No tax increase in proposed Pickens budget

New ambulance fee being considered

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Pickens County's 2012-13 budget has taken another step toward final approval and could include a new fee for residents who request ambulance service but then refuse transport to a hospital or other facility.

County Council has approved on second reading the more than $52.3 million budget, said County Administrator Chappell Hurst.

A public hearing and final reading on the budget are expected June 18, Hurst said.

The budget goes into effect July 1.

Hurst said the budget doesn't include a tax increase. If given final approval, it would be the seventh consecutive year that Pickens County has had a budget with no tax increase, he said.

Hurst said a proposed new fee the county is looking at would be for residents who call and request ambulance service to come to their location but who then refuse to be transported to a hospital or other facility.

He said it's to cut down on unnecessary calls.

"A lot of people, they'll just call us to check their blood pressure, or either somebody can't get out of a chair and they just call us to get them up," Hurst said.

"It ties up an ambulance that might otherwise be on a serious call and therefore it causes us to need additional ambulances," he said.

Hurst said the fee would be $100 per incident. He said there isn't a fee currently.

"We're about the only one that I know (of that) did not charge a fee," Hurst said, describing what other ambulance services charge.

He said the county is also looking at a possible fee increase for municipalities for their inmates who are held by the county at the Pickens County Detention Center.

It has been $12 per inmate per day and would go to $24 per inmate per day, Hurst said.

He said the increase would probably mean a total of about $4,000 a year in additional money for the county from all the municipalities collectively.

"Over the last 20 years we've had increases in food costs and electricity and clothing and all of the supplies that the inmates use, and so this is basically just an attempt to recoup some of those costs," Hurst said. "It's not to make money."

The fee increase for municipalities and the new ambulance fee would both be effective July 1 if approved.

Hurst said the budget also covers increased expenses for fuel costs, health insurance and retirement contributions for county employees due to state requirements. It reflects the continued reduced level of aid to subdivisions, which is money from the state, he said.

The budget provides funding for a new ambulance crew in Easley, new fire stations in the Pickens and Liberty rural fire districts, centralization of magistrate court offices and the demolition of parts of the former Liberty Middle and Dacusville Elementary schools that the county is acquiring from the school district, Hurst said.