

Gwinnett County Government NEWS RELEASE

Charles E. Bannister, Chairman
Board of Commissioners

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GWINNETT KEEPS CUTTING BUDGET

(Lawrenceville, Ga., July 24, 2009) – The Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners continued making deep budget cuts on Tuesday, warning that the service reductions would “ripple through” the County budgets for many years to come.

After cutting \$54 million and adding \$7 million in new revenue earlier this year to balance the 2009 budget, commissioners voted Tuesday to cut \$39.3 million in future spending as the County continues to find ways to bring rising expenses in line with decreasing revenue forecasts. Revenue gained from rapid residential and commercial growth in the ‘90s and early into this decade helped Gwinnett County fund increasing operational costs and even allowed the County to roll back property taxes by 3.98 mills, or 26 percent, over the past 12 years. As forecasted, however, Gwinnett’s growth has slowed as it transitions from high growth to a more mature community. Revenue derived from new growth is no longer sufficient to meet the service needs in this still-growing county. While the current economic downturn is compounding the County’s funding challenges with a more than \$1.5 billion decrease in the residential property tax digest and slow sales tax collections, it is not a primary cause.

The County will eliminate more than 250 jobs by the end of the year. Employees will not get any raises in 2010, and staff reductions will even hit the Fire and Emergency Services Department as well as Gwinnett Police, where approved positions will be reduced from 740 to 687, back to 2003 levels. Internal support departments have been directed to cut personnel by 15.4 percent and overall costs by 9.6 percent, on average. Parks and Recreation will cut staff costs by 9.1 percent.

Transit operations will be cut by 21 percent and express service by six percent. In addition, Constitutional and elected officials have been asked to reduce their 2010 budgets in light of the County’s financial challenges.

The Department of Corrections is planned to be eliminated by July of 2011, meaning convicted prisoners will have to be moved to state-run facilities and the County could lose a valuable source of convict labor.

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“We know these are severe reductions that will affect all Gwinnett residents in one way or another,” said Commission Chairman Charles Bannister. “We regret having to cut services so drastically but we’re trying to avoid increasing the property tax, which is our primary alternative.”

“Decisions for next year and beyond are not binding yet, so there’s still plenty of time for citizen input,” added Bannister. The 2010 budget will be officially formulated later this year for commission action in January. Bannister announced earlier this week the establishment of a community engagement initiative in partnership with the Gwinnett Chamber. Participants of this initiative will spend the next six months examining Gwinnett’s five-year needs for critical services and proposing future funding strategies.

A complete list of the budget cuts approved on Tuesday is available online on the County’s website at www.gwinnettcounty.com.

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