

Rio Grande County is a great place to live and work. In her report to the commissioners, Pat Perry, County Health Nurse reported on a survey that Rio Grande County is the number one county in the state for a healthy environment.

Financial reports presented at the monthly managers meeting Wednesday the 19th, show County sales tax revenue is holding about the same as 2009. Shopping locally helps both the towns and county as the “county 2% sales tax” is split with the towns and the county. So out of every 2 cents of “county” tax per dollar, the county receives 8/10ths of one cent. The county and municipalities are thankful for any sales tax revenue in this economy, so we encourage you to shop locally.

County employees are doing a great job of holding expenses down and staying within budget. We appreciate their commitment of doing more with less.

Our Social Services budget is struggling because of increased usage of those programs in the bad economic times we find ourselves. Food stamp use is up 40% and child welfare is projected by the state to be over budget by \$500,000. A report on a Denver TV stated “the number of students who are homeless has more than doubled since 2003 with that number now approaching 16,000. Parents are losing their jobs, their homes and their vehicles, but they don’t want their children to lose out on education.” Many are staying in motels, going to peoples homes for a night, or just constantly moving on the streets. Social Services is striving to help, and is also asking for anyone that would like to help by being foster parents, please contact our social services department.

The items mentioned above are a small part of the total mandated requirements of the county to fund. In a personal opinion piece recently, the writer compared the 1990’s and how great it was. Unfortunately, that was then and now welcome to the new economic reality.

In the early 1990’s, the economy was good, and the commissioners, did what they thought best for Rio Grande County. A part of that was reducing the mil levy three mils. Right after that, the state passed the Taxpayers Bill of Rights commonly known as TABOR. One of the consequences of TABOR is that taxes can only be raised by a vote of the people—that includes any tax increases for special districts or authorities. Six years ago, the commissioners went to a vote of the people to basically re-instate the three mils that had been a part of the mil levy until the early 1990’s. The voters rejected raising that question. The conclusion from the commissioners was that the people had spoken and the County would work with the revenue they had.

Last summer and fall, when looking at the possible 2010 budget, the commissioners reconsidered putting a three mil request on the ballot again. With the collapse of the economy in 2008, and all of us ordinary folks struggling to make ends meet already, the commissioners did not want to add a bigger burden to families of Rio Grande County, the consideration was dropped. Instead, the commissioners did what folks in the county had to do, we cut spending. We requested departments cut 10% and asked everyone for suggestions of ways to be more efficient and also save money. Thus many worthwhile

causes were not funded or funding was drastically cut for 2010 including things like senior citizens, 4-H, extension service, the golf course in Monte, the animal shelter, DRG and the list goes on.

We are already looking at 2011, and IF amendments 60, 61 and proposition 101 pass on the fall ballot, **drastic** cuts will have to be made. PLEASE, PLEASE study those very carefully. Proposition 101 if passed will reduce revenues for Rio Grande County from \$328,835.00 to \$6,037.00. The schools will be reduced from \$630,937.00 to \$11,584.00. Any special district will be severely affected as will the towns, the water districts and also the Roads & Bridges currently projected at \$393, 889.00 for roads and \$156,663.00 for bridges. The Roads & Bridges will drop to zero.

On a brighter note, the pre-bid for contractors was held at the Astronaut Rominger Airport. The bid opening is June 1st. This project is in five stages, and upon completion, will allow flight for life airplanes to land at the airport. The first two stages to be accomplished this summer will extend the new runway, dirt work and moving the county road. The paving stage cost is estimated in current dollars at \$1.2 million. Currently the county has two grants from the CDOT Aviation to help fund the project. The County will need more matching funds to finish the project. This is an enterprise zone approved project, so contributions may enjoy a tax benefit.