

A Sheriff's Office for Our New County; Save on Taxes and Operate at a Profit!

Paid for by Bill Ullery, www.lakehavasucounty.com

Some opponents and skeptics of the Lake Havasu County movement have claimed that taxpayers would pay more for the same services we now get from Mohave County. **Not true!**

Let's look at just one example: the Mohave County Sheriff's Office (MCSO). Our new county taxpayers would pay considerably less to have our own rural police operation.

The new Lake Havasu County would not necessarily require its own sheriff's department. Law enforcement services simply could be sub-contracted to the Lake Havasu City police department. Sounds radical? Not at all. This is not a new concept. At least 37 cities in the country have exactly this type of arrangement between city and county agencies. Lake Havasu County and the city could do this through an IGA (Inter Governmental Agreement) for a fee.

Properly structured, sub-contracting all the "sheriff" services to the Lake Havasu City could actually create a profit center for the new county. The following analysis shows how we could do it.

The proposed boundary of the new county (based on suggestions of the city council in 1999 at its annual retreat) is the area bordered by LaPaz County on the south, Lake Havasu on the west, I-40 on the north, and the Mohave mountain range a few miles to the east. The estimated number of people living in the unincorporated areas of the proposed new county is currently 3,000. With few roads to maintain and the sparse population, county services typical of rural areas would be minimal and very cost effective.

The law enforcement effort for those 3,000 people should only require about 1.99 officers over three shifts or about 0.66 officers per shift. This amounts to about 1/2 car per shift. From January 1, 2000 – August 1, 2001, LHC police responded to 144 calls for assistance from MCSO. Thus, the Havasu police are already bolstering the Mohave County law enforcement effort in this area...for free.

Our investigation shows that over the years, subcontracting could save the new Lake Havasu County taxpayers millions. Based on the MCSO 2003-2004 adopted budget of \$13.4 million, we estimate that LHC taxpayers contributed \$6.2 million. Yes, we help support the entire county operation for about 65,000 people in the unincorporated area of Mohave County.

Some simple math shows how Lake Havasu taxpayers could get the same service for a lot less money. \$13.4 million supports 95 sheriff's deputies, so \$281,000 should support the 1.99 deputies required by the new county. Thus, Lake Havasu County taxpayers would save \$5.92 million. That's just the beginning of the benefits of separation from Mohave County.

It gets better. For example, suppose that the new county grows to 5,000 people in the unincorporated area. That would be about 2,000 homes. With an average assessed value of \$100,000 property taxes would generate some \$3,500,000 for the General Fund (\$1.75/\$100 assessed value). On top of property tax income, the new county would also receive highway user funds from the state based on motor vehicle fuel sales throughout the new county and the number of residents living in unincorporated areas.

The cost of providing 7.3 officers to these 5,000 residents (684 people per officer) would be \$1,029,684. The cost is far, far less than the income from the property and sales taxes and highway user funds the unincorporated area and the new county would generate. Yes, the new county could make a profit on its new sheriff's department.

To reiterate, this is not a new concept. Successful examples are found across the US. Most importantly, cost benefit analyses of other county department operations produce similar results.

As one city council candidate commented at a recent forum at the Realtor Center, "Splitting off from Mohave County and forming our own county would be an economic boon to Havasu." He's right!

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