

Cummings: Clay County Commission to study revenue options

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By Beth Reese Cravey

Clay County Commission Chairman Travis Cummings ended 2010 by creating two task forces to study the county's most pressing need - declining revenues - and make recommendations by next summer.

One of the task forces will study how best to fund the county's capital improvements plan, which outlines infrastructure needs. The other task force will study the general budget and operating fund.

The committees will include commissioners and residents and their meetings will be open to the public, Cummings said.

In December, when the commission extended a two-year-old transportation impact fee moratorium for six more months to help the still-struggling housing industry, Cummings said commissioners needed to use that time to study their revenue options. Commissioners clearly had mixed feelings on the merits of the impact fee - opponents say it unfairly targets one industry - and if they ultimately vote to kill it altogether, money for roads will have to come from somewhere else.

The capital improvements plan task force will be chaired by Commissioner Wendell Davis, who will appoint up to seven Clay residents representing a "broad range of community interests," according to a memo Cummings issued.

The task force "will provide recommendations to the County Commission regarding appropriate types and levels of revenues and expenditures to meet future infrastructure and maintenance needs for Clay County." In the area of revenues, the task force will review, identify and discuss a broad range of revenue options, including consideration of, but not limited to, sales tax, gas tax and impact fees, according to the memo.

Cummings will chair the general fund/operating budget task force, which will analyze each county department to evaluate past, present and future spending levels. This will include the prioritization of the core county services, the memo said.

Also, the task force will review and discuss current and new revenue sources available that could fund county operations, including property taxes and utility, communication services and sales taxes. It will analyze and review constitutional officers' budget history and levels of service.

Davis and Cummings will serve as non-voting members of their respective task forces, and lead discussions at the monthly or bi-monthly meetings. Recommendations from both panels will be due by June 1.

beth.cravey@myclaysun.com

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