

County Budget Calls for Increase in Garbage Fees

By Pam Baker

In stark contrast to previous sessions when budgets were hotly debated line item by line item, four budgets for fiscal year 2001-2002 were passed this Tuesday with little fanfare and in less than thirty minutes. The budget includes a hike in the county's garbage collection rate.

County Manager Carol Silva asked for a slight increase in garbage fees from \$90.60 a year per household to \$95. Instead, the commission raised the fees to \$104 a year, on Commissioner Joe Manning's suggestion, to slow depletion of reserve funds. The new rate will generate \$128,372 that will add nothing to reserves and still leaves the Solid Waste Department operating in the red.

"We checked the fees in other Georgia counties and the cheapest we could find was in Cusseta at ten dollars a month," said Charles Buland, route coordinator in the Solid Waste Department. The approved increase in Harris County raises the rate from \$7.55 a month to \$8.67. The increase will appear on 2002 property tax bills and are

payable on the same due date.

CONSCIOUS OF controlling costs to prevent the need to raise rates again in the near future, the commission struck \$70,000 for a new backhoe from the proposed budget, opting instead to spend \$5,000 to repair the one 1995 John Deere backhoe the county currently owns.

The general budget totals \$10.4 million. Adjustments of \$28,000 were made to the budget from the first draft as corrections only. There is no increase in property taxes.

THE APPROVED small funds budget had only one increase from the original draft of \$6500 that reflected an error in the calculation of emergency 911 salaries and payroll taxes. The commission also voted to pass its fiscal agent duties for the Communities in Schools program to the Board of Education at the earliest opportunity. The program is projected to cost the county slightly over \$100,000 in 2002. Commissioners say they want to transfer the program as soon as possible and jettison the

expense, but that they may have to wait until 2003 to prevent causing audit problems and interfering with the Board's grant applications this school year.

THE WATER WORKS budget projects revenue of \$2.7 million and expenditures of \$2.3 million with no increase in water rates.

The budgets take effect July 1. Silva says the budgets passed more easily this time around because the commissioners worked hard to understand the numbers early in the process and strive to reach effective solutions to disagreements in an expedient manner. "I don't need antacids as much as I used to," she says

Commissioners Concede; Adopt State Ordinance

By Pam Baker

In the end, it seems, the state always gets its way. The Harris County commission defeated the Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Ordinance in the June 5th regular session only to reinstate it in the June 19th session. Judging by the grumbling, the only thing commissioners

receive funds from the Department of Natural Resources. Further, citizens would have to seek permits from the state office which could be a lengthy and tedious process. He also warned that state enforcers were "less likely to work with local people and wouldn't look after the county like we do."

"As much as I hate to give in