

**Mercer County Commission
Special Meeting Minutes
October 6, 2015**

The special meeting was called to order at 4:30 PM CT by Chairman Murray, also present was Commissioner Scheurer, Commissioner Tveit, Commissioner Entze, Commissioner Gunsch, Auditor Brost, Joe Grannis, Dawn Grannis, Kathryn Schumann, Lonnie Schumann, and Darbie Berger.

Motion made by Commissioner Tveit, second by Commissioner Entze to approve the agenda. All members voted "Aye".

Auditor Brost discussed with the board the increase in health insurance. Brost stated BCBS had increased the county's insurance by 17%, therefore the insurance committee decided to increase the health premium by 5% but leave the dental and vision premiums as is.

Auditor Brost discussed her budget, asking the board to change her budget from two secretaries to two deputies at the rate proposed for the other deputies in the courthouse. Brost added that she had enough in her 2015 budget, but would need to increase her 2016 from what was initially presented.

Tax Director, Gary Emter, stated due to the inequity by the commission by granting pay increases last year and the inability to correct it this year, he has lost an employee of nine years; therefore, when he retires next June he will not have anyone with one year of experience in that office. Emter added he normally assesses in October, but now Colette would be in the office while he is out assessing since they are short staffed. Emter stated he advertised for a Deputy Tax Director so his salary line in his budget would need to be increased by \$6,640, education/training increase of \$1,200, and travel and per diem increase of \$800. Emter added he has two applicants thus far, but the position is still open. Emter noted the position would start at \$22.00/hour with a \$0.50 increase after the six month probationary period, and then to full deputy scale after the employee is certified. Emter added if the work does not get done right in his office, the county Treasurer and Auditor will not have as many dollars to spend.

The board discussed the overtime budget request of 300 hours from Emergency Manager/911 Coordinator, Carmen Reed. Commissioner Entze stated he felt 100 hours of overtime would be more than sufficient. Commissioner Scheurer agreed 300 hours was excessive.

Commissioner Gunsch stated it should be moved down to 100 hours from 300 hours.

Next the board reviewed the Building Improvements, Building Maintenance, Retirement—County Share, Examination Fees, Sheriff, Risk Management, and the Miscellaneous funds. Commissioner Gunsch discussed the donation of \$10,000/year for 10 years to Sakakawea Medical Center and stated this is taxpayers' dollars the county is spending. Gunsch didn't feel that if the county needed to raise taxes, donating to the private sector would be the right thing to do. Chairman Murray stated the board can see how things fall into place down the road and look at donating at a later time. Commissioner Entze stated the county has been blessed with beautiful winters, but that will come to an end sometime and the county's expenditures will rise. The board agreed to leave the donation out of the 2016 budget.

The board discussed the mill levy requests from political subdivisions. Commissioner Gunsch stated the Water Resource District requested an additional 18% in tax dollars and recommended bringing the budget down to the \$180,500 that they requested last year. Gunsch added it bothers him the amount of money political subdivisions have in savings and they are still requesting additional taxpayer dollars. Commissioner Entze stated that is why the board met tonight, to review the budget one last time because pennies turn into dollars.

Auditor Brost stated due to legislative changes this year, political subdivisions will be required to furnish the county with a financial statement and the county will know what they have in savings. Brost added there were a few levies that had increased by quite a bit for 2016, such as: Mercer County Water Resource District, 18%, Mercer County Fair Board, 18%, Mercer County Ambulance, 49%, and the McLean Mercer Regional Library, 9%. Commissioner Scheurer stated some of the tax dollars the Ambulance district receives goes to Riverdale for that taxing area.

The board discussed several more budgets. They decreased County Road's utilities down to \$35,000, 911 salary, social security, and retirement—county share, increased Health Insurance by \$200,000, decreased County Agent travel and Per Diem by \$5,000 and Education/Training by \$250, and reviewed the Weed Board budget.

The board recessed at 5:40 PM.

The board reconvened at 6:00 PM.

Chairman Murray called the Public Hearing on the Mercer County Property Tax Levy Increase to order. Murray stated this is something the board does not enjoy doing, but they have the responsibility to keep the county going and that is why they are proposing an increase.

With 40 constituents in attendance, the board heard public comments from several property owners on the proposed tax increase. Commissioner Tveit stated the cost of doing business has gone up and 80% of the budget is employee salaries, where the other 20% is utilities. Commissioner Tveit added he feels the department heads do a great job scrutinizing their budgets. Commissioner Scheurer stated the board held a budget review prior to the public hearing and made a lot of cuts as they went through it. Scheurer added the levy increase does not have anything to do with the Expansion/Remodel of the Courthouse and there are a lot of expenses the county does not have control over but has to pay for, such as health insurance, social services, inmate medical, etc. Commissioner Gunsch stated he is not trying to make excuses, but the county has not increase the mill levy in three years and everything else has gone up. Commissioner Tveit stated on a \$200,000 house taxpayers may see an increase up to \$36.00 per year, and on a quarter of land they may see an increase of up to \$9.00 or \$10.00.

Auditor Brost stated the mill levy would increase by 1.67 mills if the county went with a full 5% increase. The amount of increase will not be determined until the county receives the utility figures from the state and the mill levy is set.

There being no further business, on motion duly made and second, the meeting was adjourned at 7:22 PM CDT. The next regular meeting of the commission will be October 7, 2015 at 9:00 AM CT in the courtroom of the Mercer County Courthouse, Stanton, North Dakota.

Approved: _____
Gary Murray, Chairman

Attest: _____
Shana L. Brost, Auditor