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Wednesday, June 25, 2003

Boone County OKs 'bare bones' budget

By **Brenna R. Kelly**
 The Cincinnati Enquirer

BURLINGTON - Boone County approved a "bare bones" budget for the new fiscal year Tuesday night.

The budget approved by Fiscal Court includes \$85,000 for Boone County Water Rescue, a unit county officials had considered eliminating to save money.

After several years of big spending, the 2003-2004 budget includes the addition of only two new employees and three small construction projects.

"I feel with the current economic climate, with the county revenues being at least flat, that we have a budget that is workable," Judge-executive Gary Moore said.

The operating budget is \$42.5 million, a 3.8 percent increase over this year.

"We have a very bare bones budget," Moore said, noting that the county's population is growing 5 to 6 percent per year, yet it has added only about six new employees in the last four years.

Because the county depends heavily on payroll taxes, the slowing economy forced the county to look at ways to cut costs.

Fiscal Court members discussed eliminating the water rescue unit, which had asked for \$205,000. To save the department, Capt. Dale Appel eliminated all salaries including his own \$16,500.

He also cut an \$11,000 part-time secretary position and eliminated the \$50 per-shift stipend for volunteers.

County funding for the department will go from \$132,000 this year to \$45,000, said County Administrator Jim Parsons. Covington and Kenton County contribute \$40,000 for the Water Rescue Unit.

Boone County also experienced a major increase in costs from the Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky.

The increase of 24 percent was the result of Boone County's growth. Boone, Kenton and Campbell counties use a formula

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to fund TANK, based in part on population. This year formula was changed to reflect the 2000 Census, in which Boone County grew 49 percent.

That pushed Boone's share to \$2,685,080. While the county is paying the increase, it did not give TANK an additional \$158,671 the agency requested.

The two new positions in the budget will be in the Public Works Department. The budget also includes \$8 million to expand the county water lines to rural areas, \$700,000 to fix a slide on Lower River Road and \$700,000 to build a community center in Petersburg.

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