



PHOTO BY PATRICK DOBBS

District 1 Supervisor David Williams (pictured here during a recent supervisor's meeting) has suggested county departments take a closer look at how much they are paying out to Verizon and other communications providers. "There is an awful lot of money being spent on telephones."

# Crunching the numbers

Powhatan's new board got down to the business of budgeting during two-day retreat last week

By **Emily Darrell**

Staff Writer

The Powhatan County Board of Supervisors held a two-day budget and CIP retreat on Wednesday and Thursday of last week to discuss Powhatan's financial future in fiscal year 2013.

Finance Director and Acting County Administrator Jerry Whitaker said that the county will be starting the year with an estimated budget gap between \$2.83 million and \$6.44 million – the lower figure reflecting the gap if a neutralized real estate tax is applied, and the higher figure reflecting the gap if no neutralized tax rate is applied.

Whitaker said that he expects the recent real estate assessments – which are the primary reason for the budget deficit – not to deviate more than about two percent after reassessments are made. "At this point we still feel pretty confident that those numbers will stand," Whitaker said.

Throughout the two-day retreat, which was held at the Powhatan Public Library, heads of all county departments – including Parks and Recreation, the Sheriff's Office, and Powhatan County Public Schools – were invited to share their prospective 2013 budgets and to offer suggestions as to how they might shave three to five percent off their existing budgets.

This proved more difficult for some departments than others, with many department heads feeling their current budget to be already so limited that the quality and efficiency of service they can provide is

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# Numbers: Sheriff told BOS that reduction of personnel would be only way to reduce budget

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reduced.

Sheriff Greg Neal, referring to a letter he had drafted to the finance director in December, said that he could not find any way to reduce his department's nearly \$4 million dollar budget by three to five percent unless there was a reduction of personnel, something he said is "not an option for the Sheriff's Office."

"We really need to add other positions that were requested in previous years because of the increase in workload that I associate with the economy," Neal wrote in his letter. "Although I will not be requesting those positions this year

due to the financial situation we all must deal with, my not asking is by no means because the positions are not needed."

Neal said that the many of the Sheriff's Office's vehicles are also in need of replacement and that, although the department delayed asking for funds in 2011 and 2012, the department will have no choice but to request the money in 2013.

The Sheriff's Office was not alone in feeling that budget reductions were nearly impossible. Treasurer Faye Barton, in a letter drafted in mid-November to Whitaker and former County Administrator Carolyn Bishop, wrote that "if these cuts take place, not only will there be upset taxpayers because the

bills will not go out as frequently as before, but we could possibly be borrowing money once again to cover payroll and debt owed to our vendors."

Some departments, on the other hand, were able to present three to five percent reduction scenarios, mostly by slashing operating costs such as employee travel and office supplies. Brandon Stidham, head of Planning and Community Development, suggested eliminating his department's travel budget altogether and also suggested a reduction to his own salary.

Commonwealth Attorney Bob Beasley, suggested a furlough (unpaid vacation time) for his department of four, feeling this to

be a more desirable option than reducing salaries or cutting personnel.

Beasley said that not only would it allow his staff to have a little more time off, it would also allow their salaries to remain the same on paper, benefiting them if and when the economy improves and departmental raises are once again an option.

"If I can achieve the same savings through a furlough," Beasley said in a telephone interview, "I would rather do it that way. No one has gotten a raise in several years. I'm going to at least give them some time off," Beasley said. "I just feel that's a fairer way to do it."