

**AT A WORKSHOP MEETING OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN
COUNTY, FLORIDIA ON DECEMBER 15, 2020 AT 4 P.M.,
THE FOLLOWING PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ:**

Present: Brenda Holt, Chair, District 4
Dr. Anthony “Dr. V” Viegbesie, Vice Chair, District 2
Eric Hinson, District 1- absent
Kimblin NeSmith, District 3
Ronterious “Ron” Green, District 5
Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator
Clayton Knowles, County Attorney
Marcella Blocker, Deputy Clerk
Hannah Pope, Clerk’s Office

INVOCATION, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Holt welcomed everyone to the workshop, asked for a moment of silence, and then led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the U.S. Flag.

CONSENT

Chair Holt asked for approval of the Agenda.

**COMMISSIONER NESMITH MADE A MOTION TO ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE AGENDA AND
COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 4-0 BY VOICE VOTE TO APPROVE.**

CITIZENS REQUESTING TO BE HEARD (3-Minute Limit)

Due to COVID-19 and the efforts of the Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners to continue the practice of social distancing, Commissioners want to continue to hear from citizens under the Citizens Requesting to be Heard section of the agenda.

If citizens have any questions, comments, or concerns, please email

CitizensToBeHeard@gadscdencountyfl.gov and anticipate receiving a response within 48 hours.

The Board of County Commissioners would like to thank everyone for their patience and flexibility during this time.

Chair Holt read aloud the COVID-19 Statement and there were no citizens that wished to speak.

GENERAL BUSINESS

1. Welcome

2. Presentation of the Gadsden County Sheriff’s Office Salary Study

Mr. Dixon introduced the above item and stated Sheriff Young submitted a salary study with findings and recommendations to the Board to be considered for the next fiscal year.

Ms. Jennifer Collins, J Collins Consulting, LLC, remotely appeared before the board to share the findings from the study conducted for the Gadsden County Sheriff’s Office. Ms. Collins used data from FDLE’s 2018 annual salary report data which looked at the local agencies that Gadsden County Sheriff’s Officers relocated to. Ms. Collins found that the Gadsden County Sheriff’s

department reported the #1 lowest entry level salary, and they also saw that the Sergeants and Lieutenants within the Sheriff's Office earned 15% less on average, and that the minimum salary of officers ranked in the bottom third. She added that when they looked at this information it impacted the ability of the Sheriff's Office to be able to recruit and retain officers within the County. They put together a recommendation which would be implementing a step program within the Gadsden County Sheriff's office. The step plan included an entry level salary based on the median salary for a lieutenant and the average salary for a deputy and sheriff. While conducting the study, she found that the State agencies used a 2.75% increase in the step plan for each position. The proposal would be for the entry level salary for a deputy would be \$37,000 and the step two for those who were currently in positions with the Sheriff's Department. Ms. Collins stopped for questions from the board.

Commissioner Green said he was concerned because of the amount of money that Gadsden County officers are being paid. He was also concerned because the list of agencies that Ms. Collins used did not take into account the size comparison to Gadsden County. He wanted to know how those agencies compared size wise to Gadsden County. Ms. Collins stated she did not prepare the information off of size/population but off of where the officers were relocating to. She stated that taking the information from the smaller counties may not be as relevant or it may not assist in the retention and recruitment because they were similar.

Commissioner Viegbesie said this was a concern to him regarding retention and recruitment. He suggested to Mr. Dixon that once they began the budget workshop to consider not including the sheriff's office with the other constitutionals because the responsibilities of the sheriff's office were very different from the other Constitutionals. If Gadsden County was losing its deputies to these agencies and they were comparing their entrance salaries to these agencies and not to other sheriff's officers of equal size, budget, and population did that mean that those other counties were also losing officers to the state agencies. He said he wanted to compare apples to apple and not to those state agencies that were recruiting through those other agencies as well.

Ms. Collins said it depended on the agencies where the other sheriff's offices were located. Since we were located next to the State capitol and there were opportunities for them to work for state agencies along with state colleges and other agencies in Leon County. She said she had to take into account where the officers were going in location of the county to do the study.

Commissioner Viegbesie asked about what the current entry salary was because of the step one on the plan (please see presentation) and Ms. Collins answered that the current salary was \$31,000 for Gadsden County.

Commissioner Green commented that they realized it would be hard to compete with other agencies. Also, that it felt like Gadsden County was a starting point for other agencies.

Chair Holt noticed in a report emailed to her, it was suggested they look at getting some grant writers and/or getting a permanent grant writer, but looking at what they had now, unless they come into more money, they could not give out any more money. Chair Holt stated that she liked the report even though she wished there was more comparative data, and the only way that they could approve this plan was to raise taxes. Also, Chair Holt asked how many people were in each of the categories for the proposed plan.

Ms. Katherine Pondexter appeared remotely. Ms. Pondexter had given Mr. Price, Sr. Management Budget Analyst, the total number of employees they have. She said that those who were compared in the survey would be the 36 law enforcement officers sworn in; 10 bailiffs, and also the correctional officers. The total number of officers that were looked at was 37 law enforcement and personnel.

Chair Holt agreed with Commissioner Viegbesie, when the Sheriff turns in his request along with the other Constitutionals, they had to analyze each one separately. Chair Holt said she found that the information was very helpful.

Commissioner NeSmith asked if they had a shortage of deputies and Ms. Pondexter said there was one. It was difficult to recruit and retain with the salaries they had currently and was a big issue.

Commissioner Viegbesie asked how revenue could be generated to allow for recruitment and to retain sheriff's officers, which Chair Holt had already alluded to.

Chair Holt felt this report was very informative and asked this report be included with other information at the start of the budget season.

Commissioner Green asked Ms. Pondexter, since they were aware of the shortage of officers, which was definitely an issue, what mechanism was the Sheriff's office doing to recruit new officers. Ms. Pondexter stated that Col. Collins probably was the one to answer. The Sheriff's Office advertises the positions yet because of the low pay they have trouble being competitive. Information was sent to the Chair and Budget Director, on a study that was conducted in 2008 to look at using the Small County tax and unrestricting that so it could be used for operational costs, and may be one way the Board could look at. Ms. Pondexter said that Col. Collins could expound on that subject.

Col. Collins appeared remotely. Col. Collins sits on the training commission for the Public Safety Institute so Gadsden County was uniquely situated because it has a law enforcement training academy in their back yard. Gadsden County lost 2 potential officers last week. Two agencies that are getting new Sheriffs' coming in are Jackson County and Liberty County. Col. Collins stated that even though they can pay more those agencies do not have an abundance of resources which has created Gadsden County a hotbed. Also, it was very expensive to put a deputy on the street because of costs that have to be paid, the background mental evaluation, uniforms, and background checks. Once an officer leaves within an 18-month period the Sheriff's Office has lost close to \$1,000 just on recruitment alone. Then reason that there is an uptake in crime is because Gadsden County Sheriff's Office does not have the man power to cover the county and retention in numbers were low because pay is not competitive. Also, Commissioner Green made a great point that locals do not know their law enforcement officers anymore.

Chair Holt said she appreciated his passion. She stated that Gadsden County will be going into the budget season soon. She also said that the housing issue was part of the county's economic development. There was not enough housing for officers. Also, she stated that the Small County tax was being used for EMS and Road and Bridge.

Commissioner Viegbesie suggested as they go into budget before first workshop, that the budget director and the Sheriff's office budget analyst look into what the Sheriff's office was getting this year and what would be requested for next year in an itemized format to make justified decisions for the upcoming year.

Chair Holt reminded commissioners they needed to request any information from the County Manager and Attorney, since they are the only 2 employees they can request through and they are the ones to address their staff.

Mr. Dixon said they would start the budget process earlier so it may be more prolific in their understanding and be done sooner. He also stated there was a nationwide shortage of officers and that they were not just being taken from here but other areas as well.

Chair Holt said sometimes if you could not do the salary at the level they want, sometimes they might could do signing bonuses or housing for them that was cheaper.

Commissioner NeSmith asked the Administrator about the \$1 million currently they have requested. Mr. Dixon said this was a new request just for personnel and salary.

Ms. Pondexter said she was confused on \$1 Million that was mentioned because it included other costs other than the salary study. The salary study came up to \$585,000 that was for law enforcement and correctional officers.

Chair Holt asked what was the budget for the Sheriff's office for last year and Mr. Dixon said according to their documents, it was \$7.7 Million was the approved budget for 2019 and the new request would be approximately \$8.3 Million if they were able to get the requested money. Chair Holt reminded that they have added new commissioners that needed to hear this type of information.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BERFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR HOLT DECLARED THE WORKSHOP ADJOURNED AT 4:46 P.M.

GADSDEN COUNTY, Florida

BRENDA A. HOLT, Chair
Board of County Commissioners

ATTEST:

NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk