

July 1 marks Kent County's new fiscal year

Happy New Year!

Fiscal Year 2022 started July 1, 2021, which means the new Kent County budget is in effect. The new financial plan adopted by Levy Court in late April is similar to 2021, with several good surprises since the Coronavirus pandemic did not impact last year's budget as much as was expected with the expense assistance from the federal CARES Act and components of ARPA designed to cover revenue shortfalls.



Due to the new fiscal year and the Independence Day holiday on Monday, July 5, employees are requested to submit time sheets today (July 1). Please, promptly submit any Friday or Saturday work hour adjustments first thing Tuesday (July 6) morning.

The \$32.5 million general fund budget and the \$21.9 million sewer fund budget include 306 full-time County positions in FY2022. In addition, the budget allocated \$400,000 to construction of a maintenance building adjacent to the Kent County Administrative Complex, \$195,000 toward replacement of the 9-1-1 dispatch consoles (\$450,000), \$252,000 for the cardiac monitor long term lease, \$300,000 toward an I.T. enterprise solution (\$3.1M); \$63,000 for departmental information technology upgrades; various departmental vehicle replacements; among other ongoing items. The budget also included funding to change security guard services from Gettier to Sunstates Security effective July 1. The enterprise (sewer) fund budget allocated \$5M for the South Dover/U.S. Route 113 force main relocation project, \$11.2M toward the biosolids capacity expansion project (\$24.7M); \$893,000 toward the plant wide power generator project (\$4.5M); \$400,000 toward clarifier mechanism replacement (\$800K); \$1M toward the pipeline condition assessment project (\$4M); \$1.2M toward the Puncheon Run transmission bypass project (\$2.6M); and various other sewer related maintenance/upgrade projects.

On July 1, 2021, all full-time County employees received a 2% cost of living adjustment this fiscal year as well as a full 2% step (if eligible). In addition, Levy Court approved implementation of the Compensation & Classification Study conducted by Management Advisory Group (MAG) International of Fairfax, VA & Spartanburg, SC in late 2019/early 2020.

As a result of the budget decision, a new pay plan was incorporated featuring new grade numbers with 5% separation and wider pay ranges/more steps. Instead of Grades 1 – 22, the new grades run from 2100 – 2138 and all positions have been slotted by the consultant into a particular grade based upon job similarities, education or training requirements, supervision exercised, levels of responsibility, and comparison with the employment market data for our area and on a step in the assigned pay range - now featuring 20 Steps A-T with ½ steps identified with + sign. The market survey determined the pay grade assigned to each position as well as the uniform pay ranges for each grade.

The Classification, Compensation & Benefits Study was the result of the personal efforts of many Kent County employees attending informational meetings and completing Job Position Questionnaires (JPQ), supervisors reviewing the JPQs for accuracy, and several entities in our employment market area responding to a lengthy survey regarding employee compensation for numerous comparable positions and employee benefits.

Since the new budget was formally adopted, the consultant has worked to update the report to incorporate various personnel changes, promotions, vacancies, and transfers authorized by department heads as well as several reclassifications and new positions approved by Levy Court after the original report was issued in March 2020. Some of these various post-report changes required adjustment of position classifications by the consultant to maintain internal equity, so the final revised tables may be different from the original report.

The Pay Study has required some title changes – for instance, secretarial type staff are now identified as Office Assistant, Office Support Specialist I, Office Support Specialist II, or Administrative Assistant, and other revised titles are more in line with standard descriptive titles in the marketplace for the type work performed. The completed JPQs were critical in helping the consultant understand what duties are performed by each position and/or the positions that interact with them.

In order to maintain competitive employee wages and benefits in the central Delaware market, the Levy Court has regularly authorized an update of the County's compensation and classification plan every few years. The initial pay study with its major departmental reorganization and step system components was effective in 2000, then updated in 2003, 2006, and 2015 (economic factors sidelined a study in 2009). Levy Court authorized the 2020 study in October 2019 following solicitation of vendors via a public Request for Proposals.

The study compared the job responsibilities of employees in various Kent County positions, the compensation of the Kent County position, and overall Kent County employee benefits with similar jurisdictions in the marketplace such as the State of Delaware, Sussex County, Wilmington, Dover, Newark, Middletown, Queen Anne County, MD, etc.

The data collected from the JPQs was analyzed by the consultant to determine if Kent County has correctly classified the position into a grade containing similar skill/responsibilities/education/training levels. Once that was determined, the pay ranges were developed from the information submitted by the responding governments and a minimum and maximum rate for each grade was calculated with appropriate differences between pay grades. The consultant then calculated the overall cost of any recommended adjustments for budget consideration.

The new pay grades & rates and associated position titles will be posted on the Employee Portal as soon as the tables are completed. The consultant is currently drafting new position descriptions for every employee and vacancy. Once completed, they will be reviewed/approved by the various department heads and Levy Court and then distributed to each employee for acknowledgement – most likely in August.

HR/Payroll, Finance, and I.T. staff have worked tirelessly to implement the new grade and step system as of July 1, but due to the July 4th holiday, premium pay calculations for overtime worked the week of June 27-July 3 and normally paid on July 9 will instead be calculated and included in the following pay check dated July 23.

On the benefits side, Levy Court decided to maintain the County's annual pension contribution at \$4,125,794, although the pension actuary recommended a slight decrease, due in part to a mortality table assumption revision expected to increase the contribution in FY2023. The annual retiree benefits contribution was also maintained at the FY21 amount of \$2,735,837. For healthcare, Commissioners increased the employee cost share (3.5%) for individual only high plan health insurance from \$85.04 to \$88.06 per month consistent with DVHT/Aetna's overall premium increase, with dependent health insurance cost share (20%) also increasing about 4%. The budget retains the employee/eligible retiree premium for dental insurance at \$3.10 per month and the dependent premium at \$42.00 for a monthly

premium of \$45.10 combined with a calendar year maximum benefit of \$2,000.

Full-time employees hired during the previous fiscal year and working more than 3 months and less than 9 months receive a half step (1%), while those hired in April, May & June 2010 received no step. Former employees retiring from active service and receiving a County pension and regular “pensioners” (*former vested employees that did not retire directly from Kent County service*) and beneficiaries received no increase this fiscal year. Other personnel related changes include expanding the work hours from 35 to 40-hours for three library positions in the Community Services Department and three CDBG positions in the Planning Services Department; adding a new Computer Programmer position and an Assistant County Administrator position in the Administration Department; a new Parks Worker position in the Community Services Department; a new Wills Clerk position in the Register of Wills Office; and elimination of a long vacant Building Codes Inspector III position in the Planning Services Department in favor of contracting some inspections work.

Due to payroll’s one week lag, the full benefit of the wage increase will not be reflected on the electronic pay stub until July 23, since the July 9 pay advice also includes June 20-30, which is paid at the FY2021 rate. Be advised that individual hourly and salary rates extend for several digits past the decimal point for tax reporting purposes, the figures shared with employees may reflect rounding and the application of percentages by the New World payroll software program.

(posted 07/01/21)