

## At odds with County Commission, sheriff voices her disgust

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At odds with county commissioners over next year's proposed budget, Sheriff Sadie Darnell vented her frustration Tuesday evening.

Five hours into a budget meeting, she listened as county staff and some commissioners gave their response to the budget presentation she made Aug. 17.

County Manager Randall Reid said that, while Darnell had made cost-cutting moves, a year-by-year comparison of the Sheriff's Office's adopted budgets did not show \$6 million in reductions that Darnell said she has made since fiscal year 2007-08.

Commissioner Mike Byerly noted that the Sheriff's Office's calls for service were down by approximately 24,500 over the last three years -- a trend he attributed to annexations -- and that he believed "we are overfunding the sheriff at this point."

Commissioner Rodney Long said he believed poverty reduction programs and Court Services' programs to reduce the jail population also constituted public safety.

Then Darnell walked to the podium and, her voice raising with emotion, broadly criticized commissioners and Reid.

"I am very disappointed in the majority of you all," she said. "I have never heard such flowery terminology used to describe public safety in all my life ... I am very, very disappointed and very, very angry."

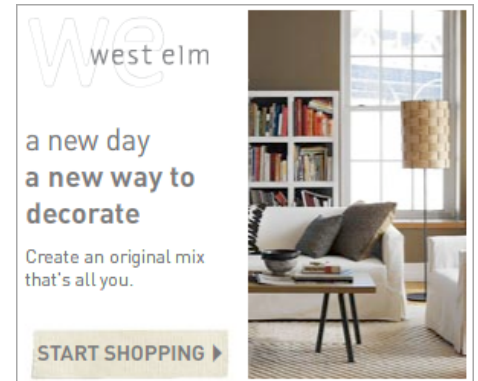
She voiced frustration at sitting through five hours of the meeting "just to justify my budget" and argued her staff was "underpaid and under-appreciated," particularly by the commissioners and county manager.

Darnell added that, the last time a hurricane hit, commissioners "were all high-tailing it out of here so you could get home and hunker down" while her staff was on duty. Speaking of county Budget Director Suzanne Gable, who reviewed the sheriff's budget request to make a presentation to commissioners, Darnell said, "I could not do her job."

"I couldn't work for you all," she said. "I thank God I work for the citizens, because I am so disgusted about this."

Darnell also said commissioners had a "bleeding heart" attitude about having to cut an employee from another department when the jail remained understaffed.

She added that if the two sides could not reach an agreement, she would appeal to the governor and Cabinet and believed she could show "bloat" in other areas of



county government.

After Darnell's comments, Byerly said, "I think we're past the point where we can have a meaningful dialogue here."

Long noted that, during the televised meeting, commissioners received an email from a resident titled "sheriff's tantrum tonight." Long said he did not take criticism personally, but expected cordiality elected officials and did not expect one official to "berate" others publicly. As he spoke, Darnell left the room.

After the meeting, Darnell said she has cut \$6 million in operating expenses since the 2006-07 budget but retirement and insurance benefits had pushed the overall budget up from \$64,017,07 that year to the 2010-11 proposed budget of \$65,542,137.

Budget numbers -- and the gap between the commissioners and the Sheriff's Office - have varied at meetings. The current request exceeds the County Commission's tentative working budget for the department, \$65,034,686, by \$507,000, Darnell said. The original sheriff's budget proposal was nearly \$65.7 million but Sheriff's Office Chief Financial Officer Patty Justice said retirement and insurance rates, while up nearly \$1.2 million, did not rise as high as first expected.

Earlier, county Office of Management and Budget Staff staff said \$624,000 would need to be cut from the portion of the budget funded through the general fund to avoid further cuts to other departments. Tuesday, their figure was \$597,000. Another budget meeting is now scheduled for 1:30 p.m. Thursday.

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