

**AT A BUDGET HEARING OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN
COUNTY, FLORIDA ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2019 AT 6:00
P.M., THE FOLLOWING PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ:**

Present: **Dr. Anthony “Dr. V” Viegbesie, Chair, District 2**
 Sherrie Taylor, Vice Chair, District 5
 Eric Hinson, District 2
 Gene Morgan, District 3
 Brenda Holt, District 4
 Arthur Lawson, Interim County Administrator
 David Weiss, County Attorney
 Marcella Blocker, Deputy Clerk

INVOCATION, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Viegbesie called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., Commissioner Morgan gave the Invocation and then led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

AMENDMENTS AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA

UPON MOTION BY COMMISSIONER MORGAN AND SECOND BY COMMISSIONER HINSON, THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 BY VOICE VOTE TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED.

Citizens Requesting to be Heard

Chair Viegbesie said the Speaker Request Forms he had were to do with the Agenda.

Nick Maddox, 301 S. Monroe St., Tallahassee, FL. Mr. Maddox said the number one reason he appeared before the Board was on behalf of the Boys and Girls Club. He said they would not be able to serve the children of the County if their budget was cut. They give kids the opportunity to have a safe haven to go, a place to interact with other kids and for them to grow.

Jim McShane appeared before the Board. He said GCDC has been able to bring jobs and tax base to the County and could not understand why a County would not want to continue to have an economic development entity helping and working for them and putting at risk some State dollars that were in the pipeline that their Executive Director has been working on that was over \$1 Million. He said also at Capital Region, that was what they were all about and was trying to help the County be profitable and prosperous but would be hard if there were no jobs to put people to work in the County that that was what the Board was turning their back on by not funding GCDC.

Antonio Jefferson, Chairman of GCDC, appeared before Board. He stated that GCDC was a 501(c)3 organization that was created by Gadsden County and its original mission was to position the County to qualify for the Federal Empowerment Zone Program. He said the County did not have success in that but it was soon followed by the State of Florida Enterprise Zone program in which the GCDC managed and maintained on behalf of the County.

He said they were responsible for about \$4.5 Million in grants, dozens of new jobs that they created new or retained and through the Gadsden County School Board and GTI, started the Diesel Mechanics program that was launched this year. From a regional aspect they were able to get Tallahassee Office of Economic Vitality to open up the Leon Works program to give students an

opportunity to go to Tallahassee and participate and introducing them to career opportunities.

He then gave an update on the Partnership with Logistics Zone; he said through their efforts the City of Gretna managed to get a grant for \$297,725.00 to do a Feasibility Study on 600 acres between Gretna and Greensboro that was part of the Gulf to Gadsden Freight Logistics Zone that makes up Franklin, Liberty, Gulf and Gadsden Counties. He said the 600 acres was adjacent to the A & N Railroad that extends from Port St. Joe to Chattahoochee. He said through their work with Opportunity Florida they have managed a number of trips and have seen that it takes a collaborative effort of many parties to sustain a successful economic development program. He said the efforts require a community effort, both public and private sector to make them a reality. He said they have asked the City partners to step up. He said they would also be looking at private fund raisers from the private sector.

He said they were glad to be a part of this County and many of the volunteers had full time jobs and do the work because they loved the County.

Zack Howard appeared before the Board and said he brought greetings on behalf of Four Star Freightliner. He said one reason they were in Gadsden County was based on GCDC; they played a big role in getting them to Gadsden County. He said they have grown from 10 employees to about 20 and hoped the County considered continued funding to GCDC.

Commissioner Hinson asked if it was possible for the BOCC and GCDC could discuss ways to generate revenue for the County.

Mr. Jefferson said there were shortfalls in the community along with the collapse of the two bridges of the two bridges. He said there were some ideas they have tossed around within GCDC and they wanted to find the appropriate time to approach the BOCC to brainstorm on how they could position themselves better. He said the bridges were a limited solution but they did need adequate infrastructure, not only locally or internally, but at the interchanges also. He said they planned to work with BOCC in the next year to bring forth some ideas and suggestions they think will begin to help solve the road problem as well as some infrastructure needs to support economic development.

Commissioner Hinson said he strongly supported organization and thanked them for doing a wonderful job. He continued and said before making any decisions, they were currently in the process of interviewing for a new County Administrator, and asked the Board if they thought this was the best angle to take and said a new Administrator may have a different approach to the County. He said there were a lot of positions and a lot of increases in lot of departments and wanted to make sure the new Administrator has something to work with when they come in. He said right now the budget was stacked so it looked like there was a shortfall but actually had an increase in the budget.

Chair Viegbesie asked how we got to where we were right now, what led us to where the County was having this discussion. He said there was a Budget presented in one of the meetings that was balanced with \$3+Million in Reserves and in that budget, the Non-Profits were being funded. He said they then voted to not split the Surtax to fund EMS, which was an integral part of the County and must be funded. He added he did not think the cuts were permanent; they were temporary and they were doing this to generate money down the pipeline. He said this was what they

needed to do currently to have a balanced budget so they were not in violation of State regulations.

Commissioner Hinson said he was a friend of EMS and they had to do what was best for the County. He said the night he voted against EMS, he said that night they had to make sure the bridges was protected and the bridge collapsed that night. He said they had a lot of money in their budget. He said for them to look at the September 17, 2018 meeting last year, he said the same thing. He continued and said they were making decisions; they gave Constitutional Officers their wish list. They then said to cut 5% from their "wish list", if someone ask for \$500,000, we cut 5% of the \$500,000, that a not cut, they were still giving them \$400,000 surplus. He said they had to make sure they were working for the people. He said it all started with 125 summer youth jobs. He said people give you a wish list, you cut 5% of their wish list, you're still giving them an increase and they had to look at that. He said they were interviewing for a new County Administrator and he wanted to make sure that person came in with \$4-5 Million surplus in the budget so they would have a lot of money so they can figure out ways. He said they need to be careful and come to an agreeance and not grandstand.

Chair Viegbesie said if there were no other comments, staff has provided them with documents.

Commissioner Morgan said they were in a tough spot from a fiscal standpoint; they had some major items they were on the tail end to complete, whether it was the Courthouse renovations, the Communications system, the AG center, in addition to a Category 5 hurricane and immediate needs with infrastructure. He said they were very fortunate that Staff put together a budget where they did not have to draw down fund balance like they were presented in a previous meeting. He said he had some suggestions.

GENERAL BUSINESS

1. Budget Overview and Discussion

Mr. Lawson said this was the Final Budget hearing and at the last Budget hearing they proposed a projected shortfall of \$1.470 Million and they were requested to make some recommended deletions to the budget. He said they were presenting a balanced budget at this point. He said once they go through the Public Hearing, they would have to vote on two separate Resolutions, one to adopt the Final Millage Rate and one to adopt the 2019/2020 Budget.

PUBLIC HEARING

Mr. Price gave a summary of what they had been looking at. He said they started out September 30, 2018 with \$4 Million in Reserves; set up the Hurricane Michael fund from that and left \$3,150 Million. He said FY19 budget was prepared using 1/3 of Small County Surtax, which was changed and given back to the other two funds and meant General Funds Reserves had to transfer approximately \$1 Million in this current fiscal year. He said in FY20 they had to recalculate the entire budget without the EMS receiving the Surtax and had to reallocate some funds and Staff identified some cuts and based on that, it left a shortfall of \$115,000, leaving a fund balance of just over \$2 Million. He said from the shown shortfall last meeting, they were recommending reallocating some of the unused hurricane funds (\$850,000) and some funds that were identified for the Woodham Building roof and wanted to bring that back to the Board and request reallocation of those two funds and items to help with the budget. He said they were cutting some positions; the IT assistant, the Senior Coordinator and the Grant Writer; cut the Non-Profits, all of them, cut the Summer jobs, cut the Butler Building generator, cut back on

some expenses for Dispatch and EMS, there might be ways to engineer that better, and in Facility/Maintenance, they cut some of that in the Department relieving the \$115,000 shortfall. He said that was the proposal and anything that was changed would have to come from Fund Balance.

Chair Viegbesie suggested before they moved to the Speakers, instead of using "cuts" in the positions of IT, the Senior Coordinator and Grant Writer, he would rather use the word "delete" because those positions were never in the budget before, they were proposals for the 2020 budget. Mr. Price said the IT Assistant and Senior Coordinator was that way, the Grant Coordinator was the position that was previously held by Dee Jackson.

Chair Viegbesie said given the budget as it was, he would now recognize speakers that had filled out Speaker Request Forms. He then said before doing that, from his understanding, if there was no budget passed by the end of September, they would be in violation of State compliance and the State would come in and take over the running of the County. Mr. Weiss said no, and explained.

Mr. Weiss said the State would not take over the running of the County but the County would be subject to forfeiture of State funds.

(Chair Viegbesie then addressed Speakers above.)

2. FINAL BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING FOR ADOPTION OF FINAL MILLAGE RATE

Mr. Lawson stated for the Fiscal Year 2019/2020, the final Gadsden County wide operating millage rate is 8.9064 mills. The calculated rolled-back millage rate (the property tax rate that generates the same amount of property tax revenue as last year) is 8.9261 mills which is 0.0191 mills more than the current rate of 8.9064 mills. The current year rate of 8.9064 mills as a percent change of the rolled-back rate (8.9261 mills) is -0.22% more. He then stated a motion was needed to adopt a Resolution for the final FY2019/2020 County-wide Millage rate of 8.9064 via Resolution number 2019-026.

Chair Viegbesie said before he entertained questions from the Commissioners, he asked if there were any comments from the audience and there were none.

Commissioner Holt asked if it was possible that they do not roll back the rate and kept it at the current millage rate and would that help generate more money.

Mr. Lawson said they were at the current rate and they voted last time for this particular millage rate and they could not increase it now.

Chair Viegbesie asked if they could increase and Mr. Weiss responded they could not increase it. Chair Viegbesie explained that he asked the question in case citizens were following them.

Commissioner Holt asked when they would have had to have done that and Mr. Weiss responded they would have had to do that at the first hearing but there were a lot of notice requirements they would have had to do. He added that practically speaking, it should be done when the Property Appraiser sends the proposed millage rate notices out.

COMMISSIONER MORGAN MADE A MOTION TO ADOPT OPTION ONE AND COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 BY VOICE VOTE TO APPROVE.

Commissioner Morgan said they were in an unusual situation from a fiscal standpoint. His suggestion from what staff presented in addition to the projected shortfall of \$115,000 from Fund balance; he suggested in addition to what Staff presented to them, they cut two positions and one existing position in the Grant Writer position and he asked they add back in the Grant Writer position and because it impacted the children in the County, the Boys and Girls Club funding and that would increase the projected shortfall, which would have to be transferred from the unrestricted Fund Balance, to \$281,187.00.

COMMISSIONER MORGAN MADE A MOTION TO ADD BACK IN THE GRANT WRITER POSITION AND FUNDING FOR THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB AND CHAIR VIEGBESIE MADE THE SECOND WITH A QUESTION.

Chair Viegbesie asked if that motion and second was upheld, what that would do to the Fund Balance.

Mr. Lawson asked Mr. Price how much that would reduce fund balance if they took \$70,000 plus the \$96,187.000 with the current \$115,000 they were drawing down and Mr. Price responded it would reduce Fund Balance by \$166,000 and would be down to \$1.9 Million.

Commissioner Taylor had a question. She said this budget overall was at an 8% increase. She said that amount was required to be published when they advertise the budget in the paper. She said there was an increase across the Board. She asked the Interim, in some of the Departments, the Department Heads recommended an amount and then the Manager recommended an amount, for example, Personnel was almost a \$767,000 increase with Personnel. With Fire Assessment, there was almost \$287,000 increase; EMS \$787,000 increase from what the Departments was operating on last year. The Chair asked earlier how they got to where they were where the reserves were dwindling. She said she spoke briefly this afternoon with the Clerk. They could pass this budget this afternoon; their difficulties will definitely come in 2020/2021 because they will not have the fund balance to fund that budget with. She said they either do it now or do it later but cuts will come. She said she concurred with not taking anything away with regards to children. She wished they could put the \$50,000 back in the budget as well. She said she was willing to do as suggested earlier, which was to come back and look at this budget so they can realize some of the funding that will be coming down the line from (Hurricane) Michael and some other entities. She said they could not call this a permanent budget but they have to pass this tonight. She said what was right was to be fair across the Board and if they were to take 5% across the Board from everyone, they would have the money they needed tonight and not cause anyone their position or job. If they were to do right, they could come back in December and do it right. She said they need economic development but would rather put the money where it works for them. She added if they were to do what was right, pass it as recommended tonight and come back and give money when they have it to give. She said she talked with a Constitutional Officer and they said they would not mind taking a cut but they were looking at \$750,000 worth of salary increases and other Departments within their government that asked for increases as well. She said they needed to look at that first. She asked that they all meet halfway this year. That way the non-profits and summer jobs would not get the hard hits. She said to talk to departments and see if they could free up money.

Commissioner Hinson said last year he took pride in having huge revenue and seems they have been spending for the sake of it. He said throughout that year there were increases in the budget. He also asked about if there were raises and was told there were no raises, but in January the Clerk came and said there were significant raises given and this year there were increases and this year there were raises to the tune of \$1.5 Million. But only one-third of the County received an increase, the other two-thirds were left out and he did not feel that was fair. He said one department was increased by \$700,000 and not one Commissioner ever asked why or how. He said they were about to bring in a new County Administrator and they were going to have to be the bad guy. He said he talked to the Clerk and was told they could pass the budget this year with \$600,000, it would be ok this year, but next year will be difficult. Why not ask the questions why certain departments were being increased.

Commissioner Holt said they should have met and had a Post Michael workshop and did not do it. Mr. Lawson was not here and that was not done. They had workshops in June and July and no-one questioned the budget and in September it's then a big problem. It made no sense to talk about road problems. She said they lost #1 Million after the new Board came on because they were supposed to pave roads in districts 3 and 4 but it did not happen because the Board decided to split the money up. She said the split the road money up and districts 1, 3, & 5 got roads paved. She said some Departments got increases because they got grants. If they were going to move money, they had June, July and August to do so. She said she bet not two Commissioners could tell what all have been applied for as far as reimbursements because no workshop has been held and it was very important.

COMMISSIONER HOLT CALLED THE QUESTION AND COMMISSIONER MORGAN MADE THE SECOND. CHAIR VIEGBESIE CALLED FOR THE VOTE. THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 TO APPROVE.

3. FINAL BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2019/2020

Chair Viegbesie said the Motion on the floor was the Motion made by Commissioner Morgan that he seconded. He asked Commissioner Morgan to repeat the Motion.

COMMISSIONER MORGAN REPEATED THE MOTION TO KEEP THE GRANT WRITER AT \$70,000 AND TO FUND THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB AT \$ 96,187.00 AND THE TOTAL INCREASE IN THE PROJECTED SHORTFALL WOULD BE \$166,187.00 AND CHAIR VIEGBESIE MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 4-1 BY VOICE VOTE. COMMISSIONER HINSON OPPOSED.

Mr. Lawson said they needed to adopt Resolution 2019-027. He said the budget was in the amount of \$51,649,793. Chair Viegbesie asked if it was reflecting cuts that Staff recommended and with the addition of the Grant writer and Boys and Girls Club would that change the amount. Mr. Lawson said the bottom line would be the same; they would be taking more out of Reserve.

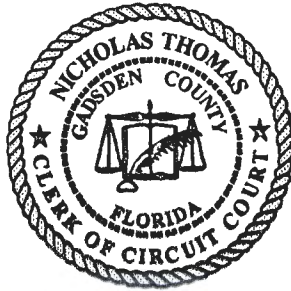
COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE AND CHAIR VIEGBESIE MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 BY VOICE VOTE TO APPROVE THE ITEM.

Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners
September 23, 2019-Final Budget Hearing

MOTION TO ADJOURN

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR VIEGBESIE DECLARED THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 7:13 P.M.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA



ATTEST:



NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk



ANTHONY VIEGBESIE, Chair
Board of County Commissioners