



Hello Hamilton County

December 24, 2007

E-News for Hamilton County citizens and employees

Quote of the week: ***"People who work together will win, whether it be against complex football defenses or the problems of modern society."***

~Vince Lombardi

Hamilton County's 2008 Budget Approved



The 2008 county budget was approved by the County Commission on Wednesday, December 19. The all funds budget, which includes restricted revenue sources such as the Metropolitan Sewer District, totals approximately \$1.0 billion. The general fund, which supports the courts, sheriff, and general governmental activities, totals approximately \$271 million.

To build the budget, fiscal officers within departments and analysts from the budget office reviewed thousands of budget line items across the entire county organization. Numerous budget meetings were held with each department over the past four months in building the budget. To balance the budget, very difficult decisions and shared sacrifice was required of all functions of county government.

As described in the County Administrator's presentation on the recommended budget in October, revenues have not kept pace with inflation. This "structural" imbalance resulted in a \$35 million general fund budget gap for 2008. County Administrator Patrick Thompson, in conjunction with all department heads and elected officials crafted a proposal to the Commissioners that balanced the budget. The county website (www.HamiltonCountyOhio.gov) provides detailed documents associated with the 2008 budget. After several public hearings in the community, the County Commission made adjustments to the County Administrator's proposal on December 19 and approved the 2008 county budget.

Key elements of the 2008 budget:

- There are no new taxes, though several minor fees were increased.
- Approximately 107 general fund positions were eliminated.
- Several service consolidations are reflected in the new budget, including the merger of the office of the County Administrator, Administrative Services, and the Board of County Commissioners into one department; the consolidation of HCJFS' Building Services into County Facilities; the consolidation of HCJFS' Personnel functions into Hamilton County's Human Resources Department.
- Funding to several outside agencies was eliminated or reduced.
- Except for salary adjustments provided for in union contracts, there are no general salary increases in 2008.
- Several public safety initiatives began in 2006 were terminated, including housing county inmates in Butler County and the Sheriff's Patrols in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood in Cincinnati.

Work on the 2009 budget will start in the second quarter of 2008. It is anticipated that balancing the 2009 will not be as painful, but tough revenue and expenditure decisions will still be needed.



Multiple Organizations Work Together To Pilot an Innovative Program To Assist Foster Children's Success in School

When it comes to school, kids in foster care face daunting challenges — obstacles that put many of them months behind their classmates in academic achievement. Some become frustrated and drop out.

"So many of them fall through the cracks," said Jessica Parks, a supervisor in Children's Services Ongoing. "Some don't get past the ninth grade."

In January 2008, the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services (HCJFS) and Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) will begin to implement a 3-year pilot project, called "Kids in School Rule," to assist foster kids. They're taking a number of steps to help them overcome serious issues related to family disruptions and frequent moves.

At least 100 students in 22 Cincinnati Public Schools — elementary through high school — will participate in the project. Organizers say they know of no other program of its type in the country.

"Educational opportunity and academic success are critically important to the long-term futures of youth," states the Memorandum of Understanding that guides the project.

The memorandum notes that the project depends upon cooperation of its primary partners and other participants. Primary partners include HCJFS, CPS, Hamilton County Juvenile Court, the Guardian ad Litem Division of the Hamilton County Office of the Public Defender, ProKids, the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati and Children's Home of Cincinnati.

Sarah Mangan, a Children's Services worker in Parks' unit, will serve as a liaison to the schools. She will assist caseworkers in monitoring educational progress and outcomes for children in the pilot project.

"A lot of times teachers do not know who to contact if they run into trouble," Mangan said, adding that she already has started building relationships with school principals and social workers. Mangan will work with a single contact at each school.

Cincinnati Public Schools will provide information to HCJFS and other partners for progress reports, coordinate educational and case plan services in an effort to improve outcomes and avoid school disruptions for students, and perform other responsibilities.

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Sarah Mangan and Jessica Parks of HCJFS Children's Services are working with the "Kids in School Rule" pilot program to help foster children succeed in school.



Pilot Program, continued from p. 2.

Legal Aid will develop and lead training on educational law and advocacy and the importance of school achievement and high school graduation. Stakeholders ranging from the primary partners to foster parents, kinship caregivers and children in agency care will receive the training. Legal Aid also will advocate for interventions and supports that will strengthen academic achievement and push for transition planning to prepare youth for emancipation and self-sufficiency.



Juvenile Court will track and review reports from HCJFS (or the guardian ad litem or ProKids) that include information about educational progress, services and outcomes. The court has developed an extensive checklist for each student that includes items such as attendance, changes in living arrangement, discipline and the role of a child’s caregiver in education. This will help guide magistrates as they review cases.

“We’re very excited to be able to have coordination to improve outcomes,” said Carla Guenther, deputy chief magistrate for Juvenile Court. “One of the goals is to increase stability in residential and educational placements. The kids just bounce from school to school to school, both nationally and locally.”

She added that a child loses three to six months of academic achievement each time she or he moves.

“We’re extremely excited because we’ve seen enough research to document that school is a most powerful influencer on future outcomes — not only educational outcomes, but in areas such as the criminal system and substance abuse,” said Elaine Fink, managing attorney of the Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio.

She noted that the pilot could result in lower truancy, less interruptions in school days for students, more promotions to higher grade levels, more graduates and — ultimately — less substance abuse, crime and other problems.

“We have had very good feedback from the schools,” Parks said. “They’re excited about having a single point of contact. And we’re excited about working in partnership with the schools to improve outcomes for our foster kids.”



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Hamilton County Department of Environmental Services Gives Back to the Community Through Holiday Gift Drive



HCDOES employees deliver gifts for children who are in the HCJFS Children's Services system.

The Hamilton County Department of Environmental Services (HCDOES) staff opened their hearts to help less fortunate children this holiday season with their ninth annual holiday gift drive.

In the gift drive, which was organized by the Wellness Committee, HCDOES partnered with the Hamilton County Jobs and Family Services (HCJFS) to provide donations of gifts and toys to neglected and abused children in the Children's Services system.

A Christmas tree was erected in the main lobby at HCDOES with handmade ornaments that had

gift ideas for the children. The gift tree had an outstanding response as HCDOES staff members and Public Health department employees took the ornaments from the tree and purchased gifts to donate to the children.

"People really seemed to embrace the idea," said Dawn Mays, testing and evaluation coordinator. "Our neighbors upstairs in the Public Health department got into the act and made very generous donations."

On December 13, HCDOES employees dressed in holiday cheer, paraded across the street to personally hand deliver the

more than 100 presents they had collected to the HCJFS staff.

"This event has been very successful in the past, but thanks to generous staff members, this was our best year yet," said Alberta Mellon, wellness committee member. "Staff members went above and beyond the suggested items, donating bags overflowing with toys and items for the children."

Thanks to the generosity of HCDOES and Public Health employees, more children in the HCJFS Children's Services system will have a presents under their Christmas trees and a brighter holiday season.



Face-to-Face Forum for Vendors and Government Purchasing Agents

Hamilton County's Office of Small Business Development is sponsoring a 2008 Face-to-Face forum on January 18, 2008.

The event is an opportunity for small, minority, and women-owned businesses that are registered with the Small Business Program to meet with purchasing agents of various public entities. They can discuss their business and learn more about the goods and services that the agencies buy.

Government Purchasing Agents may attend at no cost, and they should register by January 7th. The fee for vendors is \$35, and they should register by January 10th.

To receive a registration form, please contact Bernice Walker at 513-946-4330 or e-mail: Bernice.Walker@hamilton-co.org.



A Caring Family is Needed!

Taren
Born April 1994

This strong and intelligent teen enjoys school and does well in her classes. Taren participates in an IEP at school, but is academically on-target. Her favorite class is math, because she enjoys the challenge it presents.

Taren is a member of her community basketball team, which she enjoys. Like many pre-teen girls, she also likes listening to music and practicing her singing and dancing skills. When she grows up, this sweet, bold young woman wants to be a cosmetologist.

Taren needs help with the way she expresses anger and aggression and improving her behavior. A strong father figure who can model appropriate ways to communicate feelings would be beneficial, as would a family who will support her in ongoing therapy. Medication will be a part of Taren's life, and she will need help coping with separation and loss.

**To learn more about Taren and others available for adoption,
Please call 513-632-6366 or visit www.hcadopt.org.**



Hamilton County Sets Adoption Record Through Increased Recruitment Efforts

Hamilton County's Department of Job and Family Services set a new record for adoptions on December 17th, when the number of county adoptions reached 127 in 2007.

The county attributes this year's record pace — the previous record was 124 in 1997 — to more intense and focused recruitment efforts and an increase in public awareness.

"Our adoption workers have really worked hard this year to make sure our children have a place to call home," said Moira Weir, director of the Department, which has about 250 children available for adoption. "They banged on a lot of doors, organized many recruitment events, followed up on every lead . . . They did everything possible to find a permanent situation for our available children. Also, child welfare has drawn a lot of attention this year, and we think many members of the community stepped up to answer what is a very prominent community challenge."

The county conducts targeted community recruit-



ment efforts that concentrate on groups of available children, as well as general recruitment efforts to create awareness. Among the tactics used to promote adoption:

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- Trips to Bengals games and "spa" days where prospective parents meet children
- Advertisements on the sides of Metro buses
- Monthly media releases about specific children available for adoption
- A mass adoption day to increase awareness of adoption

Also, the county hired six new recruiters and one new manager this year and assigned most of the recruiters to focus on child-specific recruiting, which is the search for someone with a connection to an available child.

Those interested in adopting or becoming foster parents can learn more at www.hcadopt.org or www.hcfoster.org, or by calling 513-632-6366 or e-mailing adoption@jfs.hamilton-co.org.



Please post "Hello Hamilton County," so everyone can see what's going on!

Hello Hamilton County is published twice each month. It is designed to inform citizens and employees about news and events related to Hamilton County government and our community in general. You can find current and archived editions on the County's web pages. If you have questions, suggestions, or article submissions, please contact Laura Maus or Eric Stuckey.

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