

From the Office of the Sheriff:

I was a bit upset when I read an article in the October 25, 2007 Daily Citizen. The article was in reference to the 2008 Dodge County budget. Near the end of the article there was a quote from a senior county official who commented that “Two departments have decided not to play.” The two department referenced were the Sheriff’s Department and Highway Department. The “decided not to play” was the fact that I did not attend the October 24th meeting of the Finance Committee and beg and whine for additional tax dollars. For that reason I must explain to you, the taxpayer, the county budget process.

On July 23, 2007 each county department received a budget memo from Chairman Kottke. The memo outlines the 2008 budget process. The streamline and fairly easily understood document sets several time-lines for budget approval. In the absence of any specific budget guidance, we began our work. Chief Deputy Blaine Lauersdorf is the Sheriff’s Dept.’s budget master. He has had this responsibility for years and does very well. I first get involved after he formulates a draft budget of our anticipated expenses and revenues. He then walks me through it and receives my input on potential increases or reductions. Per the memo we were right on time and provided the County Board Chairman our budget in September.

Upon the review of the County Board Administrative Secretary and himself he asked that we cut just over \$813k from our 2008 request of around \$17 million. Though painful, we sat down and did as directed, re-introduced our 2008 budget with the requested reductions. With the majority of our budget wages and fringe benefits, the only place to cut is in personnel. We did cut several capital items, two squad cars and numerous pieces of equipment. When our draft budget was approved I felt proud of our tax payer conscious budget and I thanked the Chief Deputy for his effort and diligence. The process takes months and is very stressful. There is not requirement to go to the Finance Committee for their approval as that responsibility was taken from them years ago.

So, here we are in late October and we are being chastised for not coming to a Finance Committee meeting to “play the game.” Budgets are serious business and when dealing with your \$17 million it is far from a game. We were given a financial target. We were over the target and were instructed to cut \$813k and we did. We cut \$72,000.00 in squad cars, \$31,585 in mobile video and radar equipment. We cut \$424,216 from personnel services (wages), and took a \$250,000 hit on a previously unapproved raise in our federal contract rate.

What does it all mean? Simply, we leave law enforcement positions vacant. They include a Detective and several Correctional Officers. We push off officer safety features like mobile video cameras and work traffic patrol with dated and antiquated radar units. Will we continue to provide a high level of services to the taxpayer – Yes! Could we do better with more funding – Yes!

Would we be a better organization with another Detective and squad, absolutely? We were told to make the cuts and we did. In my five years as Sheriff and this being my fourth budget, we do not inflate, we do not “pork up” the budget with the anticipation it will be cut. We submit a responsible budget that doesn’t gouge the taxpayer. If the board wanted to give us more \$\$, why ask for the heavy cuts. I apologize for not “playing the game.” Thanks for listening, tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us.