Why is the County implementing a new fire services fee?

As part of the functional consolidation of the City Fire Department and the County Emergency Medical Services Department, the unincorporated area of Leon County is getting a higher level of service than previously. Specifically, there will be an increase of one Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician at each rural station, a 50% increase in staffing from 2 to 3 personnel.

For the new fiscal year, the County reduced property taxes by $8.8 million; in addition, the County is expecting a reduction of $2.6 million in state-shared sales tax collections. Combined, this is greater than $11 million in reduced revenue. In addition, the budget anticipates less revenue from a slowing of building activity and a decline in the County's level of reserves. Overall, the total budget is decreasing $20.2 million or 7.6%. Since FY2007/2008, the budget decreased by $37.5 million, or 13% total. The new fire fee is estimated to generate $6.8 million.

To address the overall reduction in revenue, the County imposed a number of budget changes:

- 61 positions eliminated over the past two years; more than 5% of the Board's total workforce
- No raises for County employees
- Over the past two years, cost savings of over 50% ($1 million) through a competitive process to purchase property/general liability insurance
- Created a public/private partnership to dispose of recyclable materials saving $284,500 annually
- Over the past two years, instituted a hiring and travel freeze
- Reduced hours of operation at the branch libraries for an annual cost savings of $386,985
- Reduced take home vehicles from 49 to 1 (a 24-7, on-call public works supervisor)

The decline in revenues noted above (more than $11 million) caused the County to evaluate alternative revenues. The County considered a number of options, in addition to the Fire Services Fee:

- Increases to either the Solid Waste or Stormwater Fees. Both of these fees are not adequate to cover the current cost of services. Neither fee has been raised in over a decade. Both of these operations are intended to operate as businesses with their fees fully supporting the program; however Solid Waste receives $1.4 million and Stormwater receives over $3 million in general fund revenues. The County did not raise either of these fees.
- Imposition of an additional five-cent gas tax. Currently, the County's transportation program is not supported completely by gas taxes but rather gets a portion of its support through general fund revenues (more than $2.3 million). The County determined that this was not the time to raise gas taxes.
- Raising the millage rate to offset the $1 billion decline in property values countywide. The County determined not to pursue raising the tax rate.

To gauge how well the County is managing its resources, an annual survey is conducted of all Florida counties. The County continues to pride itself on how well we compare:

- **Our budget of $842 per capita is the 5th lowest budget per capita out of all 67 counties in Florida with a range of $590 to $4,791 per capita.**

- **Our staffing of 6.6 employees per 1,000 residents is the 6th lowest number of employees for all 67 counties with a range of 4.4 to 22.6 per 1,000 residents.**