

Groups waiting in limbo for funds

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GREENSBORO — When Partners Ending Homelessness came to Guilford County for funding this year, it was for the first time. The group knew it was a tight budget year, but it held out hope.

The \$30,000 it requested would go a long way toward helping people affected by the economic downturn and continued high unemployment.

"We seeing a lot more single-head-of-household families and an increase in domestic violence," initiative Director Jehan Benton-Clark said. "The funding is definitely needed more now."

But when County Manager Brenda Jones Fox presented her recommended budget, it didn't include any new funding for community organizations.

A number of nonprofits and community-based organizations had their funding cut or eliminated completely this year. Partners Ending Homelessness is one of a number of groups whose funding is instead in a sort of limbo as the budget process moves forward.

From their earliest budget discussions this year, county commissioners talked about groups and causes they wanted to "put in a bucket" for further consideration before the board has to pass a budget June 30. Those things — including the Gibsonville library, arts groups and nonprofits such as Partners Ending Homelessness — are all waiting to hear their fates.

Fox and her staff have been "looking under every rock," she said, but are still tasked with cutting \$17.2 million from the budget to avoid a tax increase. That makes putting any money back in the budget difficult.

"Obviously we had a lot of really good and very interesting applications," she said. "But based on the revenue dollars that we have and the mandated services that we had to fund, we decided that the best thing to do was not to recommend any new ones."

Commissioners Chairman Melvin "Skip" Alston said the board will be going back to that bucket of undecided items at their June 3 meeting.

"I've sent out a memo to all of the commissioners asking them to feel free to contact any department and the county manager to ask them any questions they have or any concerns about any item on that bucket list," he said.

"If they get all their questions answered and it's the consensus of the majority of the board to adopt the budget that night, I hope we'll go ahead and adopt a budget June 3," he said. "If not we'll pass it on June 17."

It could take longer than that. Alston said it wouldn't be unprecedented for the commissioners to schedule a special meeting to pass the budget closer to the June 30 deadline if at least six of them can't agree.

Alston said he has asked the county manager to come to the June 3 meeting ready to answer all the commissioners' funding questions.

"I want her to be prepared at that time to say where she will get that money from," he said.

"I want her to be prepared for if we have to fund everything and if not then a property tax increase would have to be considered."

Alston said he won't support a budget that raises taxes. He said he doesn't think it's necessary.

"That's not to say that any other six commissioners won't come up with a budget and vote for a tax increase," he said. "It's whatever the will of the board is and not my will."

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