County budget will maintain a revenue-neutral property tax rate and make Animal Control an independent department.

The Board of Commissioners adopted the $130.9 million budget Monday evening, including a property tax rate of 63.27 cents per $100 of property valuation. The new rate is about 2 cents less than the current rate and reflects increases in property values based on the recent revaluation by the Tax Department.

For most property owners, the tax will remain about the same while some will see increases and others will have decreases in their property tax. In a statement to begin the budget discussion, chair of the board Darrell Frye reminded the audience that the past few meetings have seemed to “center on Animal Control.” Animal rights activists have petitioned the commissioners to move Animal Control from Public Health to the Sheriff’s Office.

Instead, the commissioners elected to go to a third option — an independent department with the director reporting to the county manager. Frye said that when Animal Control was under the Sheriff’s Office years ago, the sheriff at the time said he couldn’t handle it. For that reason, Frye said, Public Health was given the responsibility. During the past year, critics have claimed Public Health was not up to the job and that Animal Control should be under the umbrella of the Sheriff’s Office.

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The sheriff has his hands full,” Frye said, noting that there are more than 300 inmates in a Detention Center with 211 beds. He also mentioned at least three shootings from the past weekend that have kept law enforcement officers busy.

“The adoption of this budget sets up a new department for Animal Control,” Frye said. He added that he would like to have an oversight board that includes representatives from the Sheriff’s Office, animal rights groups and others working together to build the new department.

“Some may think this board (of commissioners) lacks sensitivity,” Frye said. “We do not.” He added that he has a daughter who has adopted a number of pets from the Animal Shelter. On the contrary, he said, “there are a lot more things that go on in the county.” He listed issues such as high increases in the number of foster children and rising cases of child abuse, Meals on Wheels clients whose only meal of the day is the one delivered to their homes.

“These are things we live with and we’re trying to deal with in this budget,” he said. “We have more first-time money for Animal Control than for public schools. It’s not just one thing that troubles us.”

The commissioners approved changes to the proposed budget totaling $1,176,093 to public schools, including $261,093 for Asheboro City Schools and $915,000 for the Randolph County School System. Another $100,000 will go to the RCSS construction capital for its nine-year plan.

The Sheriff’s Office had requested and will receive an additional $82,323 to upgrade three existing jail positions. Randolph Vocational Industries will receive an additional $10,000 while Randolph County Senior Adults Association will get $2,670 and Regional Consolidated Services will receive $1,355.

“I’m pleased we’ve been able to get to revenue neutral while we provide some more to the Sheriff’s Office and schools,” Vice Chair David Allen said. “But we’re setting ourselves up in the future. I’ll be tough to maintain that rate.” He listed coming expenses such as added jailers when the Detention Center addition is completed and more emergency medical technicians as Emergency Services moves from 24-hour to 12-hour shifts.

“Tough but not surprised to come up with the rate we have,” Commissioner Maxton McDowell said. “It’s great we can do this and sustain what we have. There will be other problems down the road. We’re all taxpayers, too. We’re looking at what we can do to hold the line without jeopardizing things.”

Commissioner Kenny Kidd urged animal rights activists to “give this a chance. It’s a great compromise. I think the transition (to an independent department) makes sense.” Noting that government doesn’t move swiftly, Kidd said, “It won’t happen by next Friday. Please give the new department head the opportunity to build a great department, a chance to implement the strategy.”

Frye added that the decision on Animal Control “didn’t come during the last three months. Hope Haywood and Kenny Kidd have traveled extensively (to other counties) over this. It took a lot of research and work to get us to this point. We need to do this together.”

Haywood commented on building the new Animal Control department. “The more collaboration we have, the better we’re able to stop problems, the better we’ll look as a county, the more businesses and people will want to come here, and the more tax money we’ll have.”

The commissioners also closed out current budget amendments, including $500,000 from the general fund to the Asheboro High School capital project. They approved requests from fire departments for tax rates, most wanting to remain revenue neutral. Also approved were requests for revenue-neutral special school tax rates of 9.22 cents for Archdale-Trinity and 14.39 cents for Asheboro City Schools.