Charging "a decade of flawed decision-making" by area leaders, Hamilton County Auditor Dusty Rhodes tied the County's declining population to what he termed "the County's ever-increasing property taxes". In an afternoon news conference today (Friday) he released the statistics in his annual Citizens Financial Report.

The report shows Hamilton County's residential property taxes are the highest among Ohio's large, metropolitan counties and neighboring counties. It also compares school levies among each of the County's twenty-three (23) school districts.

Rhodes showed the trends in two graphs included in this year's report. Since 1993, the County's residential property taxes have increased by approximately 66 percent. Over the same ten-year period, the County has lost almost 40,000 residents.

“Our tax rates put us at a competitive disadvantage when people decide where they want to live," he said. “Rather than spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on studies, focus groups, town meetings, years long planning processes, and high-priced out-of-town-consultants…it's time to face the facts," he added.

(CONTINUED)
“Interminable studies have put the world on hold and bureaucrats on easy street - because nothing ever changes. Instead of betting on growth-gurus from high-tax states to write expensive reports and make PowerPoint presentations, we all should be about the business of managing government better and reducing the burden on the people who have to pay for it,” he added.

Rhodes charged, “The political class, the business community, the elite, and the opinion makers in the media all seem to want to ‘study’ things forever. As they gather in support of every new levy, they fail to recognize the relationship that may very well exist between higher taxes and people leaving.”

“The data offers powerful evidence that a fundamental policy rethinking is in order,” he said. “When I began my third term I issued a warning about the alarming growth of government.” Here is what he said on March 8, 1999:

If the county goes along with rather than against the prevailing culture, if all of us continue to grow government, increasing the tax burden on our residents and businesses, then we will have collectively imperiled the very economic growth needed to sustain our future as a vibrant place to live, work and raise our families.

Rhodes said, “Almost five years have passed. Unfortunately, the trend has continued. Where will we be ten years from now?”

He is sending the report to the County Commissioners, local governments and school districts in the County. Copies will be included as a supplement in tomorrow’s (Saturday’s) editions of the “The Cincinnati Enquirer” and “The Cincinnati Post” distributed in Hamilton County.

September 19, 2003
Hamilton County Residential Property Taxation and Population

During the past ten years as residential property taxes billed have increased, Hamilton County’s population has fallen steadily. When evaluated on a per person basis, Hamilton County’s residents paid $100.52 in residential property taxes per person in 1993 and $175.35 per person in 2002, an increase of 74.4%. During this same period, the total residential property taxes billed to Hamilton County residents increased from $87,757,124 in 1993 to $146,196,314 in 2002, a 66.6% increase. In 1993 the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that Hamilton County had 873,002 residents, while in 2002 the estimate had fallen to 833,721, a 4.5% decrease.

The City of Blue Ash receives a portion of the property tax revenues distributed to Hamilton County’s municipalities. The Blue Ash Bicentennial Veterans Memorial Park, located in downtown Blue Ash, was completed in 1991 as part of the City’s Bicentennial celebration.
The graph below compares Hamilton County’s per person county-wide residential property tax billings for 2002 to those of the Ohio peer and neighboring counties. In providing a broad array of levy-funded services, Hamilton County voters tax residential property owners at a higher amount, on a per person basis, than any of the comparison counties.
September 19, 2003

Board of County Commissioners
Hamilton County
138 East Court Street, #605
Cincinnati, OH 45202

Honorable Board:

I am writing to transmit a copy of our office’s Citizens Financial Report for 2002.

In addition to other information, this year’s report shows the County’s continuing trend of increasing property taxes over the past ten years and the simultaneous decline in the County’s population over the same period.

We are also presenting a review of Hamilton County’s county-wide residential property taxes with those of neighboring and comparable counties in Ohio. For each county we also show the purposes of such taxes.

Another new feature in this year’s report is a listing of annual residential property taxes per $100,000 of assessed valuation for school purposes in each of the County’s twenty-two (22) school districts.

I invite your consideration of the ever increasing tax burden as a possible reason for our continuing loss of population. There is a saying, “if you want less of something, tax it more”. That seems to be occurring here as a majority of the voters approve new and increased tax levies.

I hope this report is helpful in keeping you informed about the County’s financial situation and in assisting you, local government officials and citizens in working together to address the issues we face.

Sincerely,

Dusty Rhodes