

**AT A BUDGET WORKSHOP OF THE
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN COUNTY,
FLORIDA ON SEPTEMBER 18, 2023 AT
3:00 PM, THE FOLLOWING PROCEEDING
WAS HAD, VIZ:**

Present: **Kimblin NeSmith, Chair, District 3**
 Eric Hinson, Vice-Chair, District 1
 Alonzetta Simpkins, District 2
 Brenda Holt, District 4
 Ronterious “Ron” Green, District 5, appeared through Zoom
 Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator
 Clayton Knowles, County Attorney
 Adriana Quijada, Deputy Clerk

Call To Order, Invocation, Pledge of Allegiance

Chair NeSmith called the workshop to order at 3:04 pm. Pastor Farr provided Invocation; Chair NeSmith led into the Pledge of Allegiance.

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 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.

Bill Farr, 564 Middle Creek Rd

Bill Farr appeared before the Board to talk about the Budget. He thanked the County Administrator for a great report on the website. He stated he learned that all employees in the County received a bonus of \$2,000 last year. He also learned about the 9 million American Rescue funds given to the County. He asked that the millage rate stay the same or go lower.

Commissioner Hinson appeared at 3:13 pm.

General Business

1. Introduction

(Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator)

2. Summary Highlights & Budget Review

(Georgette Daniels, Assistant County Administrator / Jenifer Burgess, Budget Manager)

Ms. Daniels stated they will be walking them through budget. Ms. Burgess appeared before the Board. She stated they have provided a summary of the budget. At 9.25 mill rate, budget will be \$63,483,156. She stated the additional \$487,000 has been placed in the Department for Reserve for Contingency. That department also includes the 1.5 million dollars from the Half Cent Sales tax.

Ms. Burgess stated for Economic Development, the current year they have expenditures related to salaries and benefits for the Director of Economic Development and Administrative Assistant. They also have operating expenses of around \$97,000 for that Department which includes rent, contractual services, marketing advertisement, office supplies, training, utilities, etc. They also have budgeted \$20,000 for equipment such as computers, cameras, etc. Ms. Burgess stated they have budgeted \$50,000 for the Economic Development Grant Program.

Chair NeSmith asked if that Department number 0024 was captured in the line item. Ms. Burgess stated correct.

Ms. Burgess stated the Department of Elderly Affairs includes salaries and benefits for 5 full time and 10 part time staff. She stated there is operating supplies budgeted for \$50,000 which includes congregate meals, kitchen supplies, etc. They also have contractual services which includes security, garbage pick-up, food services, tax prep. They have Utilities of \$10,000 and Communications \$16,000. Promotional Activities for \$11,000. She stated there is also a \$30,000 Residence Assistance Program in that budget.

Chair NeSmith asked the County Administrator about the utilities for that location being municipal. Mr. Dixon stated it was municipal.

Commissioner Simpkins asked if they were asking questions as they go along or what was the process. Chair NeSmith stated they will let her finish the whole presentation first then go back and ask questions.

Commissioner Holt asked if they would give the line-item number next time. Ms. Burgess stated it was line-item number 0060.

Ms. Burgess stated they have also budgeted for some Capital Projects. She stated for line-item 0301, there is a Capital project for an elevator at the W.A. Woodham Building for \$225,000. There is also a roof needed at that building budgeted for \$125,000. Capital project 0342 Fire truck replacement for Midway for \$430,000. Ms. Burgess stated for Information Technology 0030, they have had some increases related to software for cyber security, network wiring, network support, operating supplies, adobe. That would lead to an increase of \$170,000. For line-item 0235, County Administrator, they have budgeted some increases in salaries in anticipation of the new contract for the County Administrator. Commissioner Simpkins asked if they budgeted for other employees as well. Ms. Burgess stated no, they did not have the exact number per department to budget for each of them.

Ms. Burgess stated for line-item 0077, Aid to Private Organizations, there was a decrease of \$150,000 due to those funds being moved from the Just Read Program to the Summer Youth Program. She stated there is an increase of \$150,000 to Department 0450, Summer Youth Program. Department 0233, Public Information Office, there was increases related to the 'Love Where You Live' Campaign. Increases related to advertising, community outreach, promotional marketing, etc. Ms. Burgess stated Department 0001, County Commissioners, had increases related to insurance. There were also increases for the contractual services. Ms. Burgess stated last week, the Commissioners mentioned increase in Interfund Transfers, Department 9001.

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Commissioner Simpkins asked about the insurance and if they were able to get a better rate. She asked if there was a policy in place saying that they have to stay with that insurance. Mr. Dixon stated that was of concern. He stated the contract has been going on for a while and it was time for it to go out. Chair NeSmith stated it was showing \$115,000 increase and they have to finalize the budget tomorrow. Mr. Dixon stated they would not be able to do it this Fiscal Year, but it was time for it to go out.

Commissioner Simpkins mentioned it showed \$40,000 for Black History, but then it also showed an additional \$15,000 on the back page for the FAMU foundation. She stated that was \$55,000 just for Black History activities. She stated if they were paying the \$15,000, then that needs to be included in the Black History account. Commissioner Simpkins stated she had a problem with having residents from Gadsden County attending FAMU but not able to access the funds because they are not in the band. She stated it needed to be accessible to all Gadsden County students attending FAMU. Ms. Daniels stated the payment to the FAMU Foundation is a payment to the non-profit organization, therefore, it has to be budgeted in a separate line-item. She mentioned about the marching band participating in the Black History parade, which has increased the County's overall participation. Commissioner Simpkins stated she did not have a problem with giving money to FAMU, but she did have a problem with having residents in Gadsden County attending FAMU but they are not able to access these funds. Ms. Daniels stated they could take a look at that donation to FAMU and look at the criteria. Commissioner Simpkins stated she would like a copy of the contract. She stated the funds need to be available to all residents not just for band members.

Commissioner Green stated they should have partnership with their local high school band to help push people to attend FAMU under the music department.

Commissioner Holt asked Ms. Daniels if she addressed all comments with Commissioners. Ms. Daniels stated those that contacted her.

Commissioner Simpkins mentioned Human Resources and what the change was. Ms. Daniels stated that would be a new HR system of \$50,000. She stated Ms. Maas is here and may be able to explain a little bit more about the system upgrade. Commissioner Simpkins stated she wanted to know if that

would allow applications to be filled online. Mr. Dixon stated it was more of an IT thing on whether or not applications could be filled online. Ms. Steele stated there was a danger of citizens putting in their Social Security Number online. They were trying to find a safer system. Mr. Dixon asked if under the new system, could people do an application online without their Social Security Number. Ms. Steele stated yes. Commissioner Simpkins stated this was 2023 and most applications are online so, they could not say it was because of putting in a Social Security Number.

Commissioner Simpkins mentioned Public Information Office. She stated for the contractual services, they were going from \$17,000 to \$82,000. Difference of \$64,000. Ms. Daniels stated the major difference was the \$50,000 increase for the visibility and community outreach efforts to get information out to the public by various media outlets. Commissioner Simpkins asked Ms. Daniels if she was referring to the contractual services. Ms. Daniels stated yes. Commissioner Simpkins asked if they have a contract right now for designs. Ms. Daniels stated they were sending that back out for an RFP. Commissioner Simpkins asked if they currently have a Graphic Design contract. Ms. Daniels stated they have someone who is providing those services for them and have put it out for an RFP. Commissioner Simpkins stated she wanted to see the RFP and the challenge information. Commissioner Simpkins mentioned getting with the local high school and designing flyers. Commissioner Simpkins clarified that they were looking at \$100,000 for advertising. Ms. Daniels stated they have been using more medio billboard advertising. She stated costs have increased for advertising.

Commissioner Holt stepped out at 4:03 pm.

Commissioner Holt returned at 4:05 pm.

Commissioner Holt stated every time they have an activity, they want it marketed. They need to market those items if they want a good turnout. Commissioner Holt asked Ms. Daniels if they have addressed the concerns they had. She stated she was used to sitting down with the Director and getting questions answered.

Commissioner Hinson asked about tourism. Ms. Daniels stated the Tourist Development Council receives funding from Bed Tax. Commissioner Hinson mentioned integrating public-private

partnership with some of the programs they are giving money to. He stated they still need to keep in mind that they are a fiscally constrained County. He questioned if they were able to still do these things in 3 or 4 years.

Commissioner Green mentioned budgeting for a possible increase for employees. He stated he had concerns because they have supervisors making the same thing as people that they supervise. He thought that they had budgeted for staff increases. Ms. Daniels stated the compensation study was well on the way. She stated they have 1.5 million dollars in Reserve, not allocated. Mr. Dixon stated they had a lot of people under \$15, they moved a bunch of people already.

Commissioner Green stated he made a motion of 9.25 for the millage rate only because he was interested in what they could do with that. He stated there would be an increase of \$487,000 if they go with 9.25. He wanted them to think about whether it was worth raising at this particular moment.

Chair NeSmith stated they need to look at ways to collaborate with entities. He stated they need to make sure that these municipalities contribute to their programs.

Commissioner Holt stated she agreed with Commissioner Green. They need to decide on the millage rate. She was ready to move on this and she really just wanted them to sit down and get these numbers. She stated they could clear up a lot of these things by meeting with the staff.

Commissioner Simpkins asked about Elderly Affairs and the \$40,000 that was allocated for the foundation. She thought the foundation was established to raise money to assist with the senior's budget. She asked why they were giving \$40,000. Mr. Dixon stated part of it was to simply do things they could not do as a County Government. As a non-profit, they could not do certain things. He stated it was an invest to get them up and running. The money was going back to the Senior Services. They do not have any ability to get a Grant Writer. He believed they could raise a bunch of money and qualify for a lot of Grants that the County would not. Commissioner Simpkins stated she heard what Mr. Dixon was saying but she just thought that that particular group was for raising money. She asked if they received funding from the \$475,000 of ARPA funds. Mr. Dixon stated no.

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Chair NeSmith asked what would it take for that organization to write Grants. He wanted to know what it would take for them to get off the ground. Mr. Dixon stated they were chastised heavily for assisting them in writing Grants.

Commissioner Hinson asked who was the Executive Director for the foundation. Mr. Dixon stated they did not have one, Just Chair Germany that runs the Board. Commissioner Hinson asked who were the Board member and how long have they been operating. Mr. Dixon stated they have met a couple of times. Commissioner Hinson stated the Executive Director's job was to find grants and the vision of the Board. He stated they need to give them direction.

Commissioner Hinson asked how much was in general funds. Ms. Burgess stated they have balance of \$6,256,457. The number will change throughout the rest of this year. Commissioner Hinson asked how many employees they have working \$15 an hour and under \$20 an hour. Ms. Burgess stated she did not have those numbers.

Commissioner Hinson stated they need to hold conversations about community centers in the east and west side of Gadsden County.

Commissioner Simpkins stated there was not really an increase for fire services. She stated that was a concern. Commissioner Simpkins stated in district 2, people are not hearing about doing a study. She stated they need a right now plan for fire services. Ms. Daniels stated funding for fire services comes from Half Cent Sales Tax and other revenues. She stated \$487,000 is in Reserve for Contingency until they get a plan and then they would able to transfer to Fire services. She stated they have that money earmarked for Fire services, but until the Commissioners authorizes them to transfer that money to Fire services, they could not do it. Commissioner Hinson stated to Commissioner Simpkins that all she had to do was say that she would like to add X amount of dollars into this particular budget. Then, the Board would decide to agree or not.

Commissioner Green stated the only way he would support the millage rate is knowing that they would be allocating those funds for fire services.

Commissioner Holt stepped out at 5:38 pm.

Commissioner Holt returned at 5:41 pm.

Chair NeSmith verified that Midway has a Fire Department. Mr. Dixon stated correct. They have volunteers. Chair NeSmith stated the City of Quincy responds to calls from Midway because they are not sure if the Midway volunteers are going to respond. Mr. Dixon stated yes, a lot of their calls.

Commissioner Simpkins returned at 6:01 pm.

Commissioner Simpkins stated when they leave today, they need to have on their calendars scheduled dates for the municipalities as well as the volunteer fire departments to have a meeting with them. Commissioner Green stated they can hear some of the firefighters or Chiefs, but would that give them accurate information on what they need before they have the assessment done? What would be the purpose of having the assessment if they are going to plan to meet with them? His thought process was having a collaboration after the assessment was done.

Chief Hood stated they need to understand which municipalities want to be a part of the assessment. That way, they could have an understanding of which parts of the County they are truly assessing as it relates to Fire. Commissioner Simpkins stated they do need to have the meetings so that way the municipalities could determine if they want to be a part of the assessment. Commissioner Hinson stated before they go out and talk about doing an assessment, they need to be given directives from the Board of County Commissioners, not from Staff. He stated they need to be careful with their wording, they should be saying it is a study instead of an assessment. Commissioner Green stated a few months ago, he mentioned about having a volunteer program. One of the issues was that they did not have enough manpower at the stations, which affected their rates. Chief Hood stated they have been working on that over the last couple of months.

Commissioner Hinson asked how much did the give to City of Quincy. Chair NeSmith stated around \$500,000. Commissioner Hinson stated if they are giving them \$500,000, it seems like they should know exactly what is going on with the City of Quincy.

Commissioner Holt stepped out at 6:28 pm

Commissioner Hinson stated a lot of people are thinking that all because of the Fire ratings, their insurance is going up. He asked what was the difference between Concord and the Town of Havana. Mr. Dixon stated because Concord is tightknit, it is probably easier to keep volunteers than Havana. Commissioner Simpkins stated the ISO ratings do have a small effect on the actual cost of the insurance, her concern was the 10's because insurance companies are dropping residents and businesses due to those fire departments having a 10. Commissioner Hinson stated they need to find a solution to this problem.

Chair NeSmith asked Chief Walker if before the Board approves the allotment for all 12 fire departments, does he get a request. Chief Walker stated yes. Commissioner Hinson stated he concurred with what Commissioner Simpkins said about scheduling a meeting for this.

Motion to Adjourn

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR NESMITH DECLARED THE WORKSHOP ADJOURNED AT 6:51 P.M.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

KIMBLIN NESMITH, Chair
Board of County Commissioners

ATTEST:

NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk