

Series of Split Votes Lead to Watauga Budget

Written by Gary Childers

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Very different opinions and a number of three to two votes, but finally one approved Watauga County's 2013-2014 budget. The basis of the sometimes heated differences of opinion stemmed from the issue of using tax dollars to fund non-profit organizations. In an effort to provide some perspective to the issue Commissioner Perry Yates shared the contents of a phone call he had received from one of the county's citizens, pointing out the conflicts of funding various non-profits. Commissioner Yates went on to share that he likes non-profits and supports many 501C-3s personally but input like this causes him to think the gentleman had a good point about the Commissioners responsibility to use citizens' tax dollars for things that benefit the entire county. During the budget development process most traditionally funded non-profits had their funding reduced or eliminated. In an effort to restore some of their funding and to help the Sheriff's department purchase additional equipment Commissioner Blust made a motion to take \$50,000 from the \$250,000 allocated to Smokey Mountain Center and redistribute that money to other agencies. Commissioner Kennedy strongly objected to reducing funding to the agency that provided assistance to citizens who needed mental health care. At that point Commissioners John Welch and Kennedy recommended that another budget work session be scheduled to determine how best to resolve these issues. That suggestion was not acted upon and the motion was approved by a three to two vote with Welch and Kennedy voting against. Commissioner Blust then moved to increase funding to Foscoe Community Center, Western Youth Network, Mountain Alliance, Hunger Coalition, and Green Valley Park by a total of \$13,300 and to increase the sheriff's department's funding by \$36,700. Following the passing of that motion, Commissioner Welch made a motion to take funds from several other areas and distribute them to the non-profits. That motion failed by a three to two vote with Miller, Yates, and Blust voting against.

The budget approved during Tuesday morning's regularly scheduled Commissioners' meeting totals \$55,857,586 which is an increase of \$1,243,596 (2.28%) from the current budget. No change was recommended in the current tax rate of 31.3 cents per \$100 of valuation.