

AT A BUDGET WORKSHOP OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN
COUNTY, FLORIDA ON SEPTEMBER 15, 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 - arrived late
Clayton Knowles, County Attorney
Marcella Blocker, Deputy Clerk
Sara Green, Deputy Clerk

1. Welcome

Chair Holt welcomed everyone to the workshop at 4:01 p.m.

2. INVOCATION, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

3. CITIZENS REQUESTING TO BE HEARD (3-Minute Limit)

Anyone wishing to speak on agenda items or non-agenda items should schedule or notify the County Administrator's Office before attending the meeting and will be asked to follow the Gadsden County Public Meetings Citizens Access Guidelines. Also, public comment for Commission meetings can be submitted via email to CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov until 11:00 a.m. August 17, 2021. Comments submitted after the deadline but prior to the meeting 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 meeting.
Commissioner Viegbesie read the above and statement aloud.

Bishop Willie C. Green, 296 Bradwell Road, Quincy, FL appeared before the Board. There were some items he wanted to mention and hoped they would consider some things. The Budget process was a most important process they undertake in the course of the year. He said there were three things he would like to say:

- 1) Any of the groups that were requesting to be included in the budget should have some accountability and should have appeared before the Board before it got to this point to stress just as the importance why they should be included in the budget;
- 2) They should be accountable for funds they have already received; and
- 3) What they plan to do in this current budget.

Commissioner Viegbesie stepped out at 4:07 p.m.

Commissioner Viegbesie returned at 4:10 p.m.

4. Introduction/Overview

Georgette Daniels, Assistant County Administrator, addressed the Board. She said they had made a few adjustments to the budget. As the Clerk pointed out at the first Public Hearing, his budget stayed the same and he had indicated they had put in the increase for him its home for the FRS and for the insurance but they failed to follow through with that on paper and is now done. She said in the Clerk IT area was increase of \$21,619.00 and in the Board finance area, there was an increase of \$29,776.00 and were minor increases and was nothing that they could not cover. They also did a little adjustment in their own IT, increased the licensing so all employees could have emails. The increase is \$24,168.00 and will cover a new IT Tech person that will handle the radio communication area.

Commissioner NeSmith asked if they were going through line by line items. Chair Holt suggested to let her finish her presentation.

Chair Viegbesie asked where the changes were coming from, if they had a copy of the revised budget. She explained it was a transfer with the Clerk and was based on the increase with the health plan, FRS and contributions they were required to make. And when they had indicated they had put in the budget...Chair Holt asked if it was already budgeted and Ms. Daniels said it was a General Fund transfer and was small amounts they were able to shuffle things in the budget to make sure they were covered.

Chair Viegbesie asked with the changes made, was there a balance budget and she replied yes. He asked what was the amount they have in reserve? She said they still have the same amount based on the orders financial statement as of September 30, 2020. Commissioner Viegbesie asked what that amount was and she said she did not have that figure with her, it was upstairs and she could get it to them.

Commissioner Viegbesie said they should have those numbers they were working with and be directed where the numbers were coming from in the workshop as they work the budget so they could follow along.

Chair Holt said she wanted to get them all listed and they could then go through them one at a time.

Commissioner NeSmith asked to start at the top so he could wrap his head around it.

Commissioner Green appeared at this juncture of the meeting 4:24 p.m.

Commissioner NeSmith asked about different budgeted items.

Commissioner Viegbesie said to expedite the process, he suggested they give credit to the Administrator and staff that they know what was needed to run their government.

Commissioner Hinson said Ms. Daniels was a highly intelligent person, doing multiple jobs and what she was told to do. He said he has been on the Board for a while, very a visual person and wants to see things, there were corrections made such as aides and normally when that happens, they get a whole new budget so they could see it. He emailed the Administrator, staff, attorney, clerk, etc. that he would like to have whole new budget before this meeting so he

could review it prior to the meeting and have not seen it. He thought they needed to wait until it was properly advertised so citizens can see it and the Commissioners can see. He thought it should be adjourned, come back Friday when they have a new budget, advertise the meeting so it can be seen, be transparent, give the budget to the Commissioners so they can see it, and then go line by line.

Commissioner Green asked if has been properly advertised and according to Commissioner Hinson's comment, the information was not out there. He asked about the deadline, will they have what was needed to make sound decisions? When can they have an updated budget?

Chair Holt said the entire budget was not reprinted every time they have a meeting. They would be provided with replacement pages.

Commissioner Green said with the inserts, when could they expect that? Ms. Daniels said she could provide those to them and also the Board may make changes here that they would also have to incorporate. The details that Commissioner NeSmith asked for is in the book.

Commissioner Hinson said first, the sheets they were talking about, their responsibility is for the whole book. In the past, they started the budget season earlier, in May and June. He said this was a County Commission meeting not the County Administrator meeting. They should give him directions and him bring it back to the Board. He said in 2020, Dr. Grant was the Administrator and had half of the staff, had everything in and was done right way. FS §129.03 says the public should have access to this budget on the website two days prior to the meeting so citizens can look at it. They had a budget hearing last week, not one citizen raised their hand and could not see it on the website and should be on for 45 days after. We have to go by Florida Statutes, not by "he said, she said". He said they need to do things the right way and move on. They should have another meeting on Friday, bring the whole thing back showing the changes that were made. They were dropping the ball.

Chair Holt asked Ms. Daniels if the meeting was advertised and she stated yes, it was advertised there would be a budget workshop today and citizens were free to attend either in person or via Zoom. Chair Holt asked if Monday's meeting was advertised and she said yes. Chair Holt asked if it was advertised per their policy and procedure and Ms. Daniels responded it was advertised according to the Department of Revenue requirements.

Commissioner Hinson asked for the attorney to enlighten them. Were they in line with Florida Statutes 129.03? Mr. Knowles said no and he sent a couple of emails out regarding this. He said they were required to post a tentative budget two days prior to the **first public hearing** and did not know what or if there is a penalty for that. But they need to do that. He said it was not for him, not for them but was for the citizens. It is before the public hearing and should be kept on there for 45 days and post the final adopted budget and it must be on the website for two additional years.

Chair Holt stated that was for a public hearing but this was a workshop. Mr. Knowles said that was right, but they had a public hearing last week. Chair Holt said she wanted to find out about Monday's meeting and today and then would look at that. Was there anything that said they advertised incorrectly for the Monday meeting and today's meeting. Mr.

Knowles stated they were workshops and were different. Chair Holt asked Ms. Daniels how they advertised the present hearing.

Ms. Daniels said the first public hearing was advertised on the TRIM notice sent to every property owner in the County. That is the advertisement for the first public hearing.

Mr. Knowles said advertising was not the issue, the budget is required to be on the website **TWO** days before.

Chair Holt asked Ms. Daniels when the budget was put on the website and she was not sure if it was the same day it was given to the Commissioners. Chair Holt said it was not put on the website two days before. She said they were talking about the Public Hearing and it needed to be placed on there two days before and if that was the case, then they had to have two public hearings and asked what the penalty was for it.

Mr. Knowles said there was no statutory penalty, all he could find that was remotely close was an Attorney General opinion from 1962. The potential problem he saw was resident suing because they were not following Florida Statutes or Department of Revenue coming in and said they did not properly pass the budget, which falls on all of them because it was not on-line. He said it was a small thing, not the end of the world, but was something he sent two emails out addressing this matter.

Chair Holt questioned when the public hearing should be held and Mr. Knowles clarified the public hearing notice was more of a notice requirement for the five days it had to be advertised, the public hearing in between the first and final. He said it had to be advertised no less than two days and no more than five days between the two public hearings.

Chair Holt asked if he talked with Ms. Daniels about this and he said he sent two emails to Ms. Daniels and the County Administrator regarding this.

Chair Holt asked Ms. Daniels if they had discussed this matter. She said they received the email the day of the public hearing. Mr. Knowles said he sent a follow-up. Chair Holt said it was sent the day of the public hearing and he stated yes, he sent it when he noticed it was not on-line.

Ms. Daniels said the Department of Revenue workbook for TRIM process nor their training presentation addressed it. Mr. Knowles stated it was in the Statutes. It was a statutory requirement, FS §129.03(c).

Commissioner NeSmith asked if the Assistant County Administrator knew about the requirement and Chair Holt stated she may not have, but they were trying to correct it now, if there was a correction.

Mr. Knowles read:

“The board shall hold public hearings to adopt tentative and final budgets pursuant to s. 200.065. The hearings shall be primarily for the purpose of hearing requests and complaints from the public regarding the budgets and the proposed tax levies and for explaining the budget and any proposed or adopted amendments. The tentative budget must be posted on the county’s website at least 2 days before the

public hearing to consider such budget and must remain on the website for at least 45 days. The final budget must be posted on the web site within 30 days after adoption and must remain on the website for at least two years. The tentative budgets, adopted tentative budgets, and the file budgets shall be filed in the office of the county auditor as a public record.”

He said this was what they had to do as a county.

Commissioner Viegbesie said he was going back to something they talked about earlier. As a teacher, if there is something he was going to teach the students, even though they do not have it in advance, he would make that available to them so they could follow along and understand what he was saying. He said what Ms. Daniels was reading from should have been made available to them as they walked in so they could see where and what changes had been made. Right now, he was listening and was not following what she was being said and was trying to work that into the document and could not see where the changes were coming from. He also said no words that could express how grateful he was to staff given the situation that they were operating in currently. Before they adjourned last meeting, he asked when the document would be made available to the citizens and was told the next day. Could she slip the paper to staff and have copies made?

Commissioner NeSmith said as they were sitting here now, was the budget on-line? Ms. Daniels said the budget summary was on-line, it did not indicate what format. He asked Mr. Knowles if was complied with the statutory requirements?

Mr. Knowles stated he did not think so. He thought the document they were looking at in their books was the tentative budget; the budget summary was different. A tentative budget was all of the line items, the Revenue, the Board account, Department by department...

Chair Holt asked what the Statute said.

Mr. Knowles said it states tentative budget and the summary was not a budget.

Commissioner NeSmith said the County Administrator was reacting (he came in and was sitting in the audience). Chair Holt said she was going to get to him.

Chair Holt said when they have a situation, and have had them before, have had before when they lost Administrator during the budget process, you have that in turnovers.

Chair Holt asked if Mr. Dixon had anything to say and he stated no.

Chair Holt asked if someone could get a copy of the items that Ms. Daniels wanted to insert and bring before the Board?

Ms. Daniels asked if they could recess and Chair Holt asked for a 10-minute recess.

Commissioner Hinson said he thought it was fair to the citizens to show leadership and respect that they post the budget today, have a workshop on Friday and it would then not look like they were trying to circumvent anything so they could be transparent. He said to adjourn this meeting, come back Friday and post everything on the website so it can be seen.

Commissioner Viegbesie said based on what Commissioner Hinson said, he thought it was a very good idea. Friday would be a good day for a workshop. He said they could workshop it the way they wanted to workshop it and then have the public hearing on Monday. He asked if there was a way it could be uploaded tonight and the changes could be made available on Friday to work the changes and then on Monday they would have a budget to adopt.

Mr. Dixon approached the podium. He said the budget they asked to be posted would be posted in the next 30 minutes. Chair Holt asked what was posted now and he responded the budget summary. Chair Holt said they could have two public workshops the next week or have the hearings next week.

Leslie Steele, the Public Informations Officer, interjected and stated the tentative budget, the entire budget was on-line. She stated if you went to the Finance page, both were on there.

Chair Holt asked her to pull that up.

Commissioner Viegbesie said he knew they were all under pressure and should have been told that when the question was asked if it was on-line.

Chair Holt asked that the budget be put back on the screen and it was. She said that was the summary. She asked the Attorney when he found out the error had occurred, she wanted a date and time. He said he sent an email on Thursday (September 9th) at 3:30 p.m. and then sent another email. He said this was simple thing to fix. Chair Holt stated she was not worried about that. She said she was not worried about that part. He said he sent an email on Monday about his health status and wanted to readdress his prior email regarding the budget being posted on the County website, the tentative budget and the final budget on the website.

Mr. Knowles said when he looked for the budget before attending the meeting via Zoom, he did not see it.

Chair Holt stated staff thought with posting the summary budget, that was sufficient.

Ms. Steele said they thought that because the budget was not posted at all the prior year until after it was completed and approved.

Chair Holt stated for them to not discuss that, to see if they could get it fixed.

Mr. Dixon stated the information they read, the attorney was always right. The information they were privy to in terms of what they were getting from Revenue, they followed that information and got the information from the attorney just like he said, five minutes before the budget, because they were very involved in the budget. He said they reached out to the power that be that said to continue on, go through with what they were doing; they posted the budget just as soon as, they followed what they believed to be the law. He said tentative was posted because the budget was ever changing and evolving.

Chair Holt asked to nail down dates before leaving so staff would know what dates they were looking at because they still had to meet the October 1st date.

Mr. Knowles said the key was finalizing the budget, the finalization of the budget must be no less than 2 days and not more than 5 days after the first public hearing. He said they could do the first public hearing and two days later adopt the final budget. He said they have two weeks to do this. He suggested do more time to be safe; have the first public hearing next Thursday or Friday and have the next public hearing 2-5 days after the first public hearing.

Chair Holt said they could do Friday, September 24th for the first public hearing and Thursday for the second hearing.

Chair Holt said to the attorney she was expecting him to tell them this when they came in this evening, or send to them in an email, someone needed to tell them something was out there. She said she was not beating up on him and he said he was not trying to beat up on anyone either.

Mr. Knowles wanted to make sure they were compliant. He said if they pass the budget and it dies not go through, it would fall back on him and Mr. Dixon.

Chair Holt said they need to adjourn and Commissioner Viegbesie said that was the wise thing to do.

Commissioner Viegbesie asked if they could advertise multiple meetings at the same time? Mr. Knowles said he will check. Commissioner Viegbesie said that will save money and save time.

Chair Holt thanked Commissioner Hinson for bringing this matter up.

Commissioner Green said there would be no meeting on Monday and was told that was correct. Mr. Dixon said they will advertise in the Democrat.

Commissioner Viegbesie said since finding this situation, why not use Monday for a workshop.

Commissioner NeSmith wanted to make sure he understood what happened. He asked Mr. Knowles and the County Administrator was this just a fact that there was a misunderstanding as to what determined a budget summary and what was posted? Mr. Knowles said he did not look on Tuesday to see what was up and this is just getting things right procedurally.

Mr. Dixon said he had a different opinion, he thought the summary would be ok. They reached out to DOR and thought they were doing right.

Chair Holt asked when they have things like that, she wanted it in writing.

Chair Holt said this means they will have public hearings back to back and have no time to stumble. She also stated they needed three people in the Budget Department. Mr. Dixon said they were working on it.

Commissioner NeSmith said he appreciated her emphasizing the need for the Budget department.

5. Board of County Commissioners Priorities and Direction

MOTION TO ADJOURN

**THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, THE WORKSHOP WAS
DECLARED ADJOURNED AT 5:22 P.M.**

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

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

ATTEST:

NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk