Proposed County Budget Puts Greene County Extension Programs in Jeopardy

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – The budget proposed by members of the Greene County Commission cuts the annual allocation to the Greene County Extension Council to the state minimum of $10,000 for 2012. That reduction puts the local office, which provided educational programs for over 25,000 people during 2010, in jeopardy according to Greg Whitlock, chairman of the Greene County Extension Council.

“Our best projection is that with this current reduction, the office will have enough money to operate for another 12 to 14 months,” said Whitlock. “A cut of this size will cause a significant reduction in services here in Greene County. For two years we have pulled from our reserves to fulfill our mission after the Commission cut our budget by 72 percent.”

University of Missouri fully funds the salaries, benefits, training, and computer support, for the five specialists headquartered in Greene County. County funds are used to pay for two administrative assistants and office expenses like the telephone, copies, office supplies, some postage and travel for specialists conducting programs.

“Under normal budget situations, when the County Commission was allocating $100,000 to the local Extension office, we could say that for every $1 the County Commission allocates, the University of Missouri invests $15 back in to this county,” said David Burton, civic communication specialist and county program director for Greene County Extension. “The last two years the Commission has not fully funded our office but the University has kept their promise to offer services.”

In 2009, the County allocated $95,000 to the publically elected Greene County Extension Council. The local office also generated about $25,000 as part of an annual office budget of $115,000, which was still a cut from previous years.

In 2010, the County Commission voted to allocate $27,000 to the local office as a savings measure and the local office began to draw heavily from reserve funds, even after making cuts. The Commission repeated the allocation of $27,000 (a 72% percent cut from previous years) with the 2011 budget also.
By state law, every first class county funds an Extension office with minimum of $10,000. That amount was set in 1961 and would actually need to be $72,000 now to have the same buying power.

“The local Greene County Extension Council has instituted many cuts and revenue generating ideas over the past two or three years in an effort to balance the budget,” said Whitlock.

For example, the Greene County Extension Council cut a full-time youth assistant position Jan. 1, 2010, has eliminated 1.5 secretarial jobs over the previous three years, and has not budgeted or given a raise to the administrative assistants in three years. Mileage payments for travel have been reduced below the IRS rate, materials are rationed, and postage has been greatly reduced.

Educational programs at the Greene County Extension Center draw people from other counties in to Greene County where they spend money and then take what they have learned back home to improve their own communities. The regional specialists in the Greene County office conduct programs that impact the entire region but they also do good work for Greene County. Closing that office will mean that those specialists will either be moved to other counties in the state or their jobs will be eliminated,” said Jay Chism, interim regional director for MU Extension. “From a regional perspective, the Greene County office is one of our flagships so a suggested cut of this magnitude is especially troubling for our organization, our staff and the people we serve. It could also lead to some of our larger conference and events being moved to other counties.”

There are also some key budget meetings coming up this week.

- First, the Greene County Extension Council meetings at 5:30 p.m., Monday, Nov. 28 at the Springfield-Greene County Botanical Center. An agenda is posted under the “plans and reports” section of the extension website at http://extension.missouri.edu/greene.

- The Greene County Commission will conduct a budget hearing with representatives of Greene County Extension at 1:30 p.m., Dec. 1 at the Commission offices, 933 N. Robberson, Springfield.

Additional information about the impact of the budget cut is available on the Greene County Extension website under the “plans and reports” section of http://extension.missouri.edu/greene.

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