

**AT A SPECIAL MEETING TO INTERVIEW  
CANDIDATES FOR THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR  
OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA  
ON SEPTEMBER 17, 2020 AT 5:00 P.M., THE  
FOLLOWING PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ:**

**Present:**       **Anthony Viegbesie, Ph.D., Chairman- District 2**  
                  **Brenda Holt, Vice Chair- District 4**  
                  **Eric Hinson- District 1, appeared remotely**  
                  **Sherry Taylor- District 5**  
                  **Gene Morgan- District 3, appeared remotely**  
                  **Lonyell Butler- Human Resources**  
                  **Henry G. Grant- PhD., Interim County Administrator**  
                  **Clayton Knowles- County Attorney**  
                  **Beth Bruner- Deputy Clerk**

**These meetings are being held virtually in accordance with the Governor's Executive Order No. 20-69 as extended by Executive Order No. 20-179.**

**\*\*All interview questions are listed at the beginning of the first interview\*\***

**General Business**

**1. Welcome (Anthony O Viegbesie, Ph.D., Chairman)**

At 5:04 p.m. Chair Viegbesie welcomed everyone to the interviews, asked for heads to be bowed in silent prayer, followed by leading the Pledge of Allegiance to the U.S. Flag.

Chair Viegbesie thanked Ms. Butler for her hard work and asked for the interview guidelines and Ms. Butler stepped forward and gave the interview guidelines. She further stated one applicant, from the interview process for tonight, sent a letter of withdrawal from the process.

Commissioner Morgan asked which candidate withdrew and Ms. Butler answered, Mr. Proctor.

Chair Viegbesie asked for Mr. Elias to be brought into the meeting at 5:10 p.m.  
Mr. Elias was not on the line but the interview was not scheduled until 5:15 p.m.

Mr. Butler said she would read the letter of withdrawal from Mr. Proctor and she did.  
*This letter can be found at the end of these meeting minutes.*

Chair Viegbesie asked Mr. Knowles if there was a legal opinion.  
Attorney Knowles said go forward and put the letter into the record.

Commissioner Hinson asked if the process was a fair process from a legal perspective and did it interfere with the labor laws. He said no candidate had another person listen to what other candidates had to say.

Chair Viegbesie asked if the process of being virtual and because people could listen to the other interviews made it unfair and Commissioner Hinson said yes, and he wanted to be in line with what was right.

Chair Viegbesie said go through with the process, let the attorney research the impact of the process and give his legal opinion as to any violations.

Commissioner Holt said she had questions about the process, but thought the remaining candidates should be given the opportunity to speak if they wanted.

Commissioner Hinson said the Board could come back tomorrow and give new questions. Chair Viegbesie said the same questions had to be imposed on each applicant. Ms. Butler stated Chair Viegbesie was correct.

Commissioner Morgan said he had asked if anyone had seen the questions and was told no. His question for the Attorney was, is the BOCC required to have a public meeting during the interview process. Attorney Knowles answered yes.

Commissioner Morgan said the Board could not control who listened to the interviews and this was the most open and fair process.

Commissioner Holt said the Board could have a discussion later and they needed to finish.

Chair Viegbesie asked for the process to be finished and asked for Mr. Elias to be brought into the meeting.

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**(AV) 1. Please describe how your previous work experience has prepared you for the position of County Administrator of Gadsden County.**

**(BH) 2. What interest you most about being the County Administrator for Gadsden County?**

**(EH) 3. Please explain the role of the County Administrator within local Government as you see it.**

**(ST) 4. As the County Administrator, how would you interact with and engage the citizens and different organizations within the community?**

**(GM) 5. This position requires you to develop the County's budget. Explain to us the key to a successful budget and what has been the largest organizational budget that you have developed and managed.**

**(AV) 6. Explain your experience in goal setting and financial forecasting.**

**(BH)7. Share with us your experience with developing and implementing a strategic plan.**

**(EH)8. Provide a time when you were able to identify a complex problem, evaluate the options, implement a solution, and the benefit(s) the solution had for your employer.**

**(ST) 9. Describe your experience in working with citizens from various cultural backgrounds and the approaches you have used to ensure adequate attention is given to the varying needs of these groups.**

**(GM)10. What have been your biggest work-related accomplishments and how were you able to attain them?**

**(AV)11. What do you see as the most critical part of an Administrator's job?**

**(BH) 12. In your experience, what is the key to ensuring Gadsden County is compliant with all laws, regulations and standards that are applicable to the operations of the organization?**

**(EH) 13. How do you assess the strengths and weaknesses of an organization and identify opportunities to make improvements?**

**(ST) 14. How would you keep the County Commissioners informed on issues, projects, and/or citizens' concerns?**

**(GM) 15. Tell us about your experience working with small local city/county governments and what do you consider the primary difference between small local governments as compared to a larger governmental entity.**

**(AV) 16. How would you characterize your leadership style?**

**(BH) 17. Share with us a time when your ethics were tested and the outcome.**

**(EH) 18. How would you improve low staff moral with limited funds?**

**(ST) 19. In your experience, what is the key to developing a good administrative team?**

**(GM) 20. If this position were offered to you, when would you be able to start?**

**(AV) Do you have any questions of this panel?**

**2. 5:15 p.m. – Interview – Derrick Elias  
(Board of County Commissioners)**

At 5:23 p.m. Mr. Elias appeared remotely before the board via Zoom and Ms. Butler gave him the guidelines of the interview.

**Chair asked question #1**

He said he had 34 years of Public Service. He started in 1985 with the Federal Government, Department of Defense. He was a Recruiter, Staffer, Trainer, Employee Relations, Labor Relations, Payroll, Attendance. He came back to Quincy and worked at the Florida Department of Corrections as an Assistant Personnel Officer. He was responsible for the grade classification of 26,000 positions. He started the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice in 1994. He worked with the FDJJ for 24 years. He was deputy Chief of HR and supervised the day to day activities of the Bureau. He said he was responsible for labor relations and became the Equal Opportunity Officer and was responsible for reviewing all cases of discrimination, sexual harassment, and retaliation. He was an elected Commissioner for 18 years on the Quincy City Commission and was the Mayor of Quincy for 7 years. He was employed with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity as Deputy Chief of HR, and responsible for all the day operations of labor relations and employee relations with all discipline and training.

**Commissioner Holt asked question #2**

He said he saw the County go without a permanent County Administrator and he wanted to offer his services. He said he was homegrown, well-known and could converse with a diverse group of individuals. He said he knew the County and the issues of the County. He further stated he could work with employees and citizens to move the County forward and bridge the gap.

**Commissioner Hinson asked question #3**

He said it was to initiate, implement, and carry out policies the Board had agreed upon, and to carry out day to day processes of the County based on the policies the Commission adopted.

**Commissioner Taylor asked question #4**

He said by having meetings regularly. He said he would reach out to municipalities in the County and invite them in to work together on issues. He had an open-door policy for everyone and was accessible at all times.

**Commissioner Morgan asked question #5**

He said the key was to be realistic and live within your means. He said the City of Quincy had a \$40 Million budget, and that was the largest and it was a collaborative effort.

**Chair Viegbesie asked question #6**

He stated he would establish goals and establish an avenue to obtain the goals, and that called for research, and projections. He said to be realistic and look at where you are and where you want to be and make sure the forecast was in line with previous situations.

**Commissioner Holt asked question #7**

He said Quincy had a Comprehensive Plan and it was a group effort. He said no one person could develop a Strategic Plan alone.

**Commissioner Hinson asked question #8**

He said it was with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice when the Legislature made a law that his agency had to identify persons with disabilities. He said it was complex because on the Federal side of the law, a person did not have to identify if they had a disability. He had to have an Affirmative Action Plan to merge the two laws together without violating either one and be able to follow through. He made a survey and explained to the employees why it was being done. He said it did not violate Federal Law and adhered to the State requirement and the Affirmative Action Plan still stood today.

**Commissioner Taylor asked question #9**

He said one was Quincy, he worked there 18 years and it was diverse. He said he treated each individual with respect because it did not matter the diversity, and everyone should be treated the same.

**Commissioner Morgan asked question #10**

He said he took on starting an agency from scratch. He further stated he could not take credit for it solely, but there were many hours of working 8am to midnight making sure everything would be properly in place and the best people for the positions would be hired to ensure the integrity of the agency.

**Chair Viegbesie asked question #11**

He said it was being the face of the County and carrying out policies and knowing everything that was going on in the County.

**Commissioner Holt asked question #12**

He said he would make sure everyone understood their job and the laws. He stated it would also be through training the workforce and a relationship with the Attorney.

**Commissioner Hinson asked question #13**

He said he would put out a survey and find out from the people working for the County what they were doing and if they had the tools needed and if they did not, what was required to do it better and more efficiently.

**Commissioner Taylor asked question #14**

He said he would get with the Commission as a whole and individually to see how each Commissioner wanted to communicate. He said whether the communication was by email, phone, or office visits, he would meet with all of the Commissioners and they would be told the same thing.

**Commissioner Morgan asked question #15**

He said he worked with Quincy as an elected official. He stated as you move up the government levels, there was more red tape and accountability the higher you went, but expectations were all the same to get the job done and provide services for people.

**Chair Viegbesie asked question #16**

He said he led by example and would not ask anyone to do something he was not willing to do.

**Commissioner Holt asked question #17**

He said he could not think of a specific time but the bottom line would be he would not do anything unethical, illegal or immoral.

**Commissioner Hinson asked question #18**

He said money was not the major motivator for staff. He said the key was to provide a place the people wanted to come and work, and to make the workplace a place they wanted to perform and give their all. He said he would have celebrations for major accomplishments, public recognition, as well as pats on the back.

**Commissioner Taylor asked question #19**

He said he would hire for fit. He stated sometimes the most qualified person on paper was not the best fit.

**Commissioner Morgan asked question #20**

He said he would want to give his employer ample opportunity to fill his position. He further stated the end of October, no later than the first of November and it could be negotiated.

**Chair Viegbesie asked if he had any questions for the panel.**

Mr. Elias asked when the Board would decide on the right person to fill the position.

Chair Viegbesie said there was no specific date, but he would like to fill the position as soon as possible.

Mr. Elias asked if the Board would make a decision by the end of October.

Chair Viegbesie said after today, there was a discussion process. He further stated the County needed to hire a County Administrator as soon as possible.

Commissioner Morgan asked that no other Commissioners add additional comments because that would change the interview process.

Chair Viegbesie said Commissioner Hinson could respond to the question asked by Mr. Elias along with any member of the panel.

Commissioner Hinson said he was going to make a motion tonight or tomorrow so it could be soon.

Mr. Elias asked how many were left to interview

Chair Viegbesie answered, one.

Mr. Elias asked what the Board was looking for in a County Administrator.

Chair Viegbesie said someone to develop a Strategic Plan that used the County Fiscal Year Budgets, enabling the County to achieve its missions and visions for the good of the County.

Commissioner Morgan said a motivator and a communicator, someone who understood how to implement and deliver, develop key staff, lead daily and understood the primary goal of the County Administrator.

Chair Viegbesie thanked Mr. Elias. He then asked Ms. Butler for the next candidate.

Ms. Butler said Mr. Ford was scheduled for 6:20 p.m.

Chair Viegbesie said there would be a 10-minute recess.

**3. 6:20 p.m. – Interview – Auburn Ford  
(Board of County Commissioners)**

At 6:23 p.m. Mr. Ford appeared remotely before the Board via Zoom.

Ms. Butler gave him the interview guidelines.

**Chair Viegbesie asked question #1**

He said he was born and raised in Gadsden County and educated in the public-school system. He was an FSU graduate in the field of Criminology with a minor in Public Administration. He said he served in the Army for 4-years. He further stated he was a State Trooper in Miami, Dade County. He had been a Florida Lottery Investigator and also worked for the Gretna Police Department as well as the Women's Prison on SR12. He was the Quincy Grant Manager and had owned a construction company. He further stated he had been the Midway City Manager and had a wealth of experience in all facets of being the County Administrator.

**Commissioner Holt asked question #2**

He said it was to be a Community Activist. He wanted to bring customer service to Gadsden County which deserved a high level of customer service and he was not seeing that. He said there was a need in Gadsden County to move forward with advanced customer service.

**Commissioner Hinson asked question #3**

He said his major goal was to be the bridge between the Commission and day to day operations with the County. He said he would run the County smooth and follow the orders of the Commission.

**Commissioner Taylor asked question #4**

He said he had an open-door policy for any concerned citizens. He would have meetings with all City Managers to get all municipalities to help together. He would keep relationships to move the County forward.

**Commissioner Morgan asked question #5**

He said he had a lot of experience with Midway and the City Manager wore a lot of hats. He said he developed their Budget of \$1.5-\$3 Million.

**Chair Viegbesie asked question #6**

He said when you wear a lot of hats, like he did in Midway, he would set goals that were realistic based on the past financial history and the future based on the growth of the City.

**Commissioner Holt asked question #7**

He said he would plan and project what was wanted for the County and he would forecast and budget for future years.

**Commissioner Hinson asked question #8**

He said it was the Midway Fire Station on the South side of Midway, which was separated by tracks. The issue came up that if there was a fire on the South side of the track, and a train was coming through, how would the trucks get from City Hall to the South Side of the track. He stated he helped write, and implemented himself, a Grant and got a Fire Station built and resolved the problem.

**Commissioner Taylor asked question #9**

He said Gadsden County was diverse. He said he had written Grants for all ethnic groups. He further stated he had written more GDBG Grants than the County ever had.

**Commissioner Morgan asked question #10**

He stated he had a burglary problem in Midway and no Police Department. He said he went out on a limb and hired a fully functional Police Department, and they now have a Police Department and burglary went down. He further stated he helped get the EMS Station as well.

**Chair Viegbesie asked question #11**

He said it was communication. Communication solved a lot of issues that occurred in local government. He said if everyone communicated, it would make it easier for the organization to move forward.

**Commissioner Holt asked question #12**

He said it would be to know and train employees on things that were legal and not. He further stated the County Attorney would be contacted and was there to protect the County.

**Commissioner Hinson asked question #13**

He said it was communication. He said he would take time to interview every employee and get to know them and get them training in the weak spots.

**Commissioner Taylor asked question #14**

He said this was the age of media and there was no excuse for everyone to not have the same information. He further stated it was the same for the citizens. He said he would be accessible 100% of the day.

**Commissioner Morgan asked question #15**

He said it was Staff. He further stated it all worked the same but small was easier with a smaller number of employees.

**Chair Viegbesie asked question #16**

He said in Midway he had to be the authoritarian type because he wore all kinds of hats but in the County, he would be more of a democratic type style of manager. He further said he was not a micro-manager.

**Commissioner Holt asked question #17**



He said it was in Midway with the Fire Station. He said there were allegations made about bids being rigged, so they did everything above board. He said they had sealed bids that were opened in the public. He said it tested his ethics and he made sure he did everything legal.

**Commissioner Hinson asked question #18**

He said he would create a work force that was enjoyable to work with. He would have employees backs and give bonus for good work.

**Commissioner Taylor asked question #19**

He said it was truth and team building. He further stated if they were not on board they had to go. He further stated it was also building relationships.

**Commissioner Morgan asked question #20**

He stated he could start right away.

**Chair asked if he had any questions for the Board.**

He said he had no questions, but thanked the Board for the opportunity.

Chair Viegbesie thanked Mr. Ford.

**4. 7:25 p.m. – Interview – William Proctor  
(Board of County Commissioners)**

*Mr. Proctor withdrew his application.*

*His letter was filed with the Clerk's Office and posted at the end of these Interview minutes.*

Ms. Butler said she would seek direction from the Board as to how they wanted to move forward.

Commissioner Morgan said he appreciated Ms. Butler and her efforts for providing quality candidates to interview.

**COMMISSIONER MORGAN MADE A MOTION TO HIRE DEREK ELIAS AS COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR WITH A SECOND BY COMMISSIONER TAYLOR WITH DISCUSSION.**

Commissioner Holt questioned the process no matter who was chosen. She said the process needed work and there were other ways to do the interviews.

Chair Viegbesie said he wanted to hear thoughts from the Attorney. Chair Viegbesie thought the BOCC was going to wait so the Attorney could do research. He said he did not support moving forward at this time.

Commissioner Hinson said fair was what he asked for. He wanted to commend all of the candidates. He said he personally thought Mr. Gilyard was great, direct and passionate, as well as Mr. Ford and Mr. Hawthorne. He said he had wanted to see Mr. Gilyard get the job.

Commissioner Holt said she thought the process was improper and that was her concern. She said the Commission could meet one day and interview everyone that day. She said to throw it out and bring it back so there would be no conflicts. She said with a new Commissioner coming

on, and one in election mode right now, she thought the Board should give the Attorney time to look at the process and do interviews in a way that was fairer to the applicants.

Chair Viegbesie said all candidates did a wonderful job. He agreed with Commissioner Taylor about hasty actions. He said if he voted no, it was not voting against candidates, it was against the process. He wanted legal counsel to give his advice and stated he was fine with whatever the Board chose.

Commissioner Taylor said the process had been in front of everyone for a month, and the process had not changed. She further stated all meetings, since COVID, had been Zoom and using Facebook and social media. She thought the Board should move forward with selection tonight and the Attorney should still look into the legality of the process. She said there was an HR Director who had set the process in place and it was also vetted by the Director. She said the Attorney answered if the public obligation was met and his answer was yes. She said the County needed an Administrator. She did not know what the Attorney would look at. She further stated all applicants did amazing and there was an Assistant Administration position open and the Board could pick both from the group, although the authority did not lie with the BOCC to pick an Assistant. She suggested the Board move forward with the vote and the Attorney could look into the legalities.

Commissioner Holt said the process was incorrect, not the person, just like it was wrong to hire Mr. Williams out of a hotel on 267. She said the Board could have scheduled the meetings differently. She said the County did not have open meeting to hire other employees and the Board could have interviewed individually. She further stated it was not left up to HR and how they thought it should be done. The Commissioners should have sat down and come up with a better process. She said people could have evaluated yesterday's applicants and figured out what to say and what not to say. Other applicants could see the mannerisms of the applicant interviewing. She wanted to throw out the process because it was not sufficient and it was unfair.

Commissioner Taylor called the question.

Commissioner Morgan said the last thing the Board needed to do was to further delay the process that should have been completed months, if not years ago. He then moved the question.

Commissioner Hinson said he had reservations about the process and said the Board should not have had the interviews this way.

**THE BOARD VOTED 3-2 BY ROLL CALL VOTE TO NOT APPROVE MR. ELIAS.**

<b>COMMISSIONER HINSON</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>COMMISSIONER TAYLOR</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>COMMISSIONER MORGAN</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>COMMISSIONER HOLT</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>CHAIR VIEGBESIE</b>	<b>NO</b>

**MOTION FAILED 3-2, COMMISSIONER HOLT, COMMISSIONR HINSON AND CHAIR VIEGBESIE OPPOSED.**

Commissioner Holt asked the attorney take an opportunity to look at the process, and wait until November. She wanted to let the new Commissioner come on so he could choose who he liked as well.

**COMMISSIONER HINSON MADE A MOTION FOR DERRICK ELIAS TO BE NAMED COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR WITH THE SECOND BY COMMISSIONER MORGAN.**

Commissioner Holt said she did not know why the Board was tormented by the situation, because a Commissioner gets up and threatens to walk out, let her walk out. She said there was a situation where the Board was going back and forth and that was not correct. She stated it had nothing to do with the candidates, it was the process. She said the Board needed to work together and it would not kill anyone to take one or two days to look at things.

**THE BOARD VOTED 4-1 BY ROLL CALL VOTE TO APPROVE MR. ELIAS AS COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR.**

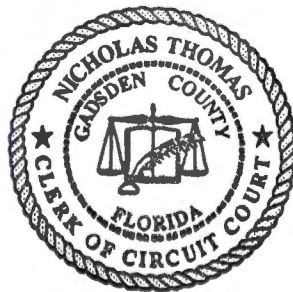
COMMISSIONER HINSON	YES
COMMISSIONER TAYLOR	YES
COMMISSIONER MORGAN	YES
COMMISSIONER HOLT	NO
CHAIR VIEGBESIE	YES

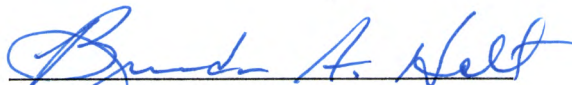
**MOTION PASSED 4-1, COMMISSIONER HOLT OPPOSED.**

Motion to Adjourn

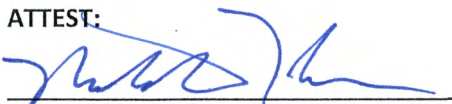
Chair Viegbesie called the meeting adjourned at 7:17 p.m.

GADGDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA



  
ANTHONY O. VIEGBESIE, PH.D., Chairman  
Board of County Commissioners

ATTEST:

  
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NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk

Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners  
September 17, 202 County Administrator Interviews

September 17, 2020

Gadsden County Commission  
9 E Jefferson Street# B  
Quincy, FL 32351

Dear Gadsden County Commissioners,

I am an applicant for the role of Gadsden County Administrator. I write to inform you that I cannot go forward in the current climate given the non-neutral and inappropriate acts of the Deputy Clerk of Courts.

On her personal Facebook page, she has hosted and agreed with a barrage of citizen comments that have distressed me and unsettled the spirits of my loved ones. The Deputy Clerk of Courts works directly with the Administrator's office. I recognize that a hostile hiring process has been cultivated by the Deputy Clerk of Courts' hosting and agreement with disparaging comments about me.

Contending with the variety of hostility of the Clerk's office and the offensive sentiments of the public exceeds the price I am willing to pay to be an Administrator. Commissioners, you do not deserve to be harassed relentlessly by an element of citizens who- before I am afforded a chance to demonstrate my gifts and talents- have so venomously opted to oppose me, my name and my presence.

Given all that has been expressed by the Deputy Clerk of Courts and others, I respectfully withdraw my application for Gadsden County Administrator.

Bill Proctor

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