

Traverse Country Commission  
Truth In Taxation  
December 10, 2015

The meeting was called to order by Commission Chair Kevin Leininger. Other commissioners present included Dave Salberg, Tom Monson, Mark Gail, and Todd Johnson. Employees present included Kit Johnson, Matt Franzese and Rhonda Antrim.

Citizens in attendance included: Dean Frisch, Tom Fridgen, Shannon Boehmelner, Ray Ehlers, Gordon Christensen, Steve Fridgen, Doug Frisch, Roger Schmidt, and Don Osarson.

Kit Johnson presented a handout of the budget summary. The net levy as of today is \$4,873,448.84. Last year was \$4,596,815.93, which was a 1.68 decrease from the previous year. He discussed the levy history and each fund's budget. He discussed property valuation and how every property can vary due to issues such as homestead, townships, schools, and so forth.

Dean Frisch asked how many dollars are available for homestead. For 2016, the answer was \$2,140,000.00. The Department of Revenue sets it. He also asked about the special taxing district and if that was only the watershed. It is straight watershed. He asked if they were having a tax meeting, which they are not, but their next regular meeting is the 17<sup>th</sup>. Monson explained there is an additional .75 cents per acre being assessed, to help with cash flow. K. Johnson explained that they assess based on the original benefit so some will be more and some will be less, not necessarily based on the acre. Frisch also asked about market values between Highway 75 and 3 miles west of 75. The land clearly isn't of equal value. He was directed to meet with the Assessor. Frisch asked if the values of homes in the cities increased or how can some tax increases could be 21%. Johnson said the net tax capacity levy on the school went up 83%. Johnson said some properties went down such as commercial.

Roger Schmidt distributed a handout for review. He discussed the increase in county government pay scales and benefits and that they're even higher today, including commissioner salaries and per diems. He suggested they decrease their salaries or per diems or reduce the meetings to one meeting per month. They have received substantial increases for the past 4 years. Schmidt discussed salaries and benefits of employees and expressed concern that if you can't control taxes at the local level where can you. He asked if Springsted used private industry or just government to evaluate salaries. He was told that they only compare to other county and city government. Don Oscarson said there's a reason there's a surplus at the state, it's due to over-taxation. Schmidt discussed the Sheriff's department and salaries. He estimated that at step 10, the Sheriff would receive approximately \$60.00 per hour when factoring in benefits. Monson said that's what a plumber receives. Schmidt also discussed PERA and how they get double what most employees receive. He asked about the budget category "other services and charges," and what types of things go into that. K. Johnson discussed it's a catch-all for miscellaneous expenditures. A code can be created for any category if someone requests it, but incidentals fall under that category. Monson and Schmidt discussed the farming industry and value of land, as well as the circumstances surrounding the farming economy of the 1980's. He reiterated that the commission needs to curb its spending, starting with their own compensation. T. Johnson discussed the net levy and how it's below 2008 and 2009. As a county, we've sharpened our pencils. K. Johnson discussed the law

changes and the impact on the work for employees. Many new laws create new programs to administer, more reports, another system or machinery to run it. A perfect example is the new buffer strip law that passed with no idea how to enforce it. Monson discussed the unfunded mandates that limit our choices. Leininger discussed local assessments and the increased technology that will assist with the grading and the valuations on a more equitable basis. He reiterated that the major increases have been wages. The unions are challenging. Schmidt suggested the commission pursue private bids on some projects and curb commissioner spending.

Attested to by:

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Rhonda Antrim/County Coordinator

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Kevin Leininger/Board Chair