



The Leon County LINK

Connecting Citizens with Leon County Services

Leon County Releases Fiscal Year 2007/2008 Tentative Budget

The fiscal year (FY) 2007/2008 tentative budget is now available online at www.leoncountyfl.gov/omb, or, for viewing, at the Leon County Courthouse, located at 301 S. Monroe Street. The development of this budget has been significantly influenced by state property tax reform, requiring reduced revenues. The new property tax reform law passed during the recent special legislative session requires Leon County to "rollback" taxing rates to the previous year, as well as reduce an additional three percent.

Due to the Leon County Board of County Commissioners' fiscally conservative practices in the past, Leon County has the 11th lowest per capita tax growth rate over the past five years in the state; 56 counties have higher rates. Of the non-fiscally constrained counties (39 total), Leon County has the third lowest growth rate; 36 counties have higher ones. Based on Leon County's low growth rate, the Department of Revenue certified only a three percent reduction from the rollback rate. The reductions range from three to nine percent. The countywide millage rate is decreasing from 7.99 in FY2006/2007 to 7.213 in FY2007/2008. One mill equals one dollar per \$1,000 of a property's taxable value.

Because of continued fiscal discipline, the Board is well-positioned for the state-mandated reductions, particularly through the practice of not growing on-going expenditures over the past several years and also by building appropriate reserves, which are now being used to offset some of the revenue reductions. The FY2007/2008 total operating budget is \$202,018,055, representing an increase of 2.9 percent; the capital budget is \$42,150,316, representing an increase of 9.7 percent; the budget includes a reserve for capital projects of \$40,522,926. Excluding the capital reserve, the total tentative budget is \$244,168,371, representing an increase of four percent.

While sacrifices were made in the tentative budget due to these reductions, such as not proceeding with replacing storefront branch libraries with stand-alone buildings and not funding the construction of new community centers, the Board maintained its commitment to public health and safety. The tentative budget includes fully funding healthcare services at \$1,287,094 without levying additional property tax. This healthcare includes the funding of Bond Community Health Center and Neighborhood Health Services, as well as We Care and FAMU Pharmacy.

In addition, the Board continued its steadfast commitment to public safety by including in the tentative budget full funding of the Leon County Sheriff's Office salary study to properly compensate sworn law enforcement officers and Emergency Medical Services paramedics and emergency medical technicians. In addition, the Board allocated \$2 million per year to replace the outdated emergency response radio system and provide for joint dispatch.

Due to property tax reform, the average savings for a homeowner over a two-year period is \$200. The total reduction in tax rate this year is 10 percent, and over two years, it will be 16 percent.

The Legislature's property tax reform package also includes a constitutional amendment to be placed on the January 29, 2008 ballot for voter consideration. The amendment provides for a super homestead exemption, and, if passed, would result in an additional revenue loss of \$17 million, which would necessitate greater reductions in programs and services. In the fall, the Board intends to address possible reductions in the event that the amendment passes.

Two public hearings will be held on the FY2007/2008 budget, one on Tuesday, Sept. 4, and one on Tuesday, Sept. 18, at 6 p.m. The Sept. 4 public hearing will also serve as a town hall meeting, where citizens are invited to attend and share input. For the complete Leon County FY2007/2008 Tentative Budget, visit www.leoncountyfl.gov/omb.

Do You Have a Hurricane Plan?

It's not a matter of if a storm hits our community, but when. With so many decisions to make, preparing for a hurricane can be a difficult and overwhelming task. Leon County wants to make sure you have a plan in place before the wind starts to blow and created the HaveAHurricanePlan.com Web site to make the process easier.



The site helps users create hurricane preparedness plans tailored to their own needs, beginning with important decisions, such as whether to stay in your home or evacuate. With recommendations for your family, pets, and property, the site covers preparations for before, during, and after the storm. You will also find important contact information, evacuation routes, checklists for survival kit essentials, and shelter and volunteering information. Build your plan today, visit www.HaveAHurricanePlan.com.

Animal Control Changes Hours of Operation

Due to staffing limitations caused by the hiring freeze, Leon County Animal Control has changed its operation hours. Officers will be available from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, and the office will be open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. In case of an after-hours or weekend emergency, field requests can be made through the Leon County Sheriff's Office at 922-3300. Emergencies are classified as animal bites, dangerous or aggressive animals, sick or injured domestic animals and suspected wildlife with rabies. For more information about Animal Control services, please contact Director Richard Ziegler at 606-5400 or visit www.leoncountyfl.gov/animal.



In anticipation of Florida's property tax reform, the County Administrator recommended, and the Board approved, a hiring freeze in February to create vacancies. They also froze millions of dollars worth of capital projects. The hiring freeze will remain in effect through the January referendum and next legislative session, and levels of service, such as with Animal Control, may be affected.

County Greenways Designated Part of National Trail System



The Department of Interior, the nation's principal conservation agency, has designated Leon County's J.R. Alford and Miccosukee Canopy Greenways as National Recreation Trails. Steeped in history, the National Trails System includes the Trail of Tears and Pony Express National Historic Trails and consists of approximately 900 trails that span the United

States and range in length from one mile to more than 485 miles. Leon County is now home to two of the 16 National Recreation Trails in Florida.

Combined, the Miccosukee Canopy Road and J.R. Alford Greenways consist of more than 1,300 acres of open space, forest, and woodlands. Leon County maintains over 60 miles of nature trails, which are used for biking, running, hiking and horseback riding.

Residents and visitors are encouraged to visit the greenways and take photographs. Leon County is holding the second annual Summer Snapshot Greenway Photo Contest through September. All photos will be posted on the County Web site, and prizes will be awarded to the top three winning photographs.

The Miccosukee Canopy Road Greenway is located at 5600 Miccosukee Road, and the J.R. Alford Greenway is located at 2500 S. Pedrick Road.

"Summer Snapshot" Greenway Photo Contest

Capture the beauty of Leon County's Greenways with your camera and enter the second annual "Summer Snapshot" Greenway Photo Contest, continuing through Sept. 30. Prizes will be awarded for first, second and third place, and all photos submitted for the contest will be posted on the Leon County Web site to display photographers' talents. For more information and contest rules, please visit www.leoncountyfl.gov/parks or call the Public Information Office at 606-5300.

August 2007 Board of County Commissioners Schedule

14 Board Recess - No Meeting

**30 Joint County/City Public Hearing on Cycle 2007-2
Comprehensive Plan Amendments, 6 p.m.**
City Hall, 300 S. Adams St., 2nd Floor, Commission Chambers

The Link is produced by Leon County Public Information, 606-5300.