

AT A BUDGET HEARING OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA ON SEPTEMBER 9, 2021 AT 6:00 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  
Nicholas Thomas, Clerk of Court  
Marcella Blocker, Deputy Clerk  
Sara Green, Deputy Clerk

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

Chair Holt calls the meeting to order at 6:03PM; asked for a moment of silence and then led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the U. S. Flag.

**AMENDMENTS AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

County Administrator Dixon asks for a 10-minute recess to print copies of the agenda and budget.

**A MOTION WAS MADE FOR A TEN-MINUTE RECESS BY VICE CHAIR VIEGBESIE AND WAS SECONDED BY COMISSIONER GREEN. THE MOTION PASSED 5-0.**

Meeting resumed at 6:17PM.

**THERE BEING NO AMENDMENTS A MOTION WAS MADE TO APPROVE THE AGENDA BY VICE CHAIR VIEGBESIE AND WAS SECONDED BY COMISSIONER NESMITH. THE MOTION PASSED 5-0.**

**CITIZENS REQUESTING TO BE HEARD ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

*Anyone wishing to speak on agenda items or non-agenda items should schedule or notify the County Administrator's Office before attending the workshop and will be asked to follow the Gadsden County Public Meetings Citizens Access Guidelines. Also, Public comment for Commission workshops can be submitted via email to [CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov](mailto:CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov) until 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, September 9, 2021. Comments submitted after the deadline but prior to the workshop will be added to the official record, but the County cannot guarantee that Commissioners and staff will have adequate time to review comments prior to the workshop.*

Commissioner Green read the above statement.

**GENERAL BUSINESS**

**1 Budget Overview and Discussion (Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator)**

Mr. Dixon came before the Board to introduce the item. He says the main problem with the budget was that they could not find an approved budget in December, his office could find a recommended budget. An approved budget was found in February and was on a thumb drive in

someone's pocket. The budget he thought his office was operating by was not the actual budget. One problem was the \$400,000 for a radio system that wasn't actually budgeted. A \$2.2 million in account receivable that were expensed was actually bad debt. He says "we were spending that money when it wasn't really revenue." He says they had to scrap everything and start a new budget because of many holes and issues. They didn't end up trusting the budget they were looking at. He says "things were not adding up." He says the only action to take was to stop and start over again. He says a lot of the expenses were in salaries which is money that is not easy to get back.

He assures the Board that "we will have a balanced budget; it will come with some sacrifice." Line item of \$2.2 million actually brings in \$40,000. He says his office expects \$53.2million in revenue which is a \$1.4 million increase from the previous year.

Mr. Dixon says cooperation is appreciated within all departments. When it comes to budgeting for the year, CARES and American Rescue funds have helped immensely. He says they provided cash that would have otherwise had to have been paid for.

He explains his office is having to look for certain positions, four positions have been split to cover two or three positions, the County has gotten significant grant money, and overall expenditures have been kept where they could be. He also mentions healthcare rises, CPI's included. He says CHP, Capital Health Plan, went up 4%, so that is another thing that his office has to look at. The county is at 144% of CHP rate which means employees are sicker. He says CHP makes a profit at 94%. He also says the Sheriff pulling out will only drive-up rates because of a smaller pool. He says the county pays about \$800 a month per person.

Chair Holt says the County Administrator, herself, CHP representatives, and the Sheriff met because of the drastic CHP increase. The change is a \$700,000 increase. She suggested members join a gym. She explained they have to make changes to drive number down because the budget is due October 1.

Commissioner Green asked what solutions have been thought of in reference to having a budget we can trust. Mr. Dixon says his office is recruiting and looking for people to work in the budgeting department and asking for them to apply. He says they haven't gotten eight people in terms of background and ability. He says they are looking for people they don't have to question the integrity of. He says "we are dealing with integrity issues."

Commissioner Greens asked what are our options are for health insurance, have we started comparing? Mr. Dixon explains CHP is an HMO and is the best out there. The next best is a PPO.

Commissioner NeSmith asked in regard to the budget issues, why wasn't this discovered earlier? What happened? Mr. Dixon responded, "you get the perfect storm". He explained there were seven new administrators in 10 years, directors were running the County, the Clerk's office has to review what you say, and the Clerk asks you if you follow your own rules. Everything else is a policy decision.

**Nicholas Thomas, Clerk of Courts**, reminded the Board that they must adopt a budget tonight. Regarding the situation, "we do everything we can to make sure things are correct". He said "we

take heat but do our job to make sure you get a good audit report". He said his office was trying to ensure that in the end, things don't end up in the audit report and tries to ensure the County stays in good light with the state. He reminded the Board that they need a budget adopted tonight and on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Chair Holts said they always submit a budget on time. She says the budget has to be stable to do anything. They have to have more than one person working on the budget in case someone gets sick. She also explained they have had glitches but if there are good people in the department, they'll catch it.

Mr. Dixon says it is a balanced budget. He says "if you find things wrong, we're sorry but we'll fix it. We know you'll find things you don't agree with, but I need for you to understand that if you don't do your own homework, that's our fault."

Vice Chair Viegbesie says he knew it was going to happen because of process of convolution. He expresses his disappointment that the budget was on a thumb drive in a pocket. He says it is ludicrous if things are listed as revenue just to make budget look balanced. He says to do due diligence so we don't ask for what we can't afford.

Mrs. Daniels came before the Board and explained the County does have a balanced budget. She says they had to reach out to partners to assist, Integrity Group and thanked them for their help. The millage rate went up to 9.000 mills which is .5 higher than it was and the new millage rate generated \$1.4 million in general fund. She says the county has covered single employee CHP insurance. She says they "fixed everything that we could possibly find". She says additional funds were added to the transportation fund which included a new mowing crew in new budget and equipment needed, the one-time purchase along with the 6 staffers. They have done things for Supervisor of Elections including the purchase of the needed equipment as well as the increase in insurance and FRS.

Mr. Thomas came before the Board to point out that "you have us as the same amount as the previous fiscal year. You have IT in one place as same amount but in another you have it as another". He pointed out that the needed increase in funds was not in the budget, increased county by \$185,000. Mrs. Daniels looked at the budget and said she would address and amend that.

Vice Chair Viegbesie asked if this was a balanced budget based on the 9.000 millage rate? Mrs. Daniels says yes. Vice Chair Viegbesie clarified the need for the 9.000 millage rate in order to have a balanced budget.

Mr. Dixon wanted to have the option to over mow. "With climate change, rain, what's happening versus what will happen". He says he didn't want to get into a contract that they couldn't go back and mow which is why the county opted to not subcontract the mowing. Mrs. Daniels says in regards to the emergency services fund during current fiscal year she is unsure of the revenue that comes into that fund. Look at what's going in the fund. She said they tried to make adjustments so that fund wouldn't get a hit and did have to make up some using the general fund.

Mr. Thomas, **Clerk of Courts**, says the billing is more like hospital billing. "You're always going to be allowed to collect more than you bill". This happens often, you always have to add money to the EMS fund.

Commissioner NeSmith said the County needed revenue. When it comes to EMS services, is that revenue included in budget? Mr. Dixon says yes. Commissioner NeSmith asks how do we know what percentage of EMS revenue goes into next budget? Mr. Thomas said to look at past revenue. Mr. Thomas said to keep it around what we're actually receiving, offset by Medicaid and Medicare and insurance adjustments.

Mr. Thomas said not to privatize because revenue is \$6 million but budget collected is \$4 million. He reminds the Board that the cost of operation comes into play.

Commissioner NeSmith asked if there is revenue that hasn't been recovered, excluding EMS. He asked how much revenue is owed to the county? Mr. Dixon says yes, the county gets revenue where services are provided to cities. He says there aren't uncollected millions of dollars. He says some of the reason for this is the change in administrators.

Commissioner Green asked how much money has been spent by outsourcing to Integrity. Mrs. Daniels says she will have to let the Board know the answer to that in the next meeting as she is unsure right now. She says Integrity's help was desperately needed because of those being unskilled working on the budget. Commissioner Green asked if this was something that should have come before the Board before the decision was made. Mrs. Daniels said this was an administrative decision. She said they did not have any other choice and didn't have the time to spend as the deadline was approaching.


Mrs. Daniels introduced the expenditures tab which includes interfund transfers and an increase of \$538,000 of general fund. She says a lot of revenues aren't coming in like they have been because of the pandemic and grant decreases. Overall, an increase of \$1.4 million dollars has been spent.

Vice Chair Viegbesie said if the budget is contingent on the 9.00 mill rate then the Board needs to approve it because the rest can be what it is and is moveable.

## **PUBLIC HEARINGS**

### **2 First Budget Public Hearing for Adoption of Tentative Millage Rate**

They're being no comments regarding the millage rate, Mrs. Daniels read the script.

 Vice Chair Viegbesie asks what is the percentage difference between what we had and what we will have? Mrs. Daniels says a .036 increase in order to have a balanced budget bringing the county to a 9.000 millage rate.

**A MOTION WAS MADE TO APPROVE THE MILLAGE RATE BY VICE CHAIR VIEGBESIE AND WAS SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER NESMITH. THE MOTION PASSED 4-1 WITH HINSON IN OPPOSITION.**

**3 Tentative Budget for Fiscal Year 2021/2022 (Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator)**

Vice Chair Viegbesie suggested investing an hour or so in the budget highlights.

Mrs. Daniels introduced the summer youth program which had a budget of \$97k and proposing increase to \$150k to expand program and include more youth.

*Commissioner NeSmith stepped out at 8:00PM*

Mrs. Daniels said the maintenance agreement contracts haven't been looked at for 3 years.

Mrs. Daniels said as for Medicaid, there has been a small reduction of \$100,000. County Commissioners office has included funding for 5 interns. Commissioner NeSmith asks if that is fulltime or aides. Mrs. Daniels says either.

Chair Holt says she doesn't agree with aides because there was no budget for it, someone has to hit the ground running and elected ones knew that when being elected. Aides can be effective but people will look for the commissioner instead of the aide. She says the commissioners are not getting the work done without them regardless.

Vice Chair Viegbesie says there is nothing wrong with documenting and discussing aides, however, aides can't be doing the work for the commissioner. He says the main problem is to find space for aides.

Commissioner Hinson suggests aides work in the office down here and move those down up to the top floor. Chair Holt says they needed people to work SHIP and housing which is why they're on the bottom floor. She says they work with confidential information that can't be in a general location with people's information.

*Vice Chair Viegbesie stepped out at 8:22PM*

Mrs. Daniels said there is \$50,000 in reserve for contingency but the new budget is prepared for it to be upped to \$100,000.

The fuel system and current fuel tanks at the Public Works department are above ground, Mrs. Daniels said they are old and need to be replaced. The next fiscal year has been budgeted for those improvements. Commissioner Hinson asked why the gas tax doesn't cover it. Mrs. Daniels says it would be general funds because it covers all county vehicles. Commissioner Hinson wanted to clarify if it can be funded by the 6-cent sales tax. Mrs. Daniels says that can only be used for roads.

*Vice Chair Viegbesie returned at 8:26PM.*

The right of way line item includes the new mowing crew, the item is budgeted for \$500,000. Mrs. Daniels says \$400,000 of that is a one-time purchase of the equipment needed. These funds would come from the gas tax because it is roadway maintenance. Commissioner Hinson suggested contracting out. Mrs. Daniels said you lose control with a contract because you can't mow outside the contract.

Mrs. Daniels addressed the next line item and said \$76,000 is to fund accounting services to payroll and services the Clerk provides to the Property Appraiser that he didn't previously charge for.

Mrs. Daniels introduced the Supervisor of Elections line item and said the \$135,000 amount is for a one-time funding. Mr. Dixon said they haven't addressed the real need which is her building and construction needs. Her building needs more space. He said they plan to do some creative adjusting to address the need.

Vice Chair Viegbesie said in regards to the Supervisor of Elections line item, he is concerned with the space because it's funded with federal money therefore, they must be compliant to federal laws. He says they must find space for every citizen that wants to observe the counting of ballots as the law requires space for every citizen that wants to observe. It's an unfunded mandate and space is imperative before the 2022 election. Canvassing board has to have enough room as well. He suggested the Board take the Supervisor of Elections request very seriously because it's a legislative unfunded mandate. He is concerned that there is not enough in the budget for it. Chair Holt said the County may need to look into leasing a space.

Mrs. Daniels introduced the mosquito control line item and says there were no additional increases or decreases made. She also said the constitutional officers will not get increases the next fiscal year.

Vice Chair Viegbesie said to make sure the Clerk's technology request was fulfilled. Mrs. Daniels said yes, that's related to the FRS and Insurance increase

Chair Holt asked if there is something about challenging the Census within the budget. Mrs. Daniels said no, they did not budget for it.

**A MOTION WAS MADE TO ADOPT THE BUDGET BY VICE CHAIR VIEGBESIE AND WAS SECONDED BY COMISSIONER NESMITH. THE MOTION PASSED 4-1 WITH COMMISSIONER HINSON IN OPPOSITION.**

**A MOTION WAS MADE TO ADJOURN THE MEETING BY VICE CHAIR VIEGBESIE AND WAS SECONDED BY COMISSIONER NESMITH. THE MOTION PASSED 5-0.**

**MOTION TO ADJOURN**

**THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR HOLT DECLARED THE WORKSHOP ADJOURNED AT 8:53 P.M.**

**GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA**

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**ANTHONY VIEGBESIE, Chair**  
**Board of County Commissioners**

**ATTEST:**

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**NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk**