

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS, WASHOE COUNTY, NEVADA**

FRIDAY

12:00 P.M.

APRIL 24, 2009

PRESENT:

**David Humke, Chairman**  
**Bonnie Weber, Vice Chairperson**  
**Bob Larkin, Commissioner**  
**Kitty Jung, Commissioner**  
**John Breternitz, Commissioner**

**Amy Harvey, County Clerk**  
**Katy Simon, County Manager**  
**David Creekman, Legal Counsel (12:00 – 12:30 p.m.)**  
**Melanie Foster, Legal Counsel (12:30 – adjournment)**

Chairman Humke called the special session of the Board to order at 12:03 p.m. in the Commission Chambers of the Washoe County Administration Complex, 1001 East Ninth Street, Reno, Nevada. Following the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of our Country, the Clerk called the roll and the Board conducted the following business:

**09-388      AGENDA ITEM 4**

**Agenda Subject: “Discussion with Washoe County Employees to receive input with regard to the 2009/10 Fiscal Year Budget. (All Commission Districts)”**

Chairman Humke explained the Board wanted all employees to have an opportunity to make comments. He introduced several key staff members.

John Sherman, Finance Director, provided a brief update on the County’s economic status and the 2009-10 budget process. He discussed significant dates in the adoption process and noted the County’s budget was likely to be impacted further by decisions made during the State’s 2010 Legislative Session.

Katey Fox, Acting Director of Human Resources, stated approximately 30 out of 58 voluntary separation and/or incentive requests were approved during the first round. She indicated 153 requests were received during round two, and were still being evaluated in chronological order.

The Board listened to comments and questions as summarized under Agenda Item 3 below. Employees were given the option of speaking directly to the Commission or submitting written comments to be read into the record. The written comments were placed on file with the Clerk.

Commissioner Breternitz thanked employees for participating. He stated their questions were placed on the record and answers would be provided.

Commissioner Jung commented these were difficult times and she was constantly thinking about possible ways to minimize the impacts. She thanked employees for making salary concessions when other government labor associations had not done the same. She promised answers would be provided to the questions that were submitted.

Commissioner Weber thanked employees for their willingness to share what was important to them and how they were being affected. She indicated there was still more work to be done and more questions to be asked.

Chairman Humke thanked employees for taking time from their lunch hour. He talked briefly about the checks and balances of government, and the utilization of information from *Charting Our Course* and a system of scaled tiers to determine budget reduction targets. He noted all Commissioners were doing their part to dig deeper, and stated that listening to the employees was an important part of the analysis.

No action was taken on this item.

**09-389      AGENDA ITEM 3**

**Agenda Subject: “Public Comment. Comment heard under this item will be limited to two minutes per person and may pertain to matters both on and off the Commission agenda. The Commission will also hear public comment during individual action items, with comment limited to two minutes per person. Comments are to be made to the Commission as a whole.”**

Penny Rasmussen, President of the Washoe County Employees Association (WCEA), detailed many of the concessions already given by WCEA members. She pointed out the WCEA and the Washoe County Nurses’ Association were the first governmental labor organizations in the County and in the State to give back in order to help out. She questioned the outsourcing of jobs, the appointment of friends or family members into jobs that WCEA employees spent years trying to obtain, the “collapsing” of the organization from the middle instead of the top, and the provision of only two minutes for employees to speak to the Commission.

Carla Fells, Executive Director of the WCEA, suggested the functions of some vacant management positions were actually being filled by consultants or contractors, many of whom were former employees. She requested the Commissioners ask each department head how many such contractors or consultants were on the payroll, and why current employees or managers could not perform such work. She asserted any outsourcing should include proposals to outsource management functions, and wondered why shared services discussions had not yet resulted in the elimination of some positions with over \$100,000 annual salaries. She commended Library Director Arnie Maurins,

Assessor Josh Wilson, Treasurer Bill Berrum and Juvenile Services Director Mike Pomi for their leadership and innovative management proposals.

Sue Weyl, Guardian Case Manager for the Public Guardian's Office, disagreed with the department's placement in the third tier of the reduction percentages. She noted six employees would be laid off, which was one-third of the staff. She discussed the impact of the layoffs on those served by the Public Guardian, who had no voice and no one else to represent or advocate on their behalf.

Mary Jean Sanfilippo, Guardian Case Manager for the Public Guardian's Office, outlined some of the statutes that authorized the Public Guardian to represent and to make decisions for more than 250 individuals in the community. She talked about some of the cases where Case Managers intervened, including examples of clients who were financially exploited, those who received costly public assistance instead of the pension benefits they were eligible for, those on the verge of losing their homes, and those who were living in unhealthy, unsanitary conditions. She observed the loss of six out of 20 staff members would limit the Public Guardian's ability to provide the community with the safety net that no one else could provide.

Christopher Akurosawa of the Public Guardian's Office said he understood the gravity of the situation, but thought there was a general lack of faith that everything possible was being done prior to laying off employees. He stated he did not believe department heads were inept or corrupt, but they were fallible, had biases and could sometimes lose perspective. He noted there appeared to be no double check on their decisions, as long as financial reduction targets were met.

Shirley Cosmos, Chief Records Clerk for the Civil Section of the Sheriff's Office, indicated her position was one of those being eliminated. She talked about the value of her knowledge and her experience in the Civil Section since 2001. She indicated the person taking over her duties did not possess the same knowledge and held a position that was created one year ago. She questioned what criteria were used to choose which positions were eliminated and who was watching to see why people kept their positions.

Karen Forrester of the Sparks Branch Library expressed concern about the size of the budget cuts in the Library System. She noted the Library avoided closing five of its 13 branches thanks to two landlords and an anonymous donor. She indicated there would still be 20 to 24 layoffs, although a sizeable number of the staff had volunteered to retire, resign, work reduced hours, take leave without pay, or forego merit increases for one year. She discussed the impacts of reduced hours and services, and asked the Commission not to cut the public's access to valuable library resources.

Jay Foley said he had been a Survey Technician for the Engineering Division of the Public Works Department since June 2005, and was to be laid off July 1, 2009. He explained about 85 percent of his time was spent acquiring field data for the emergency response GIS database, and the remainder of his time was spent assisting the other Survey Technician on various projects. He described the impacts of eliminating his

position. He noted five years had already been devoted to the emergency response GIS database project, and the project was not to be completed for another two or three years. He expressed doubt about how such a large and important project could just be abandoned.

Deborah Bailey, Office Support Specialist for the Public Administrator's Office, placed a copy of her written comments on file with the Clerk. She questioned the "sliding scale" approach to cost reduction, as well as the advisability of so many layoffs and service cuts that were based on projections. She talked about the impact of the cuts on a department with only 11 people to perform challenging and labor-intensive work that few people were willing to do. She asked that the employee group be given an opportunity to suggest some alternative approaches.

Patrick Winans stated he was one of two Program Coordinators in the Social Services Department. He said he had been asked to voluntarily demote to a position that had been vacant since September 2008. He wondered how the Department's budget targets could be met if he were to take the demotion and maintain the same salary. He indicated he had more time with the County than the other Program Coordinator, who had been appointed at the top of the pay scale and had not yet passed a probationary period. He noted he was responsible for supervising 13 people, while the other Program Coordinator supervised no one. He wondered whether the requested demotion was the result of a need to meet current financial goals or whether it was politically expedient and allowed for easier departmental reorganization.

Valerie Wade indicated she had been an Administrative Secretary in the Budget Division for over five years and previously worked in Human Resources for five years. She said she had observed accountability pooling at the bottom of the organization. She likened it to the train moving forward because of the momentum of the cars, not because the engine was pulling. She suggested the organization did not have an effective process to hold management accountable to any kind of verifiable performance standards. She observed many of the cuts were being made among the lowest level of employees who provided direct services to citizens and to management. She predicted the result would be a demoralized workforce.

Pat O'Hair, a recently retired County employee, noted there was a \$14 million budget item for prefunded retiree health insurance. He said it was his understanding there was already over \$50 million in the fund, which would probably cover retirees' insurance premiums for quite a few years. He recommended the Board ask the labor associations to waive the \$14 million prefunding for one year, which would probably pay the salaries of more than 140 employees.

Rocky Badolato, Secretary for the Library Director, indicated she had been a member of the WCEA Board for 16 years and supported what had already been said by Ms. Rasmussen, Ms. Fells and Mr. O'Hair. She noted she was also the Library's Human Resources representative. She stated the Library was \$284,000 away from meeting its budget cuts after 45 employees gave up their longevity pay, 19 deferred their

merit increases, 14 volunteered to reduce their work hours in the coming year, 20 were already working reduced work hours, two had taken unpaid sabbaticals, 12 opted for early retirement, seven took voluntary severance, and three separated without any incentives at all. She pointed out there would be 71 vacant positions out of a total of 231, which represented approximately 30 percent of the Library's workforce. She asked the Board to consider a stay of execution for the \$284,000 that remained. She observed the Friends of Washoe County Library was doing some fundraising and there were ongoing talks with the WCEA about the possibility of voluntary furloughs. She commented the Library was more than books and talked briefly about those who would be affected by the reductions in service.

Scott Alger said he had been a painter for 36 years and worked for 20 years in the Public Works Department. He suggested there needed to be a paradigm shift in order to stay on track, open up minds and help all of the County employees. If given adequate time to come forward, he stated employees would tell the Board they would do whatever was necessary to get the County through hard times. He indicated those at the top did not need what they had and could give back.

Bertie Alger stated she was one of three custodians left out of the 27 there had been when she started working for the Public Works Department almost 16 years ago. She wondered why there was not more talk about creating funds. She noted people were paying \$10 to park near the ballpark, and suggested the County should charge for the use of its Court Street parking lot after hours and on weekends.

Alexandria Mason, Attorney for the Senior Law Project, stated everyone understood what was happening, but needed to feel that decisions and cuts were being made competently, professionally and ethically. She said she and her colleagues felt like they were fighting a constant battle for existence after discovering a decision had already been made to subcontract their services to another legal aid provider. She indicated the decision came to light about six months after it had supposedly been made, and there had been an assumption that BCC approval would follow and everything would fall into place. She said the decision had been published in the newspaper on two occasions as if it were already a done deal. She commended Commissioner Jung and the Senior Citizen Advisory Board for their leadership in getting a full discussion of the issues and allowing the public to weigh in.

Dani Valerio, Investigative Assistant for the District Attorney's Office, placed a six-page handout on file with the Clerk. She pointed out she and her coworkers were to be outsourced in the District Attorney's budget. She suggested the outsourcing would take care of process service, but the investigative assistants did much more than that. She referred to 2007 salary information provided on page 6 of the handout, and asked the Board to consider whether there was another way to accomplish the required budget savings. She emphasized the work was not being eliminated, but would be shifted to an outside contractor.

Several written comments and questions were read into the record and placed on file with the Clerk. They are summarized as follows:

- The problem is a sick economy and laying people off will hinder the region's recovery.
- Our management team is great and I challenge employees to be part of the solution.
- Requests will now take longer for response or will not be able to be fulfilled by the remaining employees who will carry the workload.
- Employees whose salaries are grant funded were not eligible for voluntary separation incentives, but had to take a 2.5 percent pay cut that saved the County nothing.
- It is highly inappropriate for the Library Department to be grouped as purely recreational and to have to cut 36 percent. The Library is a necessary lifeline for many people in this current economy.
- Are elected department heads given different considerations because they do not report to the County Manager or the Board of County Commissioners (BCC)?
- Quit the use it or lose it on our budgets.
- Why do the parks and libraries end up at the top of the list of cuts every single time? What does it take to recognize these departments as an important and vital part of a great community?
- The state of our economy has affected my family, with relocations, lost jobs and lower incomes. I am slated to be laid off in the Finance Department, which will further the decline of my family's financial status. These layoffs will bubble up and impact the County overall – stress levels will increase, employee morale will deteriorate and reporting of financial information will not be as efficient and timely. I suggest we look at taking cuts in hours worked or pay cuts rather than cutting people.
- I have been a 21-hour Library Aid for eight years. The concept of using higher classification employees for shelving and other duties is wrong because it will require the same number of hours at a higher rate of pay and benefits. I am fully aware of the severity of the budget problem, but it is wrong to exclusively target some of the hardest working people in the Library for layoffs.

- What does the BCC plan to do to raise employee morale and appreciation?
- Please offer a fiscally responsible explanation as to why the County Manager and the County Commission continue to refuse to look at eliminating some of the layers of top paid management positions.
- Experienced people are being shoved out the door with 'Let's Make a Deal' offers; whereas, they would otherwise continue to contribute to the County and the community.
- Is it true the \$47 million target was to address a two-year shortfall and to replenish reserves? If so, what are the reserve amounts?
- I have searched the website, but cannot find a full budget proposal showing reductions by department, nor a bottom line.
- The Library provides information, learning materials, educational programs, story times for children, community awareness, entertainment, and it serves as a springboard for knowledge. We all benefit from a society that fosters education and the freedom of obtaining information we want and need. This service is most important now with the need for so many individuals to seek employment. Limiting this resource decreases opportunities and limits potential.
- Is it really economical to eliminate one of two office assistants and make the higher paid positions do the routine office work?
- This is an opportunity to upgrade staff qualifications and require a Masters Degree in Library Science for all management positions. It seems silly to lay off Library Aides and then pay management wages for the same tasks.
- Dale Brice, Storekeeper for the Purchasing Department, writes that the different departments who are already suffering cuts are going to have the added task of receiving the office supply orders if his position is eliminated. He is also the liaison between the Sheriff's Office, General Services and the Medical Examiner's Office for County surplus auctions.
- Ralph Minnitte, Heavy Equipment Operator for the Road Department, writes that he is to be transferred from Gerlach to Reno after living there for 35 years. He lists several reasons why this would be problematic and wonders why employees who have less than five years of service should be allowed to stay in Gerlach.

- How can management state they are doing everything they can when they are still using “take home cars” throughout the County?
- If the BCC does not agree with a departmental proposal due to the feedback received, can it override or deny parts of the proposal, or would it simply note objections and let the proposal pass?
- I would like to ask a question and make a comment, but fear retaliation from department heads.

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**1:19 p.m.** There being no further business to come before the Board, on motion by Commissioner Larkin, seconded by Commissioner Breternitz, which motion duly carried, the meeting was adjourned.

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**DAVID E. HUMKE**, Chairman  
Washoe County Commission

**ATTEST:**

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**AMY HARVEY**, County Clerk  
and Clerk of the Board of  
County Commissioners

*Minutes Prepared by:  
Lisa McNeill, Deputy County Clerk*