

AT A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR
GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA ON FEBRUARY 7,
2025 AT 5:00 P.M., THE FOLLOWING
PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ:

Present: Eric F. Hinson, Chair, District 1
Ronterious Green, Vice-Chair, District 5
Alonzetta Simpkins, District 2
Shawn Wood, District 3
Brenda Holt, District 4
Louis Baptiste, Interim County Attorney
Adriana Quijada, Deputy Clerk

1. **Call to Order, Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Hinson called the meeting to order at 5 p.m. Bishop Green led into Invocation and Chair Hinson led into the Pledge of Allegiance.

4. **Amendments to the Agenda**

Chair Hinson requested to pull item 7.c, Funding Request for Gadsden Wellness Senior Services.

CHAIR HINSON MADE A MOTION TO PULL ITEM 7.C FROM THE AGENDA AND COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 TO APPROVE.

5. **Approval of Agenda**

COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS AMENDED AND COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 TO APPROVE.

6. **Citizens Requesting to be Heard on Non-Agenda Items (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 on the County's website at www.gadsdencountyfl.gov.

Chair Hinson read aloud the above statement.

7. **General Business**

7.a **Interim County Attorney Legal Services Agreement**

Commissioner Holt stated she would like to know a little bit about his firm. Mr. Baptiste stated his firm is Webster-Baptiste, located in Tallahassee. He is authorized to practice law

in Florida, Georgia, and Texas. Their firm has a plethora of experience in open government workspace. They have been successful in holding governments accountable for not producing public records and they have also defended governments when there is an alleged failure to produce public records. This is a first in their law firm to engage as a practice of being a fixed county attorney. Mr. Baptiste has litigated in every district court in the state of Florida and they actively engage in litigation.

Commissioner Holt asked about contract law. Mr. Baptiste stated they have represented tax collectors in regards to contracts and they are currently representing a couple of tax collectors.

Commissioner Holt stated previously, they have had issues with attorneys not transitioning to new attorneys. Mr. Baptiste stated he wanted to put on the record that Attorney Thornton Williams did an amazing job with the transitioning.

Commissioner Wood stated he wanted Mr. Baptiste to be the Attorney for the whole board. Mr. Baptiste stated he serves at the pleasure of the dais and he has reached out to each commissioner directly.

Commissioner Holt asked if Mr. Baptiste intended to apply for the permanent position. Mr. Baptiste stated he does intend to apply. Commissioner Holt mentioned a long-term contract with the hospital and getting out of it. They have a couple of cases that are detrimental to the county.

Dr. Tracey Stallworth, 1339 P.O. Box Quincy, FL 32353

Dr. Stallworth appeared before the board and asked Mr. Baptiste what guarantee does he have that he would not let things slip within the county. Mr. Baptiste stated his firm was accustomed to responding to deadlines. He is always watching for deadlines and he did not attempt to miss any.

Dr. Stallworth asked if Mr. Baptiste had any contact with Commissioners before being voted in for this position. Mr. Baptiste stated no, he was unaware they were going to make a motion for him to serve as interim county attorney. If he was aware of it, he would have gone to the meeting in person versus Zoom. Dr. Stallworth asked if he was going to be firm on what he was going to charge. Mr. Baptiste stated they do not fight with clients regarding bills; they can address any issues.

Bishop Willie Green, 296 Bradwell Road Quincy, FL 32351

Bishop Green appeared and stated he was not against Attorney Baptiste, just against the timing of it.

Commissioner Green appeared at 5:24 p.m.

Bishop Green asked what terms of contract were breached with the previous county attorney. Mr. Baptiste advised the board to not respond to that.

Bishop Green asked what other advantages the county would receive from having Mr. Baptiste serve as interim as opposed to having the previous county attorney. Mr. Baptiste stated the monthly allowance was different and the billable hour rate was also less. In the previous contract, it was \$200 and his is \$175 an hour. Secondly, the previous contract billed \$125 an hour for paralegal work and he bills \$75 an hour.

Bishop Green asked how would he compensate the lack of experience as a county attorney. Mr. Baptiste stated they have represented counties but they have not served in a fixed capacity.

Commissioner Holt stated they have several ordinances needing to be rewritten and updated and she asked Mr. Baptiste if he had any experience with that. Mr. Baptiste stated yes.

COMMISSIONER SIMPKINS MADE THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE INTERIM COUNTY ATTORNEY AGREEMENT AND COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 TO APPROVE.

7.b Interim County Administrator's Agreement

Mr. Baptiste stated he handed the commissioners an amended contract. There has been a change under Section 3, he pulled the financial amount from what the previous county administrator and the previous interim were getting, and matched it to this financial compensation. The second change is under Section 4 under benefits, it states 'still shall receive annual salary of \$140,000 payable in equal bi-weekly installments in accordance with Gadsden County's usual payroll.' Earlier, the parenthesis was blank, now they have added \$140,000. Mr. Baptiste stated for the record, this was aligned with what they paid the previous interim county administrator and the previous county administrator. Also, they added 4d under benefits, where it states 'still shall receive a monthly car allowance in the amount of \$600...'

Commissioner Green stated he has questions for the interim county administrator.

Mr. Baptiste stated he forgot to mention another change under section 3c, it states "still shall receive 20 weeks' severance pay, unless he accepts a different position in the county at the director level or above." This was a recommendation based on looking at other agreements.

Commissioner Green asked Mr. Stiell to give a background of himself and what his intentions are. Mr. Stiell gave a background on his career, where he stated he has a bachelors in architectural studies and also received a master's degree in urban regional planning. He worked for the county as a Growth Management Director for a couple years. Last year, he decided to foster a baby with his wife, and decided that he needed a flexible position for the baby's first year of his life. He got a job with the Apalachee Regional Planning Council as a Planning Consultant. He received a phone call on Monday regarding the interim position. He was later notified that the board voted for him to be the interim county administrator.

Commissioner Green wanted to clarify if it was the former interim county administrator that asked him if he was interested in the interim position. Mr. Stiell stated no, Mr. Morris asked if the company Mr. Stiell worked for had the capacity to help out the county for things such as growth management.

Commissioner Green stated, in his opinion, it would be a disadvantage for other applicants if Mr. Stiell decided to apply for the permanent position. He wanted to make sure they would be fair to all applicants.

Mr. Stiell stated he would be interested in applying for the permanent position for county administrator.

Commissioner Wood stated he did not know who Mr. Stiell was, but he has not heard anything bad about him. He wanted to make sure Mr. Stiell will work with all 5 commissioners. Mr. Stiell stated yes, he will work with each commissioner for the best interest of the county.

Commissioner Green stated he was very concerned about their staff and he wanted to make sure Mr. Stiell had them in their best interest. Mr. Stiell stated he had knowledge of helping staff through difficult times and hoped the Commissioners would give the courtesy to go to him directly before his staff as it would protect both the commissioner and staff from any potential issues.

Commissioner Holt stated she felt like Mr. Stiell should get this interim position as he has the personality for it. In regards to the permanent position, they would need to look at all applicants. If Mr. Stiell was the most qualified, then he would be the person for the permanent position.

Commissioner Green stated the 20 weeks' severance pay for interim was a little steep and suggested 10 weeks of pay instead of 20.

Dr. Tracey Stallworth appeared before the board and stated the morale was horrible here. He asked Mr. Stiell how he could boost morale. Mr. Stiell stated some stability would probably help; he would need to meet with staff first to see what was needed. Dr. Stallworth thought the salary was a little high and he proposed an action plan.

Chair Hinson wanted clarification on what Mr. Stiell stated he was certified on. Mr. Stiell stated he was a certified public manager.

COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE A MOTION FOR 10 WEEKS SEVERANCE PACKAGE FOR THE INTERIM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR AND COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD WENT INTO DISCUSSION.

Mr. Baptiste stated if Mr. Stiell were to accept a position at the director level or above within the county, there would be no severance package.

Mr. Baptiste stated Commissioner Simpkins could make a friendly amendment to the motion made by Commissioner Green. Commissioner Simpkins stated it would give Mr. Stiell time and finance if they go with 20 weeks; it was a fair timeframe. She stated she would like to make a friendly amendment to the motion for it to be 20 weeks' severance pay.

Commissioner Green stated he would not accept the amendment as he felt like 20 weeks was a little steep.

Commissioner Holt asked if the interim only worked for a week, would he get the whole 20 weeks' severance pay. Mr. Baptiste stated under this agreement, if he worked for 3 days, and is terminated, then he will get the compensation. If he were to be terminated with cause, there would be no severance.

Commissioner Wood mentioned 15 weeks' pay. Commissioner Green stated he would accept the 15 weeks.

COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE A MOTION FOR 15 WEEKS SEVERANCE PAY AND COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 TO APPROVE.

Commissioner Green stated they need to entertain the salary piece for interim. He thought it should start at 105k.

COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE A MOTION FOR THE SALARY TO START AT 105K AND COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD WENT INTO DISCUSSION.

Commissioner Simpkins stated with the previous interim, they voted 140k and it was stated that it was not the person, but the position. Commissioner Green stated he did support that because the previous interim was also serving as a director in a department he already had, so he was given double duty and needed that pay increase.

Commissioner Holt stated this was an interim position, not a permanent one. So, she would not offer the 140k.

Commissioner Holt asked Mr. Baptiste regarding ordinance. Mr. Baptiste stated he has not had a chance to review the ordinance; the agreement is effective February 25 and any issues can be addressed prior to the effective date.

Mr. Baptiste stated when they get to the motion to approve the agreement, he would ask the maker of the motion to give him the discretion to make the adjustments spoken about in the public record prior to offering Mr. Stiell the contract to sign.

Charles Morris, 23201 Blue Hwy Quincy, FL

Mr. Morris appeared before the board. He stated in the county, there has been a staggering rate of turnover at the highest levels. At least 9 commissioners have been hired and fired in just 11 years. This kind of instability not only disrupts county operations, it also undermines public confidence.

COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE A MOTION FOR THE SALARY TO START AT 105K FOR THE INTERIM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR AND COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 2-3 AND THE MOTION FAILED.

Commissioner Wood made a motion for 140k salary for the Interim County Administrator and Commissioner Simpkins made the second. Mr. Baptiste stated there did not need to be a motion for that because that number was already in the agreement. Commissioner Wood stated he will withdraw his motion.

Mr. Baptiste stated to make a motion to approve the interim contract for the county administrator and to give the interim county attorney the ability to make revisions. Chair Hinson stated he agreed but he did want to remove the \$600 in regards to the county vehicle.

COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE A MOTION FOR THE INTERIM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR SALARY TO BE AT 110K AND COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 2-3 AND THE MOTION FAILED.

COMMISSIONER SIMPKINS MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE INTERIM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR AGREEMENT WITH THE EXCEPTION OF 4D, \$600 CAR ALLOWANCE. CHAIR HINSON MADE THE SECOND AND THE BOARD WENT INTO DISCUSSION.

Mr. Baptiste stated if they choose to allow Mr. Stiell to use a county vehicle, he would have to come back before the board to clarify what restrictions they want. He asked that they modify the motion to include that.

COMMISSIONER SIMPKINS AMENDED HER MOTION TO APPROVE THE INTERIM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR AGREEMENT SUBJECT TO THE REVISIONS BY THE INTERIM COUNTY ATTORNEY AND CHAIR HINSON MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 TO APPROVE.

Commissioner Green stated they need direction on the process of selecting a permanent county administrator. Mr. Baptiste stated the board should establish criteria for a county administrator. It was not on the agenda for this meeting and asked for it be placed on the agenda for the next meeting. Commissioner Green wanted clarity it would be on the next agenda for discussion as it relates to the advisory board.

Mr. Baptiste stated Mr. Morris has day-to-day operations of the county until February 21 as an Assistant County Administrator. When Mr. Morris was removed as the interim county administrator, he reverted to his previous position. The dais does not have the authority to hire an assistant county administrator, that is a day-to-day decision that reverts to the county administrator. Until February 21, the board does not have an active county administrator or interim county administrator, so Mr. Morris would fill the vacuum as an assistant.

Commissioner Wood stepped out at 7:01 p.m. and returned at 7:02 p.m.

~~7.e Funding Request for Gadsden Wellness Senior Services~~

Item pulled.

8. Motion to Adjourn

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR HINSON
DECLARED THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 7:03 PM.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

Eric F. Hinson, Chair
Board of County Commissioners

ATTEST:

NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk