



CITY OF BIGGS

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March 31, 2010

Dear Resident:

Your City Council has **good news** for you about police services. After months of cost analysis, discussions with various other agencies and contract negotiations, an agreement is now reached with Gridley for continued services by the Gridley-Biggs Police Department. The new agreement continues the current service for two years while savings Biggs over \$250,000 per year. Negotiations for future years will start in 2011.

Nothing is more important to us than public safety. At the same time, it is absolutely essential that we live within our means and begin to rebuild financial reserves. Public safety costs are clearly our dominant expense, and have been far exceeding the City's revenues from taxes.

Reducing our police costs from the high \$600,000 level down to approximately \$400,000 saves the taxpayers of this City \$400 per household. This means other City services are better able to continue, and there will be less pressure on electric rates.

If police costs return to a significantly higher cost when the new contract expires, the City will be in the situation of cutting services, finding a different way to provide public safety, or looking for some way to increase revenue.

We invite residents to make their thoughts on this subject known to us. **Please fill out the enclosed survey form and return it to City Hall.** This is simply an opinion survey, not a vote.

Roger L. Frith, Mayor

More Information for You

In light of recent meetings, news coverage and letters about the Biggs police contract issue, we'd like to share additional information. We also want to correct a number of inaccurate statements that have been recently made.

Biggs has a consistently depleting City treasury. In the past seven years, City reserves have dropped an average of about \$150,000 per year. This cannot be allowed to continue.

Revenues from property and other taxes have remained fairly stable. Public works construction projects are paid by grants and loans. Water, sewer, electricity and garbage are paid by the customers who use the services.

Costs for fire protection and road maintenance have risen fairly slowly. City employee salaries and benefits have been conservative and fairly stable, especially as compared to those of other local and state government agencies.

The problem? Biggs' cost of law enforcement services has more than doubled during the past seven years, and now is twice what the tax revenues are to support it.

This does not question the quality of the contract police service at all. The Gridley-Biggs Police Department is exceptionally well staffed, professional and effective. The problem, for Biggs, is not quality. It is cost.

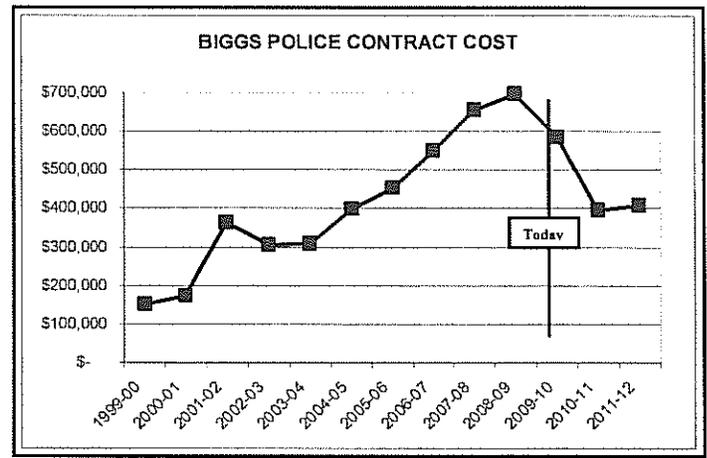
What is the Cost?

Biggs has been paying much more for police service than other small cities pay when they contract, usually with their counties. For instance, the residents of Biggs have been paying more than double what the residents of Live Oak pay for contract police service, per capita. The cost of serving Biggs should be in the \$200,000-400,000 range annually. Biggs was charged over \$650,000 last year and again this year.

Have We Asked for Input?

Biggs' local leaders have been affirmatively seeking public input on this important topic. We publicized council meeting agendas online, in the Gridley Herald, in public postings, and sometimes even by automated telephones calls to residents.

Twelve meetings in the past nine months included this subject. All key decisions were made in open public session. Council members are very accessible to the residents, with their contact information posted on the City website.



Did We Shop Around?

Biggs issued a "Request for Proposals" in September to Butte County and all cities in the county, seeking a contract for a price within the City's budget.

This is a standard practice for government agencies. It amounts to openly shopping for the best deal for your taxpayers. Only the City of Gridley and the County Sheriff responded with price proposals.

Gridley's proposal offered less service for about \$386,000 per year for the first year. After selecting this as the best proposal on January 11 and entering negotiations on a formal contract, Biggs was told this would be only a two-year discount with many cost escalators and a return to current pricing in the third year (if the cities continued to contract). The current pricing formula is what resulted in the past two years of \$651,000-\$697,000 annual costs.

Biggs City Council identified this exposure – the risk of a return to a much higher cost – as *unaffordable*. Mayors and staff from the two cities tried to work this out together. Many positive but minor changes were made in negotiations. This one big issue remained.

Why Did We Consider Going with the Sheriff?

With no other affordable alternative, the City Council decided February 22 to turn to the Sheriff's \$269,000 price proposal. The Sheriff's proposal was built on what it would "cost" the County to provide police protection in Biggs.

The Sheriff's proposal was for round-the-clock coverage by south county deputies, but required augmentation by some entity like CHP to do the traffic safety work. The proposal was a simple one-page price sheet without any stated time limits other than "Fiscal Year 2009-2010" in the heading. The amount of \$269,000 would easily fund the hiring or retaining of at least one more deputy serving the south county.

Butte County Sheriff deputies, like Gridley-Biggs police, are admirable law enforcement professionals. It's just that they are spread out much more thinly across a much bigger area.

What about a CSO?

We considered the addition of Community Services Officers (CSO's) for constant local patrol and crime prevention to be an affordable, necessary and desirable way of helping reduce the cost of police services. If we ever decide to contract with the sheriff, CSO's would be used. This is a common public safety service format in most other cities, but as of today Gridley PD does not use CSO's.

So Now What?

Eventually, Biggs and Gridley were able to come to an agreement for two years of service at a stated price, leaving future years to future negotiation. This is fair for everyone.

It should also be repeated that Biggs officials very much appreciate both Gridley and the County's willingness to sharpen their pencils in these challenging economic times, answering Biggs' request for proposals with good responses.

What Biggs has been looking for is staying within our budget while protecting local public safety. Both of these are paramount objectives. We owe this to our citizens.

We prefer to enter a long-term relationship with a customer-defined service level at a fair price based on "cost." In the end, Biggs must live within its means and we will provide for police services accordingly. Your input will provide direction as to how we provide future services.

PLEASE CHECK BOXES AND RETURN TO CITY HALL:

If the cost of Gridley police services again grows to significantly more than the City's resources to pay for it, I would prefer to have the City:

- A. Cancel City services like street repairs, street cleaning, park maintenance, code enforcement, community planning and economic development.
- B. Consider contracting with the Butte County Sheriff for police service, and hire a Community Services Officer for constant patrol and crime prevention.
- C. Consider starting a small Biggs police department with minimal coverage. This would be *at most* one officer on duty at a time.
- D. Pay the higher price by adding a parcel tax to my property tax bill.

If "D" please select from the following:

I would probably be willing to pay:

- No more than \$5.00 per month.
- Up to \$40.00 per month (as needed to afford local police service)
- Other: _____

We welcome your suggestions and comments on public safety in Biggs: _____

**PLEASE RETURN TO CITY HALL
WITH YOUR BILL PAYMENT, OR IN THE NIGHT DROP BOX.**

THANK YOU!

This is not a vote. It is only an opinion survey.