



NEWS RELEASE

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Beaufort makes most of limited budgets, still provides new and expanded services to residents

Through strong financial management and City Council leadership, Beaufort found creative ways to provide exceptional services in 2009-2010 without extra money.

The Beaufort City Council recently approved its FY2011 budget and, in a look back at FY2010, City Manager Scott Dadson and his team showcased a detailed look at the City's strong financial standing despite a national recession.

"Looking back, it was a pretty good year for us in the City, considering the economy being the worst it's been in 80 years. We saw our general fund grow by approximately \$850,000 while doing amazing things to make Beaufort a better place to live," Dadson said.

Among the encouraging signs: Building permits are up in 2010 compared to 2009, due in large part to better enforcement of permits for renovation work. Business license fees are stable – which is better than seeing them decrease, Dadson noted.

"The City's financial position, which was solid at the start of the year, is even stronger at year end," said Mack Cook, Beaufort's finance director. "The City's reduced its debt by \$2.2 million, including retiring several years early \$675,000 in outstanding loans, which saves taxpayers a lot of debt service payments in future years.

"Without adding new debt, the City spent \$524,000 for major stormwater improvements and added three police patrol cars for \$78,000. The City's ending operating cash balance remains virtually unchanged from the beginning of the year at \$7.6 million," Cook said.

"Between now and December, the City will expend \$3 million more than it takes in and starting the fiscal year with this cash position allows the City to maintain services without resorting to short-term borrowing, while keeping sufficient cash on hand should it be necessary to recover from a major storm.

Much of what the City has been able to accomplish this past year started with the outsourcing of the residential solid waste and recycling, Cook said. For FY 2010 the City's Solid Waste operation netted \$103,000 in positive cash flow – even after the Solid Waste Fund repaid \$178,000 in outstanding equipment loans and \$55,000 in advances from the General fund. This compares to a loss in FY 2009 from Solid Waste operations of \$77,000, Cook said.

"This reversal of fortunes allowed the City to redirect funding to enhancing the appearance of our neighborhood, sidewalks, curbs and streets while building a reserve for the replacement of the roll carts and recycling bins," Cook said.

"The City wasn't going to sit passively by as our citizens' property values declined in this national recession. The City took action in improving how neighborhoods look, and in doing so hopefully helped maintain property values," Cook said.

Expanded services – made possible partly by outsourcing work to the private sector -- include those increased efforts to clean up the city and to maintain parks and open space. Also, the City brought in outside experts to review police and fire department practices.

Over the past year, City staff, residents and volunteers collected more than 312 tons of debris from across the City, creating a more attractive community while also improving fire safety by removing all that flammable material, Dadson said.

The clean-up was possible through the dedication of several Neighborhood Associations, residents and volunteers, City staff and the efforts of Waste Pro, the company that provides garbage, trash and recycling collection.

In the past 10 months, Beaufort residents, City crews and volunteers removed 312 tons of "stuff" from residential properties in Beaufort, eliminating fuel for fires and cleaning up the City. To put that in perspective, 312 tons is equivalent to about 42 elephants, or two blue whales, or eight fully-loaded tractor trailer rigs, or 24 fully-loaded dump trucks, or 312 VW Beetles.

The totals from nine neighborhood clean-ups include:

- 197 tons of trash including white goods, bulky waste, lumber, and metals
- 104 tons of trees limbs, shrubs, branches and yard debris
- 11 tons of paint, tires, combustible liquids and items never indentified
- 23 vacant lots have been cleared of overgrown vegetation, improving public safety and reducing fire risk.

Under the City's solid waste removal contract with Waste Pro, in effect since August 2009, the City has focused on four key areas to improve life for residents, to improve the looks of the City, and to improve fire safety issues: garbage, recycling, yard debris and bulk goods.

Pro-active, prevention-based efforts by the Beaufort Fire Department and Beaufort Police Department earned "best practice" kudos from a recent comprehensive study conducted in 2009-2010 by the International City/County Management Association for Beaufort.

Those effort help save lives and reduce loss of property, ICMA experts said. The reports addressed strengths of both departments as well as areas where improvement is needed.

"We brought ICMA and their experts in to take a close look at the services we provide in public safety, and to help us identify how we can make an already good thing better," Dadson said. "The reports indicate we've made good progress but still have room to improve, and we now have a new roadmap for that improvement."

A majority of law enforcement calls in Beaufort originated with police officers, according to the ICMA study.

"We have 76 percent of our call volume being officer initiated," Dadson said earlier this year. "That's a big part of our pro-active community policing effort. Our officers are on the street, they're on the roads, they're keeping an eye out for suspicious people and behavior, and that helps make Beaufort a safer place."

Police Chief Matt Clancy earned a "best practice" commendation from ICMA for using "community resource teams" to shift police teams to focus on particular geographic areas when problems arise.

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