



## City Officials Struggle To Make Ends Meet

By [John Henley Jr.](#)

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Mayors and city councils throughout Arkansas are engaging in the ritual number-crunching and nail-biting that accompanies the annual budget process.

Some city officials work to have their budget process completed before the end of December.

"I don't like to run through January without a budget," said Thekla Wallis, mayor of Cave Springs.

Wallis said she hopes to have the city's budget before the council at the Dec. 13 meeting. If the budget is not ready by then, Wallis said, she will call a special meeting to approve it.

Revenue projections were estimated slightly higher than 2005 numbers, allowing for only minimal increases in expenditures, Wallis said. The Dollar General store has brought a slight increase in sales tax revenue.

The Police and Fire department budgets reflect increases in necessary areas, such as utilities, but no new personnel are being added.

"I wanted to add an animal control officer, but (the Cave Springs City Council) did not approve it," Wallis said.

The Little Flock City Council approved the 2006 budget at the Nov. 14 meeting, said Grace Fielding, court clerk and city secretary.

The town's 2006 budget didn't change much from 2005, Fielding said, showing a projected increase of \$131,784 in revenue. Most of that increase can be accounted for by a \$42,000 projected increase in county sales tax and a carryover from 2004 of \$100,000.

Fuel costs were estimated at a 76 percent increase, from \$17,000 to \$29,949, and legal costs were budgeted for a 50 percent increase, from \$10,000 to \$15,000. Other increases include

cost-of-living raises for employees, insurance costs and training fees for firefighters. No new employees were added, and no major equipment expenditures were budgeted.

The Little Flock council recently passed an ordinance prohibiting dangerous animals in the city limits. The city, however, does not currently have an animal control officer and did not approve one for 2006.

The Pea Ridge City Council approved the 2006 budget in a special meeting Nov. 16, said Mayor Jackie Crabtree.

Pea Ridge is projecting a 4.7 percent increase in revenue, but that is misleading because of the 2005 impact fee projection, Crabtree said. Last year was the first year Pea Ridge collected impact fees and the projected revenue was \$429,798. The 2006 projection is more accurate, based on the amount received in 2005, Crabtree said.

"Last year was our first year and we didn't know how much it was going to be," he said.

Almost 200 new homes were built in Pea Ridge in 2005, and Crabtree said he expects about the same level of growth in 2006. The impact fee projection is \$249,283 for 2006. The city charges an impact fee of \$2,149 before a certificate of occupancy is granted.

Lowell officials are far from through with their budget process, although Finance Director Mary Mason said she hopes to have the budget ready for the council by the Dec. 20 meeting.

A revenue increase of about \$200,000 is projected, Mason said, as a result of increases in sales tax revenue, business licenses, court fines and turnback funds.

The Lowell Police Department will add two officers and four cars, while the Fire Department budgeted for an additional firefighter in 2006. The police cars will be paid for through court fines, which Mason said have been consistently higher in 2005 than projected.

The park department will receive \$400,000 to improve 70 acres off Arkansas 264. Mason said, however, the \$400,000 is not new money but money carried over from improvement bonds for the septic tank effluent pumping system and park fund.

The Lowell City Council in May approved a 23-year bond project of \$3.3 million to fund the septic system and parks.