

**Here is a link to a Daily News article dated 7-22-2013**

**<http://www.nwfdailynews.com/local/sheriff-seeks-4-7-million-budget-increase-1.175794?tc=cr>**

**HERE IS THE FULL RESPONSE BY SHERIFF ASHLEY GIVEN TO THE DAILY NEWS ON 2013 BUDGET QUESTIONS**

Hi Kari,

I received your questions (**in bold**) and have answered them below. In order to try and prevent the pitting of opposing views from becoming personal, I have copied the County Commissioners and County Administrator my answer to your questions. In addition, our office will post these responses on our Web-site and Facebook whenever you run the story.

Thank you for your questions and helping us inform your readers. If you should need additional information please don't hesitate to call.

- **Are you still requesting the full \$4.7 million budget increase from the county? If not, how much?**

Yes, this budget represents what I and my staff have established as the minimum required to provide a reasonable level of public safety service in Okaloosa County. This need is predicated on a 14% increase in calls for service, the return of record numbers of tourist to our beaches and a rise in violent crime of over 40%. These challenges, coupled with the expanded SRO program, Deputies for the FWBMC Behavioral Health Unit and Ben Gordon Supervised Visitation Centers cannot be adequately addressed without the necessary resources. At the same time I understand that the County Administrator and the Board of County Commissioners are facing a challenge and I will work with them to ensure that whatever funds are appropriated are spent in the

best interests of the citizens of Okaloosa County and our visitors. I do support the County Administrator's recommendation to generate much needed revenue and having reviewed the county budget concerns for a number of years I am confident that his analysis is correct.

- **What will that be spent on? (SROs, 3 percent salary hike, FRS, vehicle replacement ...)**

This budget increase includes a 3% state mandated increase in employer contributions to the FRS which amounts to \$600,000 and a 3% cost of living adjustment for our employees which amounts to \$600,000. This increase request also includes \$2,200,000 for the expanded SRO program that will secure our county's schools. \$1,200,000 is included for capital investments such as patrol vehicles, a prisoner transportation bus, mobile computer terminals, and copier replacements. In addition to these items our operational cost continue to increase as the state continues to reduce its contribution to local governments. One of many examples of these increased cost includes specific crime lab work which is no longer performed by the FDLE which our office must now outsource to private crime labs for analysis. The cost of this analysis is borne by our agency rather than the state or it goes unperformed.

- **The county's proposed 2013-14 budget has allocated a \$2 million increase for the Sheriff's Office. How would that affect the Sheriff's Office? What will you take out of the mix if faced with getting less than the \$4.7 million requested?**

While I appreciate the County Administrators recognition of our budget predicament his recommendation for a 2 million dollar increase still does not meet the needs of the Okaloosa County Citizens we serve. If this budget request is not funded we will again have some very tough decisions to make as to how we continue to provide a reasonable level of public safety services to our residents and visitors. If not approved we may have little or no traffic enforcement units, environmental enforcement units, reduced beach and marine enforcement capabilities, nor any specialized street crime interdiction units. In addition there will be a reduction in the many routine services the agency provides such as employment fingerprinting, funeral escorts, shortened hours in

our walk in civil process and records services and more. The requested provision of deputies to the Hospital Behavioral Health Unit whom will now receive indigent Baker Act and Marchant Act patients in the wake of Bridgeway's departure as well as deputies for the Ben Gordon Supervised Visitation Centers certainly can't be realized without the added resources. I am not willing to speculate at this time as to what parts will go unfunded should the BOCC choose not to approve our budget. It is important to remember that just 9 months ago we eliminated 18 positions and sent 14 needed employees home without jobs and thus we are not unaccustomed to hard decisions. These type of reductions do hurt our ability to address, reduce, and prevent crime in our community.

- **Why is it important for the OCSO to get all of the \$4.7 million?**

It is important because our population, visitors, calls for service, and crime continued to increase while we have been decreasing the resources needed to meet these challenges. The Sheriff's Office has reduced its budget by over 5 million dollars or 19% over the last 5 budget cycles while our calls for service have increased by 30% during the same time period. It is important because we have not received any manpower authorizations to service an annual tourist population of nearly 800,000 visitors and because violent crime in our county has increased by over 40% in the last two years alone. It is important because our cost reduction efforts have been overcome by the reality of increased operational cost, a constant demand for increased services by citizens who expect and demand a quality law enforcement product and a significant increase in violent criminal activity.

- **What is it you want the average taxpayer to know?**

I would want our taxpayers to know that the tax dollars invested in the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office are being spent wisely and efficiently on their behalf and that they receive a good "return" on this investment in so many measurements. If we examined statistics showing the number of arrests for violent felonies committed in our county, documentation of crime prevention measures provided, or the many testimonials from people who were not victimized by criminals as a

result of our deputies' actions, the number of total years in prison being served by criminals arrested by our deputies, thereby keeping them from victimizing other county residents; I know what they would see is a law enforcement agency made up of professionals committed to ensuring that our laws are upheld and our quality of life preserved. We post calls for service on our agency web-site and so much more and these are but just a few of the benefits the sheriff's office provides to the citizens of Okaloosa County.

I would also want our citizens to know that despite these challenges their Sheriff's Office is recognized as one of the premiere law enforcement operations in the state which is evidenced by the following achievements: 2011 Florida's Crime Prevention Officer of the Year (Ashley Bailey), 2012 Florida's School Resource Officer of the Year (Sgt. Gary Venuti), and 2013 Florida Region 1 Narcotics Officer of the Year (Chad Rewis). Also, four of the ten Subject Matter Expert designations made by the Florida Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission in 2012 were Okaloosa County Deputies. I would want our citizens to know that during our recent Reaccreditation Assessment by the Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation Commission we were 100% fully compliant with all 268 professional standards which were met and exceeded while having two programs (crime prevention and public information) designated as noteworthy for their achievements.

- **A 10-percent millage hike and a 5-cent gas tax increase are on the table. What are your thoughts on those methods of raising revenue?**

I understand that the County Administrator and Board of County Commissioners face an insurmountable challenge in meeting the demands of our citizens unless revenues are increased. As elected officials we know that public demands require consensus however they are not without cost. I appreciate the County Administrator's courage in recommending increasing revenues because the easy path would have required him to do nothing.

(note to public: For additional information please visit the following links for both a more extensive Q&A on the budget and/or an extensive video with Sheriff Ashley)

<http://www.sheriff-okaloosa.org/wp-content/pdfs/reports-budget/2011/2013%20Budget%20Questions%20and%20Answers.pdf>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPPA5p8hbnE>