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City Releases Actual To Budget Figures For 2009

Jonesboro, AR – 2009 proved to be a year of unpredictable revenues and belt tightening management for the City of Jonesboro. But according to year end reports released today; the effort was well worth it.

“It was like hitting a moving target,” Mayor Harold Perrin said. “It seemed like every time we turned around, sales tax revenues would drop and an unanticipated expenditure would surface. We didn’t know anything else to do but put the brakes on spending as much as possible and look at the bank accounts every single day.”

The city started with a total budget of over \$62 million dollars in expenditures; over \$39 million of those in operating and maintenance accounts. Throughout the year, issues like the jail bill expenses raised that to over \$68.5 million dollars in expenses; and upped the O&M portion of that to over \$42 million.

“The jail bill hit us hard,” Perrin said. “I was so grateful to Sheriff McCann and Judge Haas for helping our team finally reach a settlement on the issue, but the end result was we had to increase our appropriation significantly to pay for 5 months worth of 2008 bills that were left for us when we came into office.”

Still, the city departments were able to hold total expenditures for the year to just over \$58 million; resulting in the city coming in nearly \$10.5 million dollars below budget. “They did an incredible job,” Perrin said of the employees. “We put a spending freeze on and looked at expenses on a case by case basis; we reorganized mid-year and started taking a look at our operations for efficiencies and productivity; and we cut wherever we could cut.”

The cuts resulted in a deficit reduction in O&M by 37%. “We had just over a \$4 million dollar deficit in Operations and Maintenance versus a \$6.3 million dollar budgeted deficit,” Perrin said. “We’re not done. We’re still looking at every way we can to increase efficiencies and save operating costs. We’re getting as creative as we can; some of it may require a new way of thinking and some initial investments in technology and infrastructure and facilities; but the end result will be a more efficient and lean operation.”

Perrin said that his staff is still prepping for a balanced budget in 2011. “We’re forecasting this quarter expenses for 2011 and 2012; and we’re looking at the amounts we’re investing in key areas like public safety and what potential revenues may be needed to maintain and improve critical services.”

All in all, Perrin said he wishes the economy were stronger. “We look forward to a rebound in sales tax revenues, but the truth is we don’t know what the new ‘normal’ will be. We may have to rethink how we do business and start thinking outside the box. That’s what the Comprehensive Planning initiative is all about; and that’s what I’ve charged our management team with doing. I won’t compromise on service; and I know our employees at the City of Jonesboro are resilient and will help me figure out how to get the job done moving forward. They rose to the occasion last year in the midst of navigating new challenges. Every department came in under budget last year,” Perrin said.