

Following up on the discussion of assessments and taxes from the last article, there are many issues that fall into the catalog of taxation. To break down the amount of property taxes you pay into the county, there are many variables. Depending on where your property is located, your tax amount differs. On our County website (www.RioGrandeCounty.org) you can find the 2008 Abstract of Levies on the following page: <http://www.riograndecounty.org/depts/taxes/>. On this page there is a breakdown for each school district and a pie chart showing the percentages going toward each individual taxing agency. So the example, if you lived in Monte Vista, the breakdown of the total 71.123 mils assessed on your property is:

Monte Vista School District #8: 32.679 mils,	or 45.95% of total
City of Monte Vista: 14.74 mils	or 20.72% of total
Rio Grande County: <u>15.567</u> mils	or 21.89% of total
Monte Vista Fire Protection District: 3.663 mils	or 5.15% of total
Rio Grande Water Conservation District: 2.13 mils	or 2.99% of total
SLV Water Conservation District: 0.396 mils	or 0.56% of total
Rio Grande Pest Control: 0.446 mils	or 0.63 % of total
Rio Grande County Library: 1.5 mils	or 2.11% of total

The 15.567 mils stays constant for the whole county. Out of the 15.567 mils the County receives, 1.5 mils go to the Road and Bridge Fund, and 1.5 mils into Social Services Fund. . So out of \$1,000.00 paid in taxes, (in this case in the Town of Monte Vista) \$218.90 goes into the County fund. And out of that \$218.90, only \$2.10 goes to our Road and Bridge Fund. As many of you realize, that \$2.10 will not even buy one gallon of diesel fuel to run a snow plow or road grader today.

As a side note, and comparison, Alamosa County mil levy is 23.81 mils.

The commissioners have been meeting with the managers each month reviewing our budget. We have asked each department what they can do to help ease the pinch we are all feeling with the downturn in the economy and the revenues that the State keeps taking away from the counties. Currently, we are down over 8% in revenues for the year to date. The county has experienced some unexpected major costs, mainly roof replacement on part of the jail and museum buildings. The combination of decreased revenues from the State and Federal programs is causing the County to submit an amended budget to adjust for these items.

The County's budget must also be amended to comply with State Senate Bill 08-194 which mandates as of July 1, 2009, all revenues and expenditures for the public health nurse must be segregated into a special fund and the public health nurse department is now a Public Health Agency. Thus we must transfer nursing funds into a separate account.

Here is a part of the budget message for the budget year 2009:

“The 2009 County Budget shows an ending fund balance of \$2,252,735 which is down by \$1,623,281. By utilizing \$1,623,281 of unappropriated funds to balance the 2009 budget the county continues to utilize its savings; this track is un-sustainable and in the future either revenue will have to increase or the county will be forced to reduce expenditures. If revenues do not increase, County General Fund will need to be reduced by 14% and Road & Bridge Fund by 18.6%. This reduction will have to be accomplished by reducing or eliminating various services and staff. This balance is required and has been reflected in the values of the voters of Rio Grande County as in 2006 a 3 mill tax increase to the same level as was held in 1992 was rejected by our constituents. The only means for local governments to remain solvent is to cut services. Consequently, the only option to balance the budget is to continue to reduce expenditures and/or find new revenue sources.”

So now with a lack of new revenue sources, the county is being forced to reduce expenditure which may include elimination of services and staff. What does this mean for John Q. Public?

First, it means a change in the way business is conducted for the county. It may mean at the least, unpaid furlough days for county employees. It may mean things like the Clerk's office not being able to filled two vacancies, and yes, it may mean taking a number and waiting for service. And please do not get upset with the clerks about the fees and charges. They are the messenger, get upset with your state senator and representative who passed ugly legislation increasing fees for the state! The clerk unfortunately, gets the grief of collection and the state gets the money. It may mean the Courthouse and Clerk's office may be closed one day a week. It may mean no new vehicle for the Sherriff's office. It may mean bologna sandwiches for the inmates rather than hot food. It may mean cuts in other services, cuts of employees, and it may even mean possible funding cuts for the elderly food program, the SLV Fair and Extension Service. It may mean possible cuts to all services currently offered by Rio Grande County.

Do the commissioners want to do these things--absolutely not? Are we working with departments to make cuts in expenditures and preserve jobs--absolutely yes? Are we looking at other resources and revenue streams--yes? By state law, counties are not allowed to have deficient spending, unlike the Federal Government. Counties are also not allowed to increase the mil levy without the vote of the people. Consequently, if revenues shrink, the only means of balancing the budget is to reduce expenditures. This means a reduction in services and programs. The Commissioners are charged with upholding the state constitution and state laws. Many of the services provided are mandated by law, such as having a Clerk & Recorder, Treasurer, Assessor, Sheriff, District Attorney, Coroner and providing for Social Services. Other programs are not state mandated. These programs, such as the elderly food program, SLV Fair, handicap services, television, and senior citizen services are not mandated. They make for a better community. But when the money is not there, the county must comply with the law and fund those mandated offices.

Bottom line, just as you are, we are cinching up our belt and moving forward to get through this tough time.