

**AT A BUDGET HEARING OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY  
COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN  
COUNTY, FLORIDA ON SEPTEMBER 12, 2023 AT 6:00  
P.M., THE FOLLOWING PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ:**

**Present:**       **Kimblin NeSmith, Chair, District 3**  
                  **Eric Hinson, Vice-Chair, District 1 – arrived late**  
                  **Alonzetta Simpkins, District 2**  
                  **Brenda Holt, District 4**  
                  **Ronterious “Ron” Green, District 5 – appeared by Zoom**  
                  **Georgette Daniels, Assistant County Administrator**  
                  **Clayton Knowles, County Attorney**  
                  **Marcella Blocker, Deputy Clerk**

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

Chair NeSmith called the First Public Hearing to order at 6:02 p.m., Commissioner Simpkins gave the Invocation and led in Pledge of Allegiance to the U. S. Flag.

**AMENDMENTS AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Ms. Daniels announced there was no amendments to the Agenda.

**UPON MOTION BY COMMISSIONER HOLT AND SECOND BY COMMISSIONER SIMPKINS, THE BOARD VOTED 4-0 BY VOICE VOTE TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED.**

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

The Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners welcomes and encourages public participation at all meetings of the Board. Citizens are free to speak for up to three (3) minutes on non-agenda items. Public comments and participation are also encouraged for items on the agenda. Additionally, if you are unable to attend a meeting in person, comments from the Public can also be submitted via email to [CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov](mailto:CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov) until noon on the date of the meeting. 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. Citizens are further encouraged to participate via Zoom using the credentials on the County’s website. The Board’s meetings are also broadcast live on the Board’s Facebook page.

Chair NeSmith read aloud the above statement.

William (Bill) Farr, 564 Middle Creek Road, Quincy, FL

Cathy Farr, 564 Middle Creek Road, Quincy, FL

**GENERAL BUSINESS**

**1. Public Hearing-First Public Hearing for Adoption of Tentative Millage Rate and Tentative Budget for FY 2023/2024**

Chair NeSmith announced this was the first of two Public Hearings for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 to discuss and adopt the millage rate and budget. He said the proposed aggregate millage rate was

9.5000 mills, which was 20.87% more than the aggregate rolled-back millage rate of 7.8597 mills.

Ms. Daniels read into the record the proposed County-wide millage rate of 9.5000, which is 20.87% more than the County-wide rolled-back millage rate of 7.8597 mills. She said anyone that had submitted a Speaker Request form was allowed to step forward.

**Cathy Farr, 564 Middle Creek Road, Quincy, FL 32351**, appeared before the Board to speak against the increase in the millage rate. She said last week they heard that the Board was concerned about housing, people upkeeping their homes, keeping their homes and they were concerned that increases in tax would tax people out of their home. She said it was the worst thing to do in times of inflation because people did not have any extra discretionary income and would not be able to support the County, support businesses, going out to eat and supporting the churches. She requested the millage rate stay the same at 9.0 or be reduced or rolled-back. She also mentioned Bay County had rolled their millage rate back.

**William (Bill) Farr, 564 Middle Creek Road, Quincy, FL 32351**, appeared before the Board and spoke to oppose the increase in the millage rate. He said when taxes increase, the people spend less and that hurts the County, cities and everyone because businesses will suffer. He said they have fallen into a trap expecting the government to bail them out and fix their problems and the government cannot do that. He proposed they get churches to ban together, start a benevolence fund to be used in the community to help. It would free up the County from having to do all of that.

*Commissioner Hinson appeared at 6:18 pm.*

Ms. Daniels said the tentative budget at 9.5000 mills would be \$63,993,581 and is 11.4% higher than the prior fiscal year's adopted budget of \$57,446,834.00. The impact of the millage rate increase from 9.0 mills to 9.5 mills would be an additional \$975,000 and that amount has been added into Reserve Contingency in the 2023-2024 budget pending Board direction and was currently earmarked for EMS & Fire.

Commissioner Green said Chair NeSmith did a good job on the purpose and said there were major issues with fire services. A joint meeting was held with the City of Quincy to attempt to discuss providing fire services to the County but they brought out very important numbers that they will need to find a way to find that money on a regular basis. He felt they need to have town hall meetings to discuss the need of raising the millage rate so it would be better understood.

Commissioner Holt said they have a conundrum to figure out what to do about fire training and services. If they do not get someone in there that is a certified fireman, the insurance rate will be going up. She felt getting churches involved would help. She asked Ms. Daniels what the increase in dollars at 9.5 mills would be and she said \$975,351 and that was budgeting at 95% of the revenue, as required by law. Commissioner Holt asked if it could be earmarked for fire service and EMS. She said as they knew, anything budgeted in Reserve for Contingency must be approved by the Board before it could be moved to any line item. Mr. Knowles said he did not think they could lock it in, it would have to be done in a separate motion. If they want to earmark it within the budget after passing the tentative millage rate, it could be done there.

Commissioner Holt said the Property Appraiser had been notified that the value adjustment had to be done and was required by the State of Florida to increase the value, in turn would increase the value and would increase property taxes anyway.

Commissioner Hinson asked about Fire Control and the increase in the budget of this year of \$338,359. He asked the difference in Fire Control and what they were talking about using the funds for.

Ms. Daniels said in the Fire Control budget, the money that goes into that fund is assessments they get from fire services as well as they give them half of the half cent sales tax. Because it was coming in from ad valorem taxes, it would have to go into the General Fund. She said in the Reserve for Contingency was about \$2.9 Million and was the \$975,000 was going as well as the additional revenue they were having from the sales tax program they were putting in Reserves as well. All of that is going into Reserve for Contingency until the Board adopts a plan for how the money would be spent and then it could be transferred to the Fire Control fund.

Commissioner Hinson said they still increased the budget by \$338,359.

Ms. Daniels said they were continually replacing fire trucks for the volunteer fire departments and right now it was costing about \$400,000. They were putting in some funding for training of volunteer firefighters that were already at some of the volunteer stations.

He also asked about Elderly Affairs and the budget of \$810,859 and asked if that was a new position and what the money was going to.

Chair NeSmith said that was a department under the BOCC that they staffed.

Commissioner Hinson said they put \$475,000 in a non-profit.

Commissioner Simpkins said with Elderly Affairs, they did not give the non-profit the \$475,000 but the BOCC has an Elderly Affairs Department that they staffed.

Ms. Daniels said that department includes 5 full time positions that are the Director, Coordinator, Program Manager, Lead Case Manager, Office Clerk; 10 part-time positions including Fiscal Officer, part-time Fiscal Officer, part-time Fiscal Assistant, 5 Activity Coordinators, a kitchen manager and 2 activity assistants. They also budgeted for operating supplies, etc.

Commissioner Hinson wanted to make sure constituents understood they had three separate budgets they were not disclosing; CARES, ARPA and the regular budget. Out of the ARPA, they will receive \$475,000, that was what the Board decided for the next two to three years.

Ms. Daniels said in the current fiscal year they had allocated money; the Board approved allocating of \$475,000 to the newly created department. They re-allocated some money that was coming into the General Fund.

Commissioner Hinson said by the next meeting, he will pull the documentation.

Commissioner Holt said that department was board approved, they have to deal with numbers in the budget, they cannot base the budget on anything from the State or Federal that was not reoccurring monies.

She asked where in this budget could they find carry-over from 23 to 24.

Commissioner Simpkins felt they were hounding on Fire and EMS but they have not set with the other municipalities and did not have a plan, they do not know what the cost factor will be. They have citizens that have lost insurance and they have done nothing about it. Going through the budget line by line was why she asked for a workshop to sit collectively and go through the budget. They do not know the amount needed because they have not set down and had a meeting. She asked for a workshop in a meeting to be able to discuss this with her counterparts, they need to have a discussion collectively. She said the Board has relied so much on the Administrator and staff but they were not requiring the information to come to them. They were a couple of weeks away from this being due to the State and they have not set down and reviewed line by line as a Commission to decide what needed. The Administrator does not get beat up, the Commissioners do by the citizens. They do not know what was needed because they have not set down and came up with plan to say what they needed in order for the EMS/Fire services to work properly so all the stations have an ISO rating of less than 10 so the citizens could be insured.

Chair NeSmith said he recalled a discussion of doing an RFP to get an idea of where they were with fire services.

Commissioner Simpkins said that came up last meeting, it had been months since she brought up about the ISO ratings. They did not have time for an RFP, RFQ, or whatever, if a storm comes through now, the citizens have no insurance and that is problem. They do not have months, they need a workshop and that needs to be top on the Agenda. She said they were always playing catch-up. She said a while back when the people were ready for their insurance to be renewed, it would not be renewed with the Fire Stations being at a 10 and that was where they were now. They are not being renewed because the ISO was at a 10 and not only that, the contracts were out of date.

Commissioner Green said time is of the essence but they have to start somewhere. He asked if they have numbers for a 9.25 millage rate.

Ms. Daniels said at 9.25 mills, there would be 17.69% more, the tentative budget would be \$63,505,907 and a 10.5% increase over the previous year's adopted budget and would give \$488,000 additional over what they would get from an increase in property value.

Commissioner Hinson said Commissioner Green was right, he started with Fire Control first. He asked about the Interfund transfer, that was increased by \$307,496. He also said they need to have an itemized plan so they know the increases and decreases.

Ms. Daniels said any funding coming into the General Fund that needs to be spent in another fund is transferred. The \$2 Million allocated from the Sales Tax program, because they were not funding Elder Affairs from ARPA, \$500,000 of the \$2 Million will go to Elder Affairs, give or take the revenue the received from the grant. The other \$1.5 Million, the Board did not give

direction on how they thought it should be allocated so it was placed into Reserve for Contingency so they could look at that and let Staff know how they wanted it spent.

Commissioner Hinson asked the difference between General Fund and Reserve for Contingency. Ms. Daniels explained was a “department” within the General Fund, they have to budget the revenue and expenditures somewhere in order for the budget to be balanced. If there is not a specific expenditure that they have not gotten approval or direction from the Board, they put it in Reserve for Contingency and revisit so the Board could approve what the money is spent for.

Commissioner Green said his question was about the \$1.5 Million, could some be moved to aid the Fire Services Department without increasing to 9.5 mills.

Ms. Daniels said there were several things they proposed using the money for and one was for a debt service on an infrastructure bond. There was never a consensus on what they would use the money for.

Commissioner Green said he thought there should be a number allocated for Fire Services.

Chair NeSmith asked if it was appropriate for Mrs. Farr comment again and was told yes.

Ms. Farr said this was a lot of new information. IF EMS and Fire was so dire, why did they allocate \$810,859 for Elder Services for the same year when it was zero previously if Fire and EMS was more important.

Commissioner Hinson said the ½ cent sales tax was going into Reserve for Contingency and was told yes, a portion was.

Chair NeSmith said if he had questions going through the budget, he sat down with the Assistant County Administrator and went line by line for clarification. Commissioner Hinson said that was why Commissioner Simpkins asked for a workshop prior to this meeting and they never had that workshop.

Commissioner Simpkins said Commissioner Hinson asked one of the questions she was going to ask. She said since they were harboring on the fire assessment, when she looked at the Budget, they knew the need was there but did not see in the tentative budget there was only an increase request of \$320,000 total for fire control. She said they should not just be addressing this.

Commissioner Holt said they met with the person that represented the bond company and they could do a bond. If they decide to take another avenue, they could reduce the millage rate back down. She asked if they could schedule a meeting with the Administrator before the next public hearing and they would know where they were. She said to request that all Constitutional Officers come and the Department heads be at the meeting.

Chair NeSmith said Tuesday was the second Public Budget Hearing, was there enough time to schedule a workshop for Monday? He asked if it could it be on Monday and Mr. Knowles said yes.

*Commissioner Holt stepped out at 7:51 pm.*

Commissioner Simpkins said she wanted to request a workshop because she heard meet with the Assistant County Administrator, meet with the Budget Director, but she also would like have a chance to talk with her fellow commissioners about the budget and that could only be done in a workshop or meeting.

Chair NeSmith asked for a time on Monday and Commissioner Simpkins said 3:00 pm and Commissioner Hinson agreed with 3:00 or 4:00, Commissioner Green said he was also available at that time.

Chair NeSmith asked the Assistant Administrator to make that happen for a workshop on Monday at 3:00.

Chair NeSmith said Florida Statutes requires the Board to address the millage rate before addressing each budget. The Board must vote on each millage rate and budget separately and he would now entertain a motion.

*Commissioner Holt returned at 7:54 pm.*

He reminded them it was set at 9.5 mills, could not be increased but it could be reduced.

**COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE MILLAGE RATE AT 9.5 MILLS AND CHAIR NESMITH MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 2-3 BY VOICE VOTE. MOTION FAILED. COMMISSIONER HINSON, COMMISSIONER SIMPKINS AND COMMISSIONER GREEN OPPOSED.**

**COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE A MOTION TO CONSIDER THE MILLAGE RATE AT 9.25 AND COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 3-2 BY VOICE VOTE TO APPROVE. COMMISSIONER HINSON AND COMMISSIONER SIMPKINS OPPOSED.**

**COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE COUNTY-WIDE BUDGET AND CHAIR NESMITH MADE THE SECOND. COMMISSIONER HINSON HAD A QUESTION.**

Commissioner Hinson said there was a few things he wanted to talk about. He said one was he had a question about Aid to Private Organizations-Big Bend Transit-JUST READ.

Ms. Daniels said in fiscal year 22-23, \$132,000 was budgeted in that department for the Big Bend Transit for the Gadsden Shuttle, Gadsden Express, Havana Shuttle and was also budgeted \$150,000 for the **JUST READ** program that never materialized and they moved money, with Board approval, to the Summer Youth program.

Commissioner Hinson asked about the Senior Citizens budget, last year it was \$100,000 and this year only \$10,000. Why?

Ms. Daniels said now that they have the Elderly Affairs Department, money was moved into that department.

Commissioner Hinson said they need to allocate money for the upkeep of the buildings.

Ms. Daniels said that money left was for the Gretna Senior Services because they have not been incorporated into the Elderly Affairs program.

Ms. Fryson appeared by Zoom and said Chattahoochee and Havana was under the Elderly Affairs department. Commissioner Hinson asked about Midway. Ms. Fryson said when she last checked with Midway, they were not operating, they had work to do and she would check back with them.

Ms. Daniels said there was not a functioning organization to give money to in Midway. Ms. Fryson said that was correct and based on her understanding, they did not request additional funding.

Commissioner Hinson said he had visited there several times and it was nice, they may have moved to another location. He was told they have tried to contact staff and never got a response. He said he would get information before the next meeting.

Commissioner Green asked for more clarity, they were having a workshop on Monday and it would give them an opportunity to discuss this matter then. They were just going through the process of approving the budget tonight.

Commissioner Holt said she agreed. When approaching the cities, they should put teeth in the game.

Ms. Daniels said, for clarity, they adopted 9.25 mill and they were now adopting the budget of \$63,505,907.

**COMMISSIONER HOLT AMDENDED HER MOTION AND CHAIR NESMITH AMENDED HIS SECOND.**

**COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE A MOTION THAT THE TENTATIVE BUDGET AT 9.25 MILLAGE RATE IS \$63,505,907 AND IS A 10.5% INCREASE OVER THE PREVIOUS YEAR BUDGET OF \$57,446,834 AND CHAIR NESMITH MADE THE SECOND.**

Commissioner Hinson asked the amount in the General Fund Fund Balance and Ms. Daniels said she could email that number to the Commissioners tomorrow.

Commissioner Hinson said they should never come into a budget meeting without having the fund balance. They need that number first before approving anything.

**CHAIR NESMITH CALLED FOR THE VOTE. THE BOARD VOTED 3-2 BY VOICE VOTE. COMMISSIONER SIMPKINS AND COMMISSIONER HINSON OPPOSED.**

Commissioner Hinson asked how could he write check without knowing the amount in the account.

Ms. Daniels said the General Fund Fund balance was \$6,256,457.

Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners  
September 12, 2023 – First Public Hearing

**MOTION TO ADJOURN**

**THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR NESMITH DECLARED  
THE PUBLIC HEARING ADJOURNED AT 8:23 PM.**

**GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA**

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**KIMBLIN NESMITH, Chair  
Board of County Commissioners**

**ATTEST:**

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**NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk**