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Commission rejects Newton's plea for staff pay raises

By CHARLES PATTON
Pasco Times Staff Writer

DADE CITY — If employees in Circuit Clerk Miller Newton's office get pay raises next year, Newton will have to find the money within his own budget which was approved earlier this month by the Pasco County Commission.

The commission Tuesday night rejected Newton's request that an additional \$26,100 be added to his budget so he could provide a 5 per cent cost of living pay increase for clerk's office employees.

"I THINK SOMEBODY is trying to dump a problem on the County Commission that someone else should be handling," Commission Chairman Mike Olson said.

"The whole thing is out of focus," Olson said. "The clerk's people work for Miller Newton. We are being put in a position of acting as head of the clerk's office." Olson said Newton "tried to slip in a cost of living increase through a contingency fund (rather than in a salary schedule that showed the proposed raises as was done in other departments). We're all a little bit torqued up about the way he tried to do this."

Chief Deputy Clerk Bob Hunter said the

raises for clerk's office were included in a \$50,000 contingency fund item rather than as straight line salary items when the clerk's tentative budget was presented to the County Commission for approval.

THE COMMISSION dumped the contingency reserve because it involved buying additional microfilm recording system equipment.

"No one from the clerk's office told us the salary raises for next year were included in the contingency plan," Commissioner Mathew Prahasky Jr. said. "I figured the clerk had handled raises like other constitutional and administrative officers by putting it in the salary schedule to begin with."

"We were told the figures (in the clerk's salary schedule as approved) included a 5 per cent increase," County Administrator Richard Kelton said. "The clerk's office knew the county was planning a 5 per cent raise for its employees. I am a little surprised that this thing is being brought up now."

KELTON SAID there is enough money in the clerk's budget already approved by the commission to give raises. He said Newton budgeted three CETA (federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) positions, and the county expects that those funds will be continued, leaving about \$21,000 free to use for raises.

Kelton said another \$8,000 in the clerk's budget could be committed to the pay raises if Newton wants to give his people more money.

"I think it's up to the clerk, not the County Commission, to resolve the salary problem," Olson said.

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