



New board hits the ground running

The Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners got down to business on Jan. 9, 2017, with a slate of housekeeping duties. Casey Kozlowski, who was elected commissioner in 2014, was elected President of the 2017 board. Vice-President is Kathryn Whittington. J.P. Ducro IV is the third commissioner. Lisa Hawkins will serve as clerk; Janet Discher is administrator.

The regular agenda meeting time for the board is 1 p.m. Tuesday, in the commissioners' meeting room, second floor of the Old Courthouse.

Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners
 25 West Jefferson St.
 Jefferson Ohio 44047

Commissioners proclaim March as Developmental
 Disabilities Awareness Month Page 3
 Board honors artist Chris Raab Page 4



Ashtabula County Insights Volume I, Issue I

Budget hearings dominate the board's schedule in January

Budgets. We all have to make them, and live by them, whether we run a household, business or county.

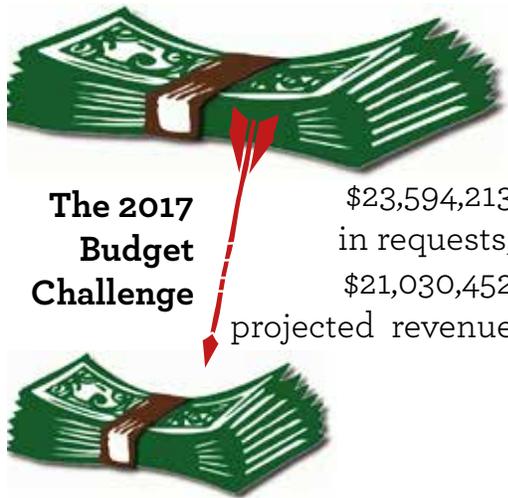
During January 2017 Ashtabula County Commissioners received the elected officials' and department heads' budget requests. The bottom line: Requests total \$23,594,213, an increase of \$1.9 million above 2016 expenses.

Further, the estimated revenue for the county in 2017, \$21,030,452, falls short of 2016 expenses, \$21,659,119 (a chart on page 5 shows where this money went).

The gap between requests and revenue is \$2.5 million.

That is similar to having a household budget of \$23,594 but only \$21,030 in earnings and other sources of income. What do you do, especially if you are on a fixed income with little possibility of that income ticking up during the year?

That is the task facing the Commissioners, who must have a permanent General Fund budget by



April 1, 2017. In the meantime, the county is operating under a temporary budget.

YOUR VOICE

President Kozlowski responds to citizens' questions



Q How will the board prioritize spending in 2017? Will safety services be cut?

A The Board of Commissioners is dedicated to ensuring the highest level of safety possible to the citizens of Ashtabula County, within the limitations of our funding, of course.

The budget of the Ashtabula County Sheriff's Department, just over \$6 million in 2016, accounts for about 28 percent of the general fund spending. This includes the county jail operation. The budget also covers the costs of dispatching, deputies' salaries/benefits and the operation/replacement of vehicles.

Ashtabula County is, geographically, the largest of Ohio's 88 counties. The Sheriff's fleet of vehicles cover 27 townships, which inflates fuel, fleet maintenance and replacement expenses. The board will be cognizant of these unique conditions that challenge our Sheriff's budget while being sensitive to other budgets that are equally strained. In the end, fairness to the elected officials and taxpayer, as well as public safety, will be reflected in our permanent budget.

Do you have a question for Casey Kozlowski?
 Call 576-3750 or email

CRkozlowski@ashtabulacounty.us

Ashtabula County INSIGHTS

is published monthly by the Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners:

Casey Kozlowski, president
Kathryn Whittington, vice-president
J.P. Ducro IV

To have Insights delivered via email, send an email to cefeather@ashtabulacounty.us to be added to the mailing list.

The Current and previous issues are always available for download from the county's website: www.ashtabulacounty.us

March meetings

7 10 a.m., Commissioners work session
 1 p.m., Commissioners agenda meeting

14 10 a.m., Commissioners work session
 1 p.m., Commissioners agenda meeting

21 10 a.m., Commissioners work session
 1 p.m., Commissioners agenda meeting

28 10 a.m., Commissioners work session
 6:30 p.m., Regional Pre-Agenda and Agenda (7 p.m.) meeting at Geneva City Council Chambers, 44 N. Forest St.

All other meetings held in the commissioner's second-floor meeting room, 25 W. Jefferson Street (old courthouse, Jefferson. Elevator, ramp available. Meetings are open to the public.

Dog warden's Facebook page is cyberlink to lost pooches

Ashtabula County's Dog Warden Donna Yan uses the social media website Facebook to help lost dogs find their owners and stray animals find a good home.

Yan criss-crosses the county, sometimes several times a day, picking up stray and lost dogs. Final stop is the Ashtabula County Animal Protective League (APL) in Kingsville Township, where the animals are impounded and provided care.

Yan snaps pictures of every find and posts them on Facebook with a description of where the animal was picked up. She says the Facebook page is, in theory, a good way to help pet owners find a lost pooch.



Donna Yan

In practice, the pooch usually ends up finding a new home, instead.

"The Facebook page reaches a lot of people," Yan says. "Visitors see dogs and fall in love with them and want to adopt them. It's a nice way to find the owner. But most of the time the owners never pick up their animal."

Yan can tell almost instantly what kind of a home life a stay or lost animal has known by their show of enthusiasm for going for a ride in her truck. "When you say, 'Let's go for a ride' and they hop right up in the truck, you know they are used to that kind of care from an owner," she says. "Some dogs have so much personality, they are just like people, you can't



Ashtabula County Dog Warden Donna Yan maintains a Facebook page on which she posts pictures of stray dogs that she takes into custody. If your dog comes up missing, be sure to check this resource.

help but fall in love with them."

Yan, in her seventh year as a department of one, works under the Board of Commissioners. Yan says that in Ohio, about half of the wardens work under the Sheriff's Department, the rest under commissioners or some other arrangement. Personally, she feels it is less

intimidating to dog owners and there is less of a chance of deadly confrontation when the warden does not pull up in a "Sheriff Department" vehicle.

For the latest in lost and stray canines, visit <https://www.facebook.com/AshtabulaCountyDogWarden/>

Conneaut Chamber awards recipients recognized

Commissioners issued four proclamations that were presented to award recipients at the Conneaut Chamber of Commerce's Annual Dinner/Meeting on Feb. 14.

Highlights of the proclamations are:

Tim Kraus, Citizen of the Year. "Tim has lived out his love for the community and God by being part of the team that secured the Conneaut Human Resources building and by serving on the UH-Conneaut Medical Center boards, Conneaut Ministerial Association, Ashtabula County Concerts of Prayer Board, Second Chance Citizen Circle Re-entry Team, Ashtabula County Re-entry Coalition and Lake Erie Correctional Citizen's Advisory Board; and Tim gives his full energy and passion to every task presented him, displaying the humility of a servant of Jesus Christ and empathy for his fellow man in his ministry and community service; therefore be it resolved by the Board of Commissioners of Ashtabula County, Ohio, that we hereby congratulate Tim Kraus on the occasion of being selected 2016 Citizen of the Year.

D-Day Conneaut was congratulated for its Professional Achievement Award. The annual re-enactment of D-Day at Conneaut Township Park brings media attention and thousands of tourists and re-enactors to the community every summer.

Arlene's Broadway on Buffalo, a community theater founded by Clay and Melissa Nielson, received the President's Award. Arlene's is located in a former church building in downtown Conneaut. Its founders have invested in professional lighting and sound equipment that ensures patrons have an enjoyable experience. The theater's ticket prices are kept affordable so all enjoy the experience.

Schwartz Construction, Ltd., is owned by Conneaut resident Rueben Schwartz, who started the business 20 years ago. The company provides employment for construction workers and has built many high-end homes in the Conneaut market, as well as farm, commercial and industrial structures. Schwartz also does residential and commercial remodeling. He received the Chamber's Leadership Award.

Board of Commissioners takes meeting to Geneva

The Board of Commissioners recognizes that some citizens cannot make it to a regular meeting of the board because of time conflicts or transportation issues. Accordingly, the March 28 meeting will be held in the council chambers of Geneva City Hall, 44 North Forest St., Geneva, at 7 p.m.

The pre-agenda meeting is at 6:30 and provides citizens the opportunity to present questions and concerns to the Board.

"This gives the citizens of Ashtabula County an opportunity to meet with us to discuss the thoughts and ideas that are most important to them and to give our residents an opportunity to see what we do. We would love for you to join us," President Casey Kozlowski says.

Drop-off recycling to return to county on limited basis

After an absence of more than three years, drop-off recycling will return to Ashtabula County in April, if all goes to plan.

Janice Switzer, director of Community Services and Planning, says an agreement with the hauler was worked out in February and all that needs to be decided are the locations of the drop-off sites. Only four sites will be designated initially; Switzer says additional sites will be added, two at a time, once she sees what the actual costs are at the initial sites.

"They are going to be south of Interstate 90," Switzer says of the initial offering. Ashtabula City offers a drop-off recycling site at its Sanitation Department at West 24th Street, and Waste Management customers can subscribe to curbside recycling services.

Ashtabula County has been out of compliance with Ohio EPA recycling regulations since 2013, when high hauling costs and declining program revenue forced the county to end drop-off

There is no opportunity for us to go east or north. It is farther for us to haul the recyclables, and the value of the material has been low. It's been one thing after another. - Janice Switzer

recycling.

Tipping fees paid by haulers to the landfill fund the county's Solid Waste program. Switzer says that, during the recession, the county got pulled into a perfect storm of declining fees and rising costs to haul away the recycled items. As consumption fell in households and businesses, so did the amount of trash being sent to the landfill and the tipping fees associated with it.

The Solid Waste District received \$261,270.80 in tipping fees during 2016. Some of that money is used for salaries, but much of it goes toward assisting communities with their recycling programs. Last year, the Solid Waste District matched an Ohio

EPA grant for Ashtabula City to establish a recycling transfer station. Switzer says the county is in a unique position because of its geography and lack of recycling infrastructure. There are only two "out of county but within the state" directions that recycled material can move beyond Ashtabula County's borders.

"It is farther for us to haul recyclables (to a processing center)," Switzer says.

In the past, the recyclable paper, plastics and metals were hauled to Akron. The new hauler will take the material to Solon or Warren.

Glass won't be accepted. Switzer says the nearest processing facility is in Michigan, and glass has low value.

"There is room in the landfill for the glass," she says. "There are just so few places that take glass. There was a place in Cleveland, but they stopped accepting it."

Even after opening the four drop-off locations, the county will still be out of compliance with the Ohio EPA.

"We actually need about 14 drop-off sites to meet the goal," Switzer says

While the agency has the right to fine the county for its non-compliance, Switzer says it has not done so because the county is working toward a solution.

There has been an increase in tipping fees due to some solid waste moving into the county from Geauga County, and the acquisition of Universal Disposal by Waste Management. Those developments, combined with a decrease in Solid Waste program expenses and more competition among haulers, is allowing the county to slowly re-instate drop-off recycling this year.

Developmental Disabilities Awareness starts in a greenhouse

For days the workers in the greenhouse at AshCraft Industries in Kingsville Township had mixed potting soil and filled hundreds of pots in anticipation of the tractor-trailer that arrived the afternoon of February 7.

With the immediacy of an emergency room nurse and the compassion of mother with a babe in arms, the workers rushed the tender geranium plants from the semi to greenhouse incubator. For the next four months, the employees will dote upon the foliage, ensuring that when Memorial Day comes to Ashtabula County, there will hanging baskets and potted plants alike to pay homage to loved ones and embellish the streetscapes of Ashtabula County.

The greenhouse workers are one segment of the AshCraft Industries workshop, which provides employment to county residents who have developmental disabilities. The workforce is dedicated, committed and, at times, temperamental, says Jim Hornbeck, production manager. It's also very grateful.

"They don't want my help or sympathy. They just want an opportunity," he says as we walk down a row of workers assembling jewelry boxes. We pause where A.J. is filling his sec-



Michael Sabados of Conneaut works in the Ash/Craft Greenhouse in Kingsville Township.

ond carton of 500 jewelry boxes on this shift. He smiles as I talk to him about the job that gives him both self-esteem and a paycheck. Across the aisle, Brian Perkins and Theresa Spang wrestle tiny washers onto a valve component. Brian uses needle-nosed pliers to get the job done, Theresa prefers to use her fingers. As long as the job gets done, that's all that matter here.

Around 200 clients are served by the Ashtabula County Board of Developmental Disabilities on the workshop side. Happy

Hearts School, started by a parents of children with developmental disabilities in the mid-1950s, is the board's other arm of service.

The county board came into being through legislation in 1967. Funding comes from local tax dollars and federal waiver money; very little funding comes from the state.

Workers are matched with their jobs based upon ability and interest. Higher functioning workers earn minimum wage.

The workshop contracts with industries and service providers in the community; much of it is assembly work that is part of a larger manufacturing process. Hornbeck says they typically have 10 to 15 clients at any given time.

Opportunities for employment also are offered in the community. Linda Perry, director, says the state has mandated that the workforce be integrated into the community by 2024. But she and Hornbeck feel there will always be a need for the workshop as some of their clients need that structure and environment to thrive.

"There is a move toward privatization," she explains.

Continued on Page 4

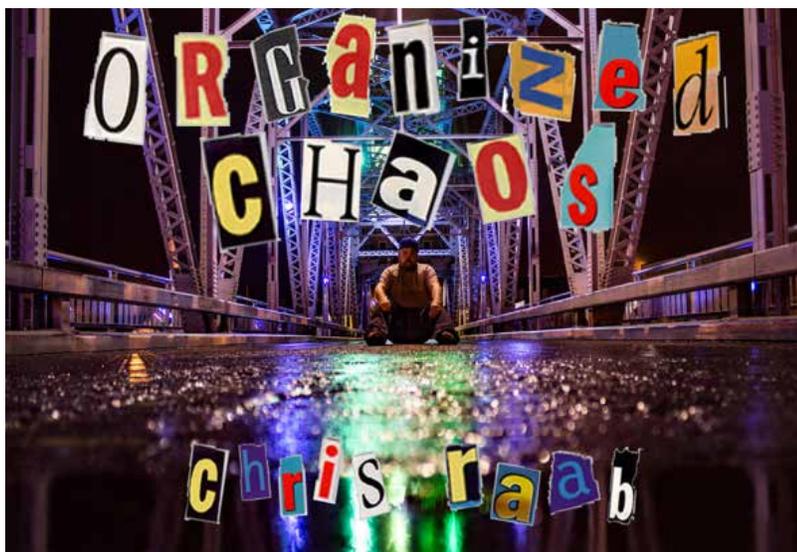
Ashtabula artist honored

Commissioners present proclamation to Raab

WHEREAS, Chris Raab is an accomplished visual artist who works and lives in Ashtabula County; and WHEREAS, his artistry and dedication to the people of our community have enriched the cultural landscape of the area through projects such as the City of Ashtabula's 72-foot mural, the Chris Raab's Quarter Mile solo art show, Artist Wall at Briquettes Smokehouse, widely published photographs extolling the beauty and maritime heritage of Ashtabula County, and assistance to Ashtabula County artists, businesses and the homeless; and WHEREAS, Chris has published a new book, "Organized Chaos," proceeds from which will benefit Project Hope for the Homeless, a demonstration of Chris' love for his fellow man and passion for his art; now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED,

by the Board of Commissioners of Ashtabula County, Ohio, that we hereby recognize Christopher Michael Raab on the occasion of "Organized Chaos" being published and the book signing event, Feb. 3, 2017, at Park Avenue Winery, Ashtabula.



Disabilities Awareness / from page 3

The county board hires the staff, but the workers are employed by the nonprofit Ash/Craft Industries. By 2024, the board will not be allowed to fund staff for the sheltered workshop, so there are challenges ahead.

Hornbeck says the program has reduced its workshop employment by one work group as the board complies with the trend to move clients into community settings, such as fast food restaurants. "Our goal is to put people out in the community," he says.

There is a process, however, and for many of the clients they need to learn the soft skills of employment - coming to work on time and courteous interaction with others - before they are ready to move into community-based or privatized workshop employment. And he says there are some clients who need the securi-

ty and flexibility that a workshop like Ash/Craft provides. The challenge will be finding a funding model to keep the workshop going after 2024.

In the meantime, the greenhouse, garden shop and assembly benches build skills and lives one washer, one box, at a time.

Tim Starkey assembles drain plugs that will go into an oil pan that Premix builds for a high-performance engines. He hand tightens every piece to torque specifications and neatly packs the assembled parts in boxes that will be returned to the North Kingsville plant for further assembly. He looks forward to coming to work every day.

"(This job) means to me that it is excellent. I love this job. I love my boss. I love the people who work here. I love everyone who works here. When I get home from work, I sit down and rest, then I help my mom and dad. My



Tim Starkey shows off one of the oil drain plugs he assembled.

mom and dad are getting up in years. I help them by buying groceries, and I use some of my money for myself. I will buy a game or movie and watch it in my room," he says.

Busy months ahead for Community Services and Planning

Spring will bring a new crop of grant opportunities for Ashtabula County, and lots of meetings, hearings and grant writing for the Community Services Department, says Director Janice Switzer.

"Right through June, we'll be busy with CHIP and CDBG grants applications," Switzer says of the four-person office, housed in the Old Courthouse.

The Community Development Block Grant application is due June 16. Switzer says the department will begin the process of determining and ranking needs at a meeting with local government officials seeking money for their projects.

The Implementation Strategy meeting is scheduled for March 17. When that meeting is over, the walls of Switzer's office will be covered with sheets of paper outlining the requests. The list of proposed projects to submit for funding will be derived from those notes.

Concurrently, there will be meetings and hearings on the county's CHIP grant proposal. CHIP - Community Housing Impact and Preservation Program - grants

fund local government activities that improve and provide affordable housing for low- and moderate-income citizens. The grants are distributed in one competitive funding round.

An advisory council meeting for the CHIP grant will be held this month to pull together stakeholders that work with the low- to moderate-income population, such as Community Action, homeless shelters, Jobs and Family Services and Catholic Charities. The discussion will center on needs and existing programs, and how the CHIP funding can be used to meet the most pressing demands.

Public hearings will be held for both grant applications before they are submitted. The next CHIP grant application meeting is 1:30 p.m. April 11; the CDBG public hearing is 1:30 p.m. May 23.

Switzer says the CHIP grant is due May 5. In addition to researching and writing the grants, she and her staff will be dealing with the normal planning, solid waste and grant application calls handled by the office throughout the year.

CHIP, CDBG public hearings on docket

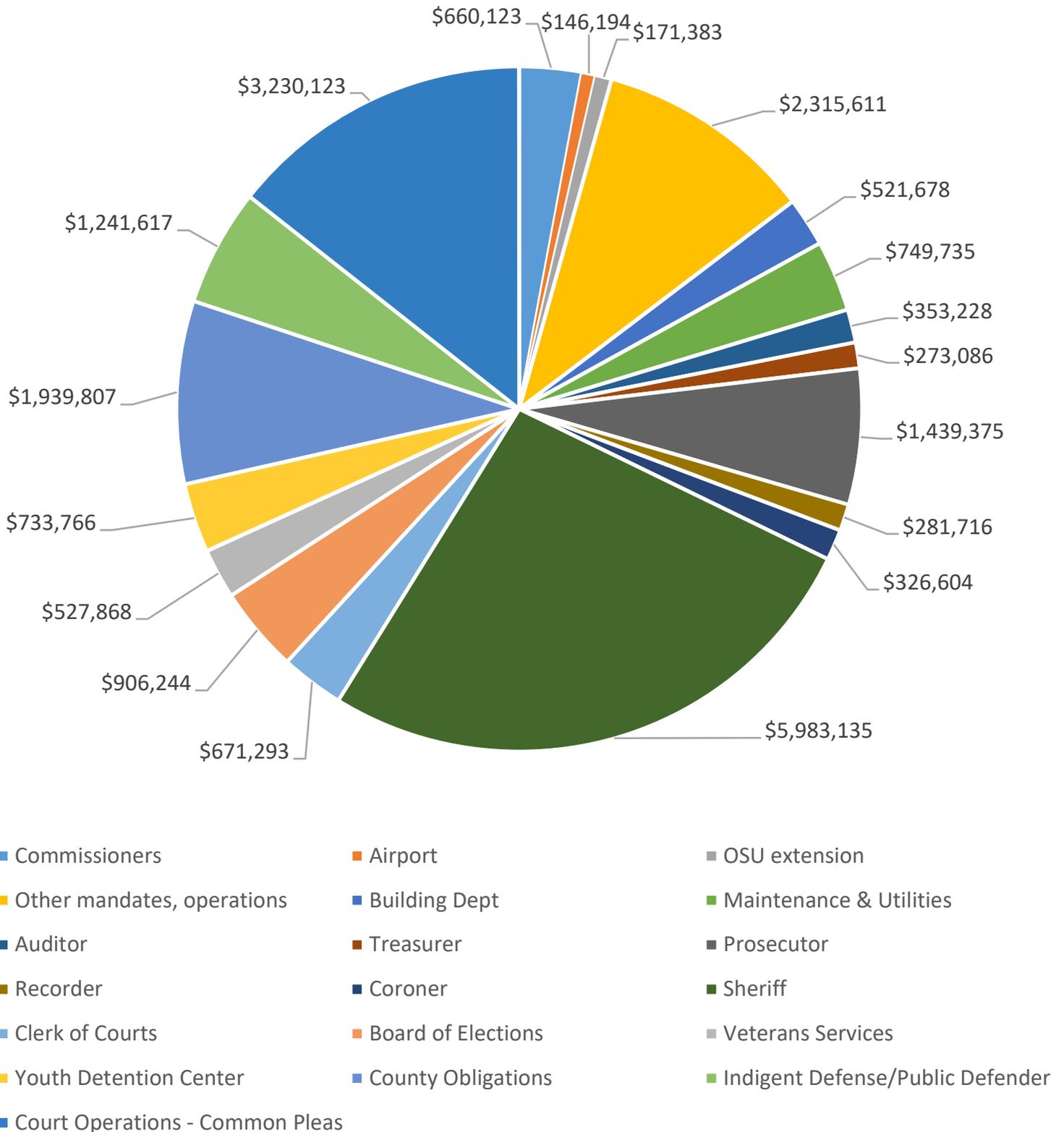
◆CHIP - 1:30 p.m. April 11.

◆CDBG - 1:30 p.m. May 23.

Both hearings will be held in the Commissioners meeting room, second floor, Old Courthouse, 25 W. Jefferson St., Jefferson.

Where the money goes

General Fund spending 2016



Citizens work on budget review committee

When county elected officials and department heads come to the table to present their budget requests to the commissioners, they also address a five-member Budget Advisory Committee.

The members serve as volunteers and spend an average of three to five full days in meetings during the budget hearing season.

Bud Hill, Bob Hegfield, Ann Marrison, Kristen Daubenspeck and Susan Hill served this year.

The concept of having citizens at the table started several years ago, when county revenues were declining and budget hearings occasionally became contentious. Commissioners hoped that input and viewpoints from the private sector would help the board better prioritize spending while discovering cost-saving measures suggested by the committee.

“There are several suggestions from the Committee the past years that have been instituted, such as needed uniformity in office salaries for similar positions, gas usage by department, centralizing purchase of supplies and fiscal accountability by each department,” says Ann Marrison, in her fourth year on the committee. She says commissioners have instituted many of the suggestions, including a wage study that is under way.

“I think the committee has helped in the last six years of making office holders more accountable to the electorate by realizing that there are community members asking

I think the committee has helped in the last six years of making office holders more accountable to the electorate by realizing that there are community members asking questions and being aware of what is going on in our county government.

Ann Marrison

questions and being aware of what is going on in our county government,” Marrison says. “It helps with fiscal accountability, the need to be responsible to the citizens.”

Advisory committee members learn about the elected officials’ mandated responsibilities and the budgetary challenges facing their operations. Committee members pose questions to the officials and make suggestions during these work sessions. The exercise brings the citizens much closer to government than they ever would be as “just” taxpayers or newspaper readers.

“We often read about how federal and state cuts to funding impacts the taxpayers in

Ashtabula County. I look at this challenge to learn more about how the economies of local government are affected and see what recommendations I could add to help reduce expense, plus increase revenues toward balancing the budget,” says Hegfield, in his first year on the committee.

To Hegfield, one of the huge issues facing the county is the “alarming increase of costs” for the courts and sheriff due to drug offenses. He says that getting help for the Sheriff’s Department may be as close as the solution Ashtabula Township implemented several years ago. The township’s voters approved a levy that pays for a dedicated Sheriff’s Department presence. Hegfield wonders if the same type of zone-coverage could be tried elsewhere in the county, where demand is high and enforcement presence is strained.

Members says they have been impressed with the documentation and level of preparedness shown by the elected officials and department heads as they came to the work sessions in January.

“What impressed me the most, besides the intelligent personnel and their gracious civility, is the thoughtful budgeting,” says Susan Hill. “Although members of the various departments do not usually get to hear each other’s presentations, there is an awareness that all are in it together and doing their best to make our county cost effective and focused on our citizens. We have great leaders here.”



Doyle Road Covered Bridge, one of 17 covered bridges still in use for highway traffic in Ashtabula County.