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FAYETTEVILLE — Is the middle of an economic recession the best time for Washington County leaders to push for the installation of all-new computer programming sure to cost taxpayers a half million dollars?

After considering that the current software was installed in 1993 - beyond a million years ago in technology terms - we can't help thinking county offices can wait just a little while longer before getting an upgrade. After all, if they can wait this long

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As was reported some days ago, the new software County Judge Marilyn Edwards wants installed would bring more county services into the 21st century. For instance, the county's human resources department works on a completely different software system, and upgrades would also simplify life in the accounting and accounts payable crowds. When Edwards says going this route would make life easier for employees, she likely knows of what she speaks.

Edwards is already being wise. Based on her comments she doesn't want this decision rushed, and has already pared back on the fully loaded software packages taxpayers could have been stuck paying for but didn't really have to have. We like that she's trying to be careful with taxpayer money.

But should she be even more careful?

The economy is getting better - or, at least, so say folks like Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke and local economist Kathy Deck. Chances are Edwards has been advised that Washington County can afford this particular expenditure at this particular time. That it probably won't come back to haunt the county.

Times are tough in government and in business, which is why the timing of this request seems contrary to what many businesses are doing. Is it advisable to spend this money now when times are so tight? The answer may be yes, because government has to keep functioning. Or it might be time for the county's leadership to suggest getting by just a bit longer.

We have confidence that the county's leaders are trying to do right by taxpayers they serve, but such a commitment of resources at this time deserves close scrutiny.

Opinion, Pages 4 on 10/02/2009

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