

Final Budget Meeting

Dixie County Courthouse

Commission Board Room

214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628

September 27, 2021 – 5:30 PM

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

Mark Hatch, District 3

Jamie Storey, District 4, Chairman

James Valentine, District 5

STAFF

Duane Cannon, County Manager

Martha McCaskill, Administrative Asst/Grant Coordinator

Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court

Verna Wilson, Chief Deputy Clerk

Della Rhymes, Asst. Chief Deputy Clerk

Jacki Johnson, Chief Financial Officer

CALL TO ORDER

The Board meeting was called to order by Commissioner Storey at 5:30 PM.

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 to discuss the advertising of the Final Budget Hearing.

Ms. Johnson read Resolution 2021-148 aloud to the Board and said the Board will need to vote on the Final Millage Rate of 13.0000 mills for the 2021-2022 FY, which is supported by this Resolution.

Commissioner Stephenson said he thought that the Board was not going to raise this Millage Rate.

Commissioner Hatch said the property values increased.

Ms. Johnson informed the Board that the rate in the Tentative Millage Rate was a mistake. She said this one has been corrected.

Commissioner Hatch made the motion to approve Resolution 2021-148 in support of the Final Millage Rate for the 2021-2022 FY. Commissioner Mills seconded. Board approved.

A member of the audience asked what was the property values raised to.

Ms. Johnson said she doesn't have those numbers with her, but she will get that information for anyone who would like to know.

Commissioner Hatch said the Property Appraiser determines those figures.

The audience member asked for clarification that the Millage Rate did not increase.

Commissioner Storey said it is the same as last year.

Commissioner Stephenson said if your property value increased then yes you will pay more taxes.

Commissioner Hatch reminded everyone that the Board did increase the Fire and Solid waste Assessment.

Ms. Johnson said on the TRIM Notice that was mailed out to the public, the Proposed Millage Rate was higher.

Commissioner Hatch asked how much was the assessment increase.

Ms. Martha McCaskill said the assessment increase is \$130.00 total. She said it is \$125.00 for Fire and \$180.00 for Solid Waste.

The audience member asked what will this money help pay.

Commissioner Stephenson relied it will help the Solid Waste Department operate within their Budget. He said that the garbage gets hauled to Greenville and that is costly. He said that even with the increase Dixie County is still cheaper than other counties. He said the assessment hasn't been raised since 1992.

Commissioner Hatch said that the assessment rates will be good for five years. He said then the Board can re-evaluate the rates.

Board Approved Resolution 2021-148 in support of the Millage Rate.

Ms. Johnson read Resolution 2021-149 aloud to the Board in support of the Final Budget for 2021-2022 FY which is \$43,663,484.00.

Commissioner Hatch made the motion to approve Resolution 2021-149 in support of the Final Budget for the 2021-2022 FY. Commissioner Mills seconded. Board approved.

Ms. Johnson discussed the need for the Clerk's Budget to be increased. She said they have received final numbers from the audit for the Clerk's Office and it was short by \$85,493.00 in the Court Fund. She said they were \$86,243.00 short in the General Operating Fund.

She said she spoke with CCOC (Corporation of Clerks and Comptrollers) and there are no provisions to help with this. She said there is no other way for the Clerk's Office to raise funds. She said the only solution is for the Board to make the Clerk's Office whole by amending their Budget for 2021 FY by this amount.

Commissioner Stephenson asked how are Court Funds collected and how are they short.

Ms. Johnson replied that the Clerk submits a Budget request to the Corporation of Clerks and Comptrollers (CCOC) and they process this and then it goes through the legislature and they fund each county based on the functions, population and different criteria for each county. She said they increase or decrease the Budget depending on these criteria. She said the Clerk did not ask for enough money in the Budget from CCOC and part of this money is from 2018-2019.

Commissioner Stephenson asked if they determine what your Budget is then how can you ask for more.

Ms. Johnson said you are supposed to work within your Budget. She said that in 2020, the Clerk did not stay within the Budget. The Clerk is supposed to base the Budget request on staff performance, functions, and volume of work. She said the CCOC calculates what is collected from each division or department. She said they also give extra money because Dixie County is a deficit county. She said that money is sent to Tallahassee monthly from court collections. She said that larger counties may bring in more money than they expend.

Commissioner Hatch asked if these figures are from the year of 2020.

Ms. Johnson clarified they are from 2020.

Ms. Johnson said that in addition to this, the Carl, Riggs and Ingrim (CRI) fee of \$75,000.00, was paid out of the Clerk's Budget. She said this money was never transferred back to the Clerk.

The audience member asked why is this short.

Ms. Johnson replied the Clerk overspent. She said it is the responsibility of the Constitutional Officer to work within the Budget.

Commissioner Stephenson said the reason he is asking is because the county is struggling now. He said the Sheriff made a mistake on figuring insurance costs of about \$40,000.00. He said the Sheriff is going to try to overcome this error and not ask for more money. He asked if the Clerk can overcome this overspent funds.

Ms. Johnson replied no.

Commissioner Hatch said the Board voted to hire CRI for \$75,000.00.

Commissioner Stephenson said he also asked for a new computer system to be purchased and used in the Finance Department. He said we still don't know where the county stands financially.

Ms. Johnson said a new computer system doesn't help when you don't have the information to put in it.

The public said you get to a certain point and draw the line.

Ms. Johnson said they need to get caught up. She said there are still processes to fix and these are time consuming issues. For example, getting collections and payroll back on track.

Clerk of Court Barbie Higginbotham informed the Board that when her team came into the office, they assumed they would only be addressing the past year. However, in reality they are fixing issues from the past three years.

Commissioner Mills made the motion to pay the Clerk Budget Amendment from the General Fund. Commissioner Hatch seconded.

The public asked what kind of audit was done.

Ms. Johnson said a forensic audit would take years to do. She said you don't have a forensic audit. She said the auditors go through bank records, revenues and expenditures, they check information with the state, they make sure that procedures and processes are being followed, cash control, payroll, and controls on hiring and firing employees, unemployment, etc.

The public asked if the auditor cost \$75,000.00.

Ms. Johnson said that was the fee for Consultants to be hired to help catch up the books to prepare for the audit. She said the auditor cost around \$80,000.00.

She said that audits are required to be done every year and the county was behind. She said the 2019 audit was just done in December of 2020 and the 2020 audit will be done in October of 2021 and the 2021 audit will begin next year.

Board approved to pay the Clerk's Budget Amendment from the General Fund.

Commissioner Stephenson said there won't be a true audit until 2021 is done. He said they couldn't do a true audit for the prior years because they didn't have all the information and documentation needed.

Clerk Higginbotham informed the Board that they used what information they could find.

Ms. Johnson said that 2021 will be better because the Clerk and the Finance Department have all the documentation for 2021.

Chief Deputy Clerk Verna Wilson clarified for the Board that from January 07, of 2021 until now they have documentation. She said they do not have October, November and December of 2020 information.

Commissioner Mills said they know what they have for the new Budget year.

Commissioner Stephenson said the county may need that extra money.

Ms. Johnson informed the Board that if any of this money is not spent by the Clerk then it is refunded back to the Board. She said the Board must do this to comply with the audit.

Commissioner Mills thanked Ms. Johnson and asked that she keep going.

Director of Emergency Services Brown appeared before the Board to request them to approve Resolution 2021-159 for the renewal of the local State of Emergency.

Commissioner Stephenson made the motion to approve Resolution 2021-159 for the renewed State of Emergency. Commissioner Mills seconded. Board approved.

Division Chief Scott Garner appeared before the Board and informed them of two Tropical Waves off of Africa which may become a named storm by Friday. He said that by September 30 the Flood Stage of the Suwannee River will be at nine foot through October 02.

Chief Garner said that Dixie County has been approved for the Small Business Association Loans (SBA). He said that homeowners or business owners can apply and get a loan for repairs. He said there is no FEMA assistance yet. He said people can use the money to remodel or replace their home up to \$220,000.00. He said the interest rate will be 1.563 percent if you have been turned down for a loan. If you can get credit the interest rate is 3.125 percent. This is a 30-year term loan.

Commissioner Mills asked where do they apply for this loan.

Chief Garner said the SBA Disaster Loan Outreach Center will be at the Steinhatchee Community Building in Taylor County on September 30 from 9:00 AM until 4:30 PM and on October 01 from 9:00 AM until 6:00 PM and on October 04 through October 06 from 9:00 AM until 6:00 PM and on October 07 from 9:00 until 4:00 PM.

Chief Garner said they will post the information on their EMS website today.

The public said this can be posted on the project board at the Community Center in Steinhatchee.

Ms. Angie Crowley asked about United Way assistance.

Chief Garner said they have sent out a Needs Assessment Form. He said the submission deadline is Wednesday. He said they will then address the needs that have been submitted.

Commissioner Hatch said he was looking at the water levels today. He said they may be able to dig on the East side of the natural drain and send water away from Cooper Thompson Road and the Hammock. He said he marked several areas which need culverts.

Commissioner Stephenson asked are you digging out the natural drain or along the road.

Commissioner Hatch said follow the natural drain.

Commissioner Mills said he wished they could dig along Chavous and use the right of way.

The public asked why is this happening all of sudden, we having all these issues with water.

Commissioner Stephenson said there is no way to prepare for what has happened.

The public said they need some culverts near the Jena Baptist Church and also near the Rocky Creek area.

Commissioner Hatch made the motion for Commissioner Mills to look over and decide what to do in his district. Commissioner Stephenson seconded. Board approved.

Commissioner Hatch said they started shooting elevations near Scrub Creek Church, the Airport Canal, the Peanut Field, Ambrose Lane, and Kirby Road. He said they should work these areas to move more water towards Road 30. He said that Mr. Hutchison can work on mowing and cleaning the ditch on the 55A project tomorrow.

Commissioner Mills made the motion to allow Road Superintendent Steve Hutchison to mow and dig the designated area for Commissioner Hatch. Commissioner Stephenson seconded. Board approved.

Commissioner Mills asked if the Task Force is looking at these areas, too.

Commissioner Hatch said they are looking at 55A, but he will ask them to look at Commissioner Mills area, too.

Commissioner Mills agreed they need the extra help.

Commissioner Storey requested they look at the Hwy 351 canal.

Commissioner Hatch said he has asked Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) for historical data from Mallory Swamp.

Commissioner Stephenson agreed that water is trapped in some areas.

Commissioner Hatch said they need to look at blockages in the canal near the Upholstery Shop.

The Board discussed following this canal and checking for blockages and depth.

Commissioner Hatch suggested using maps on the phone and drop a pin and use a computer to map the canal.

Director Brown said Chief Garner will be in their office for the next three days. He said that other staff members have other engagements.

Commissioner Stephenson and Commissioner Storey discussed attempting this together.

Commissioner Hatch and Commissioner Mills agreed to meet and look at the Greenway and look over the area discussed.

The public asked about mowing the roads around the bridges.

Commissioner Stephenson said the mowing has been delayed due to the flooding.

The public asked about using a Government Water Way Map and possibly install a baffling system for the water flow.

The public asked about dirt and rock.

Commissioner Mills said they are out of rock and dirt materials. He said they have used up their reserves.

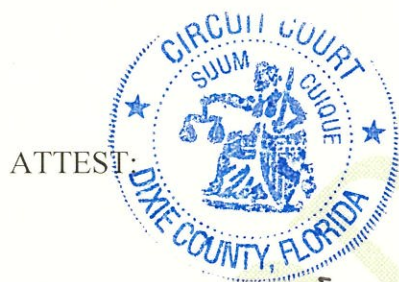
Commissioner Mills said he knows someone who has a Gradeall for sale of \$35,000.00.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

There were no comments or concerns expressed at this time.


ADJOURN

Commissioner Mills made the motion to adjourn at 7:00 PM. Commissioner Stephenson seconded. Board approved.

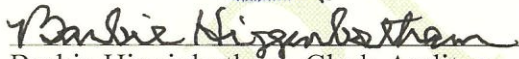


ATTEST

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
DIXIE COUNTY, FLORIDA



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.