

Study: Valley government costs soar

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Monday, July 14, 2008

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Yet government spending in Mahoning and Trumbull counties is below average for Northeast Ohio.

YOUNGSTOWN — While the population in Mahoning and Trumbull counties decreased over a 10-year period, government and school spending in both counties significantly increased, according to a study of Northeast Ohio.

The Center for Governmental Research of Rochester, N.Y., conducted a \$175,000 study on public spending for various foundations and organizations, such as the Regional Chamber, in the 16-county area. As part of that study, the company produced a separate report on Mahoning and Trumbull counties.

Between 1992 and 2002, Mahoning County's population decreased by 3 percent, but its per-person expense to operate its government — including the county, cities, villages, townships and special districts — and school systems increased by 83 percent, according to the study.

In Trumbull County during the same time frame, the population dropped by 5 percent. Its per-person expense for government and school systems increased by 72 percent, the study states.

“Spending per-capita went well beyond the inflation rate, and our government spending is accelerating,” said Tony Paglia, the Regional Chamber vice president of government affairs. “We need to continue to look for ways to curb our [government] spending.”

The inflation rate for urban areas of the Midwest increased by 29 percent between 1992 and 2002, according to the study.

The per-person expense for government and school systems in the 16-county region of Northeast Ohio in the study rose by 68 percent from 1992 to 2002.

The study also shows that 7.5 percent of employees in the 16-county region worked for governments and schools in 2002. That percentage is 7.7 in Mahoning and 7.8 in Trumbull.

The study used U.S. Census Bureau data with the most recent information from 2002, data that is six years old. The study states it used the 2002 data because it was the most recent information available that gives an accurate and fair comparison to other areas, said Chris Thompson of Fund for Our Economic Future, a Cleveland-based agency that paid a majority of the study's costs.

Data for 2007 is scheduled to be released by the U.S. Census Bureau early next year, he said. The data can be updated at that time.

The region's per-person government spending is \$3,750. In comparison, Mahoning is \$2,914 and Trumbull is \$2,712, well below the region's average.

“We’re not looking to consolidate communities,” Paglia said. “We want them to work together to share ideas for collaboration that would save money through shared services.”

The study also compared the region to Indianapolis; Raleigh-Durham, N.C.; and Minneapolis-St. Paul; considered growth areas. Mahoning and Trumbull both spent less in government spending per-capita than each of the three out-of-state areas.

A link to the database is at www.futurefundneo.org — the Web site of the Fund for Our Economic Future.

Tom Humphries, the Regional Chamber’s president and chief executive officer, said he hopes Valley government and school leaders will study the report and come up with ways to reduce spending through collaboration and the sharing of services.

The chamber last fall had asked school districts in Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana counties to consider having one school administrative center in each county. The proposal was met with criticism by Valley school administrators.

“In general, there wasn’t an interest in moving forward on that,” Paglia said.

With Gov. Ted Strickland holding education reform meetings this summer, Paglia said he hopes the chamber’s proposal to reduce the number of school administrators is part of that discussion.

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