

TEXARKANA, Ark. -- Miller County Budget and Finance Committee members have about six weeks to figure out how to cover nearly \$8 million in anticipated county office operating expense requests for next year.

The effort will start when committee members meet at 6 p.m today at the Landmark Building's second floor break room to hammer out the county 2022 budget.

Of the more than \$7,996,000 in budget requests, collectively made by about 26 different county offices, more than \$2,275,300 is needed by the sheriff's Office, along with more than \$915,800 sought by the Juvenile Detention Center and nearly \$587,000 wanted for Prosecuting Attorney's Office.

Apart from offices financed by the county's general fund, some other big ticket requests, financed by other funds, came from the county's road department, which is asking for more than \$4.2 million and the jail maintenance office, which is needing more than \$3.6 million for next year.

Last week, the committee members, along county officials, met and discussed one tentative area of budget concerns, which may take more time, perhaps beyond next year, to decide on.

Committee members have designated about \$90,000 to potentially set up a Human Resources Office. Currently, the County Clerk's Office takes care of these duties.

If an HR office is funded, committee members suggested it could potentially be housed on the courthouse's third floor -- assuming the building's flood damage is repaired by early next year.

Budget and Finance Committee Chairman Ernest Pender said he has heard some Arkansas counties that have HR departments, say they couldn't work without them.

However, some committee members and county officials voiced concerns regarding how long it would take the county to completely build a full digital employee records system for an HR office, with some officials guessing up to six or eight months.

Additionally, some county officials expressed concern regarding the handling of employee grievances and disciplinary action as well as whether or not an HR manager could offer legal advise.

Following some additional discussion, Miller County Finance Committee member John Haltom suggested that the HR issue be tabled until the county conducts more research into the matter.