

Emergency Budget Workshop and Task Force Discussion

*Dixie County Courthouse, Commission Board Room
214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628
September 16, 2021 – 10:00 AM*

While adhering to the CDC Guidelines and following State of Florida Executive Orders: 20-51 Establishing Response Protocol, 20-52 declaring a Public Health Emergency, 20-69 regarding Local Government Public Meetings and the Dixie County Emergency Declaration 2020-27. The Board will meet and limit access by staff and the public to the meeting room. The Board meetings are audio recorded. The public can hear and participate in the meeting via conference call by dialing 1(917)900-1022 and enter code 32628.

COMMISSIONERS

Jody Stephenson, District 1
W. C. Mills, District 2, Vice Chairman, via telephone
Mark Hatch, District 3
Jamie Storey, District 4, Chairman
James Valentine, District 5

STAFF

Duane Cannon, County Manager
Martha McCaskill, Administrative Asst/Grant Coordinator
Michael Osteen, County Attorney
Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court
Verna Wilson, Chief Deputy Clerk
Della Rhymes, Asst. Chief Deputy Clerk
Jacki Johnson, Chief Financial Officer

CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS

Property Appraiser Robbie Lee
Dixie County Sheriff Darby Butler
Supervisor of Elections Starlett Cannon
Tax Collector Michelle Cannon

CALL TO ORDER

The Board meeting was called to order at 10:01 AM by Commissioner Storey.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE AMERICAN FLAG

The Invocation was led by Commissioner Valentine and the Pledge to the American Flag was led by Commissioner Mills.

Ms. Jacki Johnson appeared before the Board with Budget concerns. She gave the Board some information comparing last year's overall budget to this year's overall budget requests and the individual department budgets for their review. She said they are working on balancing the budget with each department. She said that the EMS Department was out of balance a long way due to various reasons that need to be addressed.

Commissioner Stephenson asked if the information presented can be broken down and itemized.

Ms. Johnson told him that they went over all of that in the smaller meetings held with each department per the Board's request.

Manager Cannon asked the Board to review the information before them.

Commissioner Hatch said that the Budget Committee worked on this information with all the department heads.

Ms. Johnson reminded the Board that anyone could have attended these smaller Budget Committee Meetings.

Commissioner Stephenson said he should have attended.

Clerk Higginbotham said she would like everyone to be more involved.

Manager Cannon informed the Board that the Constitutional Officers turned in their line item Budgets in July and the committee has been working on this with each department. He informed the Board that the Solid Waste Department doesn't need any money from the General Fund, and this is the first time in years that has happened.

Ms. Johnson discussed with the Board several options for helping get the EMS Department Budget balanced. She said option #1 would require the Millage Rate to be set at 3.8937 to get the account in good standing; Option #2 would require the Millage Rate be set at 3.5397 and Option #3 would require the Millage Rate to be set at 2.6000. She said if the Board were to chose option #1 it would help with giving raises next year. She cautioned the Board that option #3 may put them in the position where they must cut services.

Commissioner Stephenson said he is not in agreement with raising the Solid Waste and Fire Assessments and now having to raise the Millage Rates too.

Ms. Johnson said the EMS Department reserve funds have been used up over the years.

Commissioner Stephenson said the Assessments should help with that.

Director of Emergency Services Darian Brown appeared before the Board and said some of their equipment is old and needs to be repaired or replaced and they are short on staff needed to man stations and trucks. He said there has been increases with pay raises, retirement, insurance, equipment costs, medical costs, and fuel. He said they have less revenue than expenses. He said they have finally been able to get some numbers from Finance and now see that they have been operating in the red over several years. He said that had he known about this four years ago they could have addressed it sooner. He said

that the money that was in reserve has been used for various things and has been used up. He said they are down from \$950,000.00 to \$350,000.00. He said they have already cut as many expenses as possible and the only other way for them to save any money is to cut positions and he does not want to do that. He said they are the lowest paid department compared to other counties and that his staff deals with an average of 4,000 call per year. He said they have added 160 new addresses to the county.

Division Chief Matt Ferguson informed the Board that they will have handled over 6,000 calls this year.

County Attorney Michael Osteen suggested they look into the impact fees being used to offset some of these costs.

Director Brown said that the Fire department gets some of that money now, however the impact fees are limited to what it can be used for.

Manager Cannon informed the Board that they will need a \$180,000.00 increase to salaries per year in order to meet the minimum wage increase by 2026. He said that a total of \$750,000.00 is needed.

Commissioner Stephenson said that EMS and Fire are both essential departments. He said he wants to know what is in the General Fund.

Director Brown said they have already closed one station this year to save money. He said it is 56 miles to Gainesville one-way and three hours. He said that his crews are having to work overtime. He said they have been using mutual aid from other counties to help keep up with the calls. He said their maintenance mechanic is retiring and will need to be replaced.

Ms. Johnson said the Board must make some tough decisions. She said they can't use the same budget from last year because they are over budget now. She said the Board needs to use a reality-based budget. She said they have gone over the budget figures more than once and there is no fluff or wiggle room for extra stuff. She said there is no padding in the figures. She said that the County Manager even figured salaries per person to the exact amount.

Commissioner Stephenson asked about the Fire Assessment.

Director Brown said that they can try to use this and get some improvements. He said he has moved people out of the Fire Budget and cut out three positions they wanted to add. He said some of the EMS people are being paid from the Fire Budget to help offset costs.

Commissioner Stephenson asked about the American Rescue Fund.

Manager Cannon cautioned the Board that this is a one-time payment and is mainly designed for infrastructure and not salary or payroll. He said he does not recommend this.

Commissioner Storey expressed his concern for small businesses. He said we are falling behind as a county. He said you can only raise taxes so far and people will go out of business.

Commissioner Hatch said Option #1 and Option #3 are not good choices and Option #2 is a possibility and he would like to think about it some more.

Commissioner Mills said he doesn't want to raise the Millage Rate either; but may have to do this as a last resort to survive.

Ms. Johnson asked Director Brown about the Medicaid rate.

Director Brown said they can possibly raise these rates. He said they can consider a collection agency to help with collecting some of the money that is written off.

Commissioner Hatch said they have sent collection letters in the past.

Director Brown said he believes some of this can be collected.

Commissioner Stephenson asked about applying for the American Rescue Fund for some help.

Manager Cannon said there are strings attached and the US Treasury must approve the allowable expenses.

Tax Collector Michelle Cannon had a question about the Library.
Ms. Johnson answered.

Commissioner Hatch said the Constitutional Officers all made some cuts to their Budgets.

Ms. Johnson agreed and said they need equipment and staff, too. She said there was no unreasonable differences between this year and last year's budget for the Constitutional Officers.

Manager Cannon said the increases are for insurance, payroll, and retirement.

Property Appraiser Robbie Lee said that Mr. Brad Hoard always help them figure out what to do for budgeting employee insurance.

Human Resource Administrator Ms. Angie Crowley said she has cut 25-30 vehicles from the county insurance and that will also help reduce costs.

Ms. Johnson said there was a Workman's Comp claim increase of \$200,000.00 for this year.

Tax Collector Michelle Cannon informed the Board that her budget is tight. She said she needs a new computer and a new \$5,000.00 server. She said she is currently borrowing one from another county to use. She said she was not able to give her staff a raise.

Supervisor of Elections Starlet Cannon informed the Board that there are some challenges coming with the OmniBallot Online. She said that people can get a sample ballot and vote online. She said the early voting drop box must be manned. She said she foresees more lawsuits over voting. She said she is the lowest paid Constitutional Office and she is requesting a five percent increase for her employees. She said she also applies for grants.

Tax Collector Michelle Cannon said her office also took Mr. Hoard's suggestions for employee insurance.

Manager Cannon asked for the Board to give direction on the Smart Cop program requested by the Sheriff. He said the Clerk has also requested money for software and records preservation.

Sheriff Butler said that Smart Cop cost \$400,000.00.

The Board discussed getting through this year and address next year again. Will have more time and better numbers.

Manager Cannon said the Board still needs to address the Jail roof and the inmate issue.

Commissioner Stephenson asked about the one cent sales tax to the jail.

Manager Cannon said that in the Inmate Bedding Agreement the percentage split is 66 to the Sheriff and 34 to the Jail.

Ms. Johnson said they can work with EMS on Medicare and Medicaid collections.

Commissioner Stephenson said they need to get through this year and work on next year better.

Commissioner Mills said the Board needs to think about new implementations to raise money.

Manager Cannon said he would recommend the Board seek an experienced company to help with collections.

Property Appraiser Robbie Lee asked how many hours the Budget Committee has spent working on the Budget.

Manager Cannon replied that last year it was 118 hours and this year it has been over 90 hours for sure.

Ms. Johnson said that all departments have worked on their own Budgets as well. She said that everyone wants to do the best for the county. She said she is thankful for everyone to be able to be a part of the process and that it is good experience for all to be learning together.

Ms. Johnson informed the Board that the Auditor, Mr. Richard Powell, will meet with her again and have a Budget drafted to present to the Board. She said the Chairman will need to attend this meeting sometime in September and they should be able to submit the budget in October.

Commissioner Hatch commented that it has taken this long to get to this point in the process because the Clerk has had so much to deal with and clean up.

Sheriff Butler thanked Ms. Johnson, Manager Cannon, Clerk Higginbotham and Chief Deputy Clerk Verna Wilson for their patience with his office. He informed the Board that his staff is also overworked and underpaid. He said they are the lowest paid in comparison to other counties. He said the Dixie County Jail houses inmates in the custody of Federal Marshalls and inmates from other counties.

TASK FORCE DUSCUSSION began at 11:28 AM

Mr. David Capo appeared before the Board to request permission to clean-out and re-route the canal at the Cross City Airport. He said there was a study already done for this area. He said that Mr. Pat Upshaw, from FDOT, told him there is some money to use for this project. He said there is 500 feet of culverts under the runway which is a concern. He said they will need to cut across Mr. Matt Fulford's property and Bascom Southern and then on towards the county property, then to the canal. He said this problem area contributed to the prison flooding and areas within the Hammock.

Manager Cannon clarified that the Old Town Upholstery canal and Brushy Creek are the same.

Mr. Capo said they need the Board's permission to make a plan and submit it to Tallahassee in next 2 weeks.

Commissioner Stephenson asked about the pipes on the other side of the airport near the Marvin Martin property.

Mr. Capo said to save the prison you must move the water towards California Lake.

County Attorney Michael Osteen said the county needs to send a letter and remind these landowners that they need to maintain these culverts.

Mr. Capo asked for permission to present a plan to the Florida Senate for funding.

Manager Cannon said the Board will get an update tonight and possibly make a motion.

Property Appraiser Robbie Lee said he has talked to the Task Force and said there are some good people in this community who are trying to help. He said he has also spoken with Keith Perry and Chuck Clemons about the flooding issue and they said they will also try to help Dixie County.

Commissioner Hatch said he has spoken to Neil Dunn as well about this issue.

Commissioner Hatch said the Clerk's office has done a good job and this process cannot be done overnight.

Ms. Johnson said they have been trying to keep everyone informed.

Commissioner Mills said thanks for all the help on the Budget. He thanked Mr. Wright from Building and Zoning and all the other department staff that has worked beyond their normal hours to help. He thanked the Task Force for all their help too.

Manager Cannon reminded everyone that the next meeting is at 5:30 PM here in the Board Room and then on to the School Board Meeting Room in Old Town at 6:00 PM for the Regular Meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

There were no comments or concerns expressed at this time.

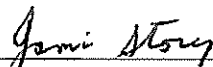
ADJOURN

Commissioner Hatch made the motion to adjourn at 11:50 AM. Commissioner Stephenson seconded. Board approved.

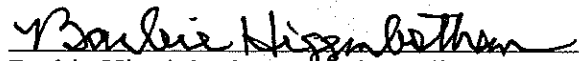


BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
DIXIE COUNTY, FLORIDA

ATTEST:



Jamie Storey, Chairman


Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk-Auditor

PLEASE BE ADVISED that if a person decided to appeal any decision made by the Board with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearings, he/ she will need a record of the proceedings, and for such purpose, he/ she will need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

“Persons with disabilities requesting reasonable accommodations to participate in this proceeding should contact (352) 486-4931 (Voice & TDD) or via Florida Relay Service at (800) 955-8771.”

The Board meets the first Thursday of each month at 10:00 AM and the third Thursday of each month at 6:00 PM. Individuals that would like to be placed on the agenda should call Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court, by 4:00 PM on the Friday Preceding the Board meeting, at (352) 498-1200.