

Zoo, Exploration Place & Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition graphs and data

By Karl Peterjohn

How much property tax money should be spent on culture, recreation, and GWEDC? How much property tax should be spent on core county public safety functions? These are part of the challenges that Sedgwick County commissioners must face going into the 2016 budget process.

During the May 13, 2015 public discussion over the agreements that the county has with the Sedgwick County Zoo, Exploration Place, and Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition (GWEDC), the budget timing issue was solved at the county end of these agreements. These contractual problems tied the commission's budget authority and locked in future year budgets if notice was not provided to these three organizations prior to June 1 each year. That needed to be corrected. The dates are being moved from June 1 to September 1, after the county's budget process is completed.

The contractual issue could put the commission in the position of having to cut key county public safety services, while at the same time being contractually committed to an increase in funding for some of these cultural and recreational functions, or raising property taxes. I want to thank the board members from these groups for their assistance in making these changes and correcting these contractual problems.

All three of these organizations, as well as 14 other county-funded groups, receive property tax funds. These 17 organizations are funded with the county's 29.47 mill property tax. None of the funding is coming from fees, grants, or other revenue sources.

Sedgwick County is still awaiting the outcome of the 2015 Kansas legislative session. The legislature could make changes that could negatively impact Sedgwick County. This increases county uncertainty concerning budget, fiscal, and revenue realities as we prepare for the 2016 county budget during the next few months.

The idea of raising the county's property tax mill levy at a time when this community continues to suffer from layoffs going back to the 2008-09 great recession is not a realistic option either.

However, there is a great deal of confusion about county spending. That is why I had county staff prepare detailed graphs showing the data and spending trends. These graphs and data were presented at the May 13, 2015 county commission meeting. If you are interested in these programs, the spending and tax trends in our county, or county fiscal trends in general, [please examine these slides](#).