


**TIM HOLCOMB
EL DORADO COUNTY ASSESSOR**

M E M O R A N D U M

November 1, 2010

TO: Sue Hennike, Principal Budget Analyst

CC: Gayle Erbe-Hamlin, Chief Administrative Officer
John Knight, Supervisor District I
Ray Nutting, Supervisor District II
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FROM: Karl Weiland, Assessor Elect 

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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
EL DORADO COUNTY

SUBJECT: Assessor's response to Reduction Scenario questionnaire

As requested, here are the answers to the questions posed in your e-mail of October 26th, 2010. As we both know, the Assessor will experience a significant and substantial reduction in management and supervision staff as a result of the ERI program. It is not possible to fully comprehend and estimate the department's ability to absorb these reductions. As I pointed out in the original memo detailing the department plans to address the departures, it may be necessary to request additional extra help as we work to close the 2011/2012 roll next spring.

This memo also contains a response to the CAO's memo of October 29th, 2010, specifically the recommendation to eliminate the Assistant Assessor position.

10% Reduction Scenario

1. Describe how you would absorb a reduction of 10% in your Net County Cost of \$3,335,706.

The Assessor's office will experience roughly a \$450,000 reduction in NCC for FY 2011/2012 due to the ERI retirement of two supervisors and one manager along with the vacancy created by the Assistant Assessor assuming the office of the Assessor. This is a 14% reduction in NCC for the 2011/2012 year.

The department is working to absorb these reductions by a combination of position eliminations, position reduction, work realignment and efficiency thru automation.

The position of Supervising Appraiser was vacated on September 30th. The Assessment Standards Supervisor and Assessment Office manager will be vacated on

December 31st. The Assistant Assessor will be vacated on January 1st when the incumbent assumes the office of Assessor.

The Supervising Appraiser is being filled with a departmental promotion. The resulting vacant appraiser position will be eliminated.

The Assessment Standards Supervisor position will be eliminated. This position supervises an appraisal crew and is responsible for some appraisal assignments along with managing the appraisal certification standards and training. The appraisal assignments will be assigned to other appraisal staff. The standards and training work will be assigned to Senior Appraisers as extra duty. The appraisal crew supervision will be assigned to the Supervising Appraiser.

The Assessment Office Manager supervises about 14 staff. This management position is also responsible for the fiscal duties of the department. This position will be eliminated and the supervision duties will be assigned to a revived Supervising Assessment Technician position. When filled with a departmental promotion, the resulting vacant position will be eliminated. The fiscal duties will be assigned to the Executive Secretary. Some of the administrative duties of the Executive Secretary be eliminated, reassigned or become the responsibility of the Assessor.

The Assistant Assessor position will be held vacant and unfunded for 2011/2012. All duties will be absorbed by the Assessor, with the possible exception of assessment appeal management, which may be assigned to another staff member. This includes the duty of Chief Appraiser. (NOTE - The CAO is recommending elimination of the Assistant Assessor *"as it will be several years before the County is in a position to fund it"*). There are several reasons that the CAO's recommendation should not be adopted:

- a. The constitutional office of the Assessor is required to discharge certain statutory obligations. The Assistant Assessor position is responsible for performing those duties in the absence of the Assessor. Elimination of the position would paralyze the Assessor's role in Property tax administration should the Assessor become incapacitated. Although interim authority will be assigned to the Supervising Appraiser position, this is an interim measure.
- b. The decision to permanently eliminate the Assistant Assessor is a *de facto* decision that the position is not necessary. In the October 29th memo, the CAO notes the Assessor "prefers" the position not be eliminated. The Assessor does not "prefer" the position be maintained, the Assessor is adamant that the position be maintained. The Assistant Assessor position is one of the principal reasons for the continuity and well running office that is highly regarded by the public that we all serve.
- c. Restoration of the permanently eliminated position will be more difficult. It will burden the Assessor with proving to a completely different board of Supervisors that the position is needed. The need for a second in command in the Assessor's office is not in question, especially with the elimination of the Assessment Office Manager position. The vacancy is only occurring due to the projected fiscal deficit.
- d. As noted by the CAO on September 15th, 2010, the Assessor's budget is being reduced by 14%, roughly \$120,000 over the targeted reduction (10% of NCC) of about \$320,000. I realize the seriousness of the fiscal situation the county faces for FY 2011/2012. That is the reason for the additional

savings contribution the department is willing to make. This now reminds me of the axiom "No good deed goes unpunished". Given the reimbursement from special districts thru the Property tax administration fee; the Assessor could request to fill the Assistant Assessor position and still meet the targeted reduction of 10%. The three eliminated positions provide enough savings; keeping the Assistant Assessor position vacant is not necessary.

In summary, including the temporary vacancy of the Assistant Assessor, the above reductions will result in a staffing level of 34.2, down from the 10/11 level of 38.2 and lower than the department staffing level of 1994/1995. Alternatives and new processes are being developed to permanently absorb some of the resource loss. There is also some uncertainty as to how well this significant reduction can be absorbed.

2. Describe what service(s) or activities you would no longer be able to provide or need to modify if your Net County Cost of \$3,335,706 was cut by 10%.

The department is engaging in modifications to internal processes to address the reduction in resources. These modifications will reduce review of property information and limit field work. As a consequence, the department will no longer be able to maintain the high level of accuracy in characteristic information about property. This will gradually reduce the accuracy of information used for comparative sales appraisals, as well as the information exported and sold to outside users like MLS and Parcel Quest.

It is probable that public service at our front counter will be reduced. One alternative is to increase and promote "self serve" using written directions to handle simple and common inquiries. Other minor services, such as mailing Home Owner Exemption forms on a routine basis may be eliminated.

All phone calls to the Assessor will continue to be answered by staff.

3. Identify what changes in your staffing you would have to make to achieve a 10% Net County Cost reduction.

As discussed above, assessment technician and transfer staff will experience delays in processing problem events due to losses in supervision and management.

Appraisal staff will see an increase in appraisal assignments as the workload from the Supervising Appraiser and Assessment Standards Supervisor are reassigned. Some senior staff will have additional training or standards assignments.

4. Describe the impact on your department/program if your Net County Cost was cut by 10%.

Public service will be reduced as discussed above. This will likely increase taxpayer frustration to some unknown degree.

An office survey in 2004 revealed that all supervising and management positions play a significant role in expediting problems that surface in the various events processed by the Assessor's Office. The reduction in management and supervision will increase the backlog of unresolved problem events. Alternative resolution processes are being considered.

Appraisal program changes will be implemented to rapidly enroll some reappraisal with only a minimal review by certified staff. Although this will allow more appraisal assignments

to be completed, there will likely be degradation in the quality of the Assessor's property information transmitted to the Auditor and Treasurer/Tax Collector. These will be addressed as discovered.

The reduction in management staff will result in reduced participation in the budget forecast process.

5% Reduction Scenario

1. Describe how you would absorb a reduction of 5% in your Net County Cost of \$3,335,706.

Any restoration of funding in the Assessor's office will be used to fill the Assistant Assessor position. The standards and control duties assigned to senior appraisers as extra duty will be assigned to the Assistant Assessor. Assessment appeal management will be reassigned to this position.

2. Describe what service(s) or activities you would no longer be able to provide or need to modify if your Net County Cost of \$3,335,706 was cut by 5%.

Restoration of funding would reduce expected services reduction under the 14% scenario discussed above.

3. Identify what changes in your staffing you would have to make to achieve a 5% Net County Cost reduction.

Less than currently expected.

4. Describe the impact on your department/program if your Net County Cost was cut by 5%.

Less than currently expected.