

AT A BUDGET WORKSHOP OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY  
COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN  
COUNTY, FLORIDA ON AUGUST 19, 2021 AT 4:00 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  
Kimblin NeSmith, District 3  
Ronterious "Ron" Green, District 5  
Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator  
Clayton Knowles, County Attorney  
Marcella Blocker, Deputy Clerk  
Sara Green, Clerk's Office

**\*\*The workshop was delayed waiting on the County Administrator to join the workshop\*\***

**CALL TO ORDER, INVOCATION, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Chair Holt called the workshop to order at 4:11 p.m., asked for a moment of silence and then led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the U. S. Flag.

**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@gadsdencountyfl.gov](mailto:CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.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.***

Commissioner Green read the above statement aloud.

**GENERAL BUSINESS**

County Administrator Ed Dixon said the purpose of the workshop was to address the budget so the Board could meet all the dates and requirements. Also, he said they were looking at the requests from members regarding everything from matters such as neighborhood lighting to road paving and striping, development of open spaces, and the increase of mowing capacity. He expressed the need for internal improvements and to bring in more money and get payments out faster along with creating a maintenance schedule. The workshop was also meant to be a time to discuss grants.

**1. Introduction**

Assistant Administrator Mrs. Daniels introduced the proposed budget. She stated they had presented the Board with different options regarding raising the millage rate. At the August 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting, the Board voted to set the millage rate at 9 mills. The County had a 7.9% property increase in property valuations for this year. Based on the millage rate of 9 mills, the County would generate approximately \$14.7 Million in revenue from that. She said they could not budget for the entire amount the County would generate. By law, they could only budget for

95% of that. Based on that 95%, the County would generate a little over \$1 Million in additional revenue. She reiterated they could not raise the millage rate but could lower it. She said they had a small decrease in the telecommunication tax along with a decrease in the indigent tax. She said they had about \$327,000 in other revenues and emergency sales tax. She said they would net \$1.4 Million increase in revenue from the past year.

Commissioner NeSmith asked about the 9<sup>th</sup> cent additional gas tax, how much additional revenue would that bring in. She said county-wide, about \$245,000 dollars annually and the County gets a major percentage of that but the cities get some as well. She thought the County received about 78%.

Commissioner Green asked what was the maximum the gas tax could be. Ms. Daniels stated the County has one cent on the ninth cent gas tax and could can go up one since they were at 8. She stated they were at 9 already on the diesel fuel and have 5 cents that they could go up on the local fuel.

Chair Holt asked for a sheet regarding taxes and where they go and where was the money generated from regarding the gas tax? Ms. Daniels answered the trucking industry was bearing the brunt.

Mr. Dixon said a big generator of that number was Flying J and Pilot and a third was going in now in Midway. He said once it was ready, they were the big generators as 60-70% of the gas tax come from them.

Commissioner Viegbesie asked if the gas surcharge have to come through a referendum or a super majority?

Ms. Daniels said it can now be voted on by BOCC but has to be a supermajority vote.

Commissioner NeSmith asked for clarification on which taxes that would apply to. She responded local option gas tax and the 9-cent tax. It is already maxed on diesel.

Ms. Daniels explained page four showed the recommendations based on the new millage rate. She made note there were no raises for BOCC staff and Constitutional Officers because of the pandemic and the County did not know who was going to be affected by the pandemic (citizens) and they may not be able to pay property taxes.

Commissioner Viegbesie pointed out BOCC raises were state and population based, Ms. Daniels clarified that she meant in regards to the County Commission staff.

Ms. Daniels stated there was a need for a new ADA compliant voting equipment which will run roughly \$110,000.

Ms. Daniels explained the Clerk's office now needs to be paid by the Property Appraiser for services it previously didn't charge for. The Clerk's Office can no longer provide these services at no charge.

Ms. Daniels explained funds need to be dedicated to the Property Appraiser's office as it needs its own IT staff.

Commissioner Green asked with this increase, was it dedicated to hire other staff? Ms. Daniels explained this was not the cost of a full position but rather they have combined some duties so monies would allow duties to be combined and have someone be dedicated to IT along with paying the Clerk for services.

Vice Chair Viegbesie requested a comparison column for the next meeting regarding the millage rates.

Ms. Daniels explained the County has proposed setting aside money for future revenue and capital items. She explained there were some new items, they were trying to set aside funding for future capital projects and were looking at an estimate of \$150,000 to be set aside, they have not identified what those projects will be but “we have to start somewhere”.

Commissioner Viegbesie asks if the County would be able to use that \$150,000 in the future for municipalities who had issues regarding monies not being paid, if supporting documentation is found that the County did indeed need to reimburse them. Mr. Dixon responded “once the meeting occurs and prior to the full approval of the budget, we’ll make arrangements “.

Commissioner Hinson asked in reference to the \$320,00 for the new positions, if the money came from CARES money? Ms. Daniels explained yes, but the CARES Act funding was a one-time funding and the County has to pay them in the future which was what this was showing. Commissioner Hinson suggested putting the hiring off until October 1<sup>st</sup> to not “comingle” with other funds. He added that positions that were not approved by the Board were advertised. Mr. Dixon said that was incorrect. Commissioner Hinson responded that he would find the listing and send it to the County Attorney as well as the other commissioners.

Commissioner Viegbesie said the Board decided to call the position Commissioner Hinson was speaking of the Government Operations Coordinator. If the position was mistitled, then the Administrator’s office should pull it and retitle it.

Commissioner Green stated “regardless of title, we’ve approved the position”. Ms. Daniels confirmed the position has been approved within the budget.

Chair Holt asks if the Board would like to look at the millage rate and asked if there were any suggestions.

Commissioner Viegbesie said each Commissioner should meet with the County Administer and submit their concerns and interests. He further stated the commissioners should have been doing that and there was no need to discuss that idea today.

Chair Holt stated she was referring to errors.

Commissioner NeSmith encouraged all Commissioners to meet with the County Administrator. He reinforced “our population impacts our budget”

Commissioner Green asked Clerk Thomas when the last time the County had an increase on the local gas tax.

Mr. Thomas replied the .6¢ goes back to the 90's and was renewed just a few years ago.

Commissioner Viegbesie said the numbers they had now were the numbers that were to be used for the budget for the next year. He added the Attorney had a better understanding of things we could do to make this better for the next go round.

County Attorney Clayton Knowles responded that there were ways to challenge census data regarding the decrease in the population. Originally, the census estimated Gadsden's population would increase by 11% and UF, who assists in gathering and organizing census data, suggested a 6% increase. Counties like Gadsden who has large agriculture populations, larger Hispanic populations, heir property, agriculture areas, and minorities, etc., may not get counted as accurately. He explained that folks who live with their grandparents or others may not get counted if their house looks uninhabitable. Every town saw a decrease aside from Midway and Quincy. He added they have 90 days to challenge the census numbers.

Chair Holt stated if the Board does decide to challenge, the County needed to set aside funds for that. The funds could always be put it back if they were not used. She pointed out that there may have been people living in homes with relatives that were counted but they were not. Vice Chair Viegbesie agreed and saw it as an investment for the next 5+ years.

Commissioner NeSmith asked if the Board challenges the census numbers, could we pause current numbers based on last numbers? Mr. Knowles said not to his knowledge. Mr. Dixon said they won't stop it but they become a part of every walk of life, in regards to representatives and federal money, so the County needs to review them now. Commissioner NeSmith asked what was the mechanism in Gadsden County (if there is one) to follow the population from year to year. The County Administrator referred to BEBR- Bureau of Economic and Business Research- who provides the State with numbers on population on a continual basis. The County can ask specifically for numbers and updates of the population. Commissioner NeSmith asked if the County could install some mechanisms so they could monitor the population on their own without having to rely on others.

Chair Holt said they have not been monitoring, but look where people go, jails, tag office, etc., to collect the data and get an idea.

Commissioner Hinson agreed the decline in numbers of the census was because of COVID in the communities. He mentioned the loss of the high school, threat of losing the elementary school, and the decline in workers at the state hospital as contributors to the population decline but also noted the Havana/Midway area was still growing. He asked if there was room in the budget for senior citizens? Mr. Dixon stated yes.

Ms. Daniels stated if a point was not on the spreadsheet before them, then there was not an increase/decrease. The spreadsheet was only showing the items that had a difference from last year.

Commissioner Hinson asked if \$1200 would still be given to public works. Mr. Dixon said every county employee would receive it, it was in the budget for this fiscal year.

Chair Holt expressed her concern about funding for the jail, it needed to be set aside so the Board could look more in depth at it since the Board was in charge of the Jail. It was up to the Board who ran it and the Board was responsible. She also said economic development money needed to be set aside to pay for trips to find new businesses.

Commissioner NeSmith asked if there was an assessment for what it would cost to bring the jail up to standard.

Chair Holt responded that a federal lobbyist came and \$43 Million was what they estimated years ago. It was recommended the County should set aside money every year.

Mr. Dixon reminded the Board that COVID has changed how renovations need to be looked at. Now, compared to years in the past, the jail needed quarantine suites, more medical room and supplies, etc.

Commissioner NeSmith asked how much was currently in the new proposed budget for BOCC economic development? Chair Holt said they give money to The Chamber and GCDC. Commissioner NeSmith asked what they allocate for their own economic development and Chair Holt said they do not. The County is open for business.

Commissioner Green asked if the Board was able to get the number on phases to renovate the jail. Chair Holt says they'd have to hire someone who is specialized in that but said they could budget and look into it.

Commissioner Hinson said the work program within the jail helped decrease the incarcerated population. He suggested subcontractors for lawn/mowing care since inmates currently could not due to COVID.

*Chair Holt stepped out at 5:31PM.*

Commissioner Hinson suggested commissioner aides for 2 years and it could be funded through the American Rescue Plan and be used as a training opportunity.

*Chair Holt returned at 5:33PM.*

Chair Holt said the County's infrastructure funds need to be discussed, empty space at the hospital may qualify as infrastructure so appropriate funds could be used for it. She wanted to encourage another hospital to enter the area especially if the two in Tallahassee were overrun. Gas tax, what were the local agencies receiving from that? New rules and regulations for the Supervisor of Elections Office, if any? Annexations, CRA's, what are the responsibilities of the Commissioners versus the annexed/CRA themselves. Example: Roads of annexes, who takes care of them.

Commissioner Viegbesie asked if annexations by cities in unincorporated areas been selective or total annexation in regards to maintenance? Chair Holt referred to Midway and the argument over county vs city roads. She stated it depended how the annexation was written.

Commissioner Hinson brought up the subject of jobs. He said the Board needed to be having meetings regarding jobs and things that impact the whole County. They need to reinvest in Midway and Havana, suggested purchasing land to control the flow of commutes to and from large projects such as the new Amazon warehouse. He also would like to discuss how to bring revenue and jobs to the Chattahoochee area.

Chair Holt asked if the County Administrator had everything he needed to make sure there were at least two people on the budget. Mr. Dixon said yes.

Commissioner Hinson mentioned teachers and police officers who were working throughout the pandemic, says he wanted to look into how to increase wages to keep them around. He said they needed it in writing to only use certain money for wages.

*Commissioner Viegbesie stepped out at 5:49PM.*

*Commissioner Viegbesie returned at 5:49PM.*

Commissioner NeSmith said the County needed revenues to provide services. Gadsden County could not compete with Tallahassee but it could compete with itself.

Commissioner Green commented in reference to wages being raised, if they were last raised in the 90s then the County will still look like the 90's.

Commissioner Viegbesie commented that the Board seriously needed to look at coming up with a regional growth planning committee because other counties were putting the effort in. The County should work with other counties to retain citizens and grow as well. He also commented that a Recovery and Resilience committee needed to be added to the economic plan.

Mr. Knowles followed up and said the 6¢ fuel tax was in the years 1985-2015 and extended in 2015-2024.

Commissioner Viegbesie asked if it could be revised before 2024. Mr. Dixon said they did not want to bother that one but rather the new .6¢ tax. He also said they needed to communicate and convey that working regional development was not an attempt to take the County over.

## **2. Summary Highlights**

- **Ad Valorem Tax Revenue Summary**
- **Major Revenue Sources Update**
- **Potential Revenue Options**
- **Enhancement/Reduction Summary**

## **3. Board of County Commissioners Priorities and Direction**

### **MOTION TO ADJOURN**

Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners  
August 19, 2021 – Budget Workshop

**THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, THE WORKSHOP WAS  
DECLARED ADJOURNED.**

**GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA**

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**BRENDA A. HOLT, Chair  
Board of County Commissioners**

**ATTEST:**

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**NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk**