

**AT A BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING OF THE BOARD
OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND
FOR GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA ON
SEPTEMBER 15, 2025 AT 6:00 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
Brenda A. Holt, District 4
Shawn Wood, District 3
Reginald James, Interim County Administrator
Louis Baptiste, Interim County Attorney
Adriana Quijada, Deputy Clerk

Call to Order, Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Hinson called the meeting to order at 6 p.m. Commissioner Simpkins led into invocation and Chair Hinson led into the Pledge of Allegiance.

Amendments to the Agenda

No amendments.

Approval of Agenda

**COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED AND
COMMISSIONER WOOD MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 TO APPROVE.**

Citizens Requesting to be Heard on Non-Agenda Items (3-minutes 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.

The board went into recess at 6:06 p.m. and resumed at 6:15 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARING

First Public Hearing for Adoption of Tentative Millage Rate and Tentative Budget for FY 2025-2026

Mr. Baptiste stated the taxing authority of Gadsden County has tentatively adopted the millage rate of 9.5 mills. Ms. Raynak was sworn in and appeared before the board to provide a presentation of the proposed tentative millage rate at 9.5 mills.

Ms. Raynak stated that the budget shown in the packet was what the budget was advertised as at 9.5 mills. It is 11% more in operating expenditures than last year with a total budget of \$71,335,653. Ms. Raynak went on to expense changes between 2024-2025. There were increased wages and loss of ARPA funding. Their health insurance went up 7.4% and workers comp has gone up 27.3%. She stated the Board must approve the tentative millage rate and the tentative budget tonight.

Mr. Baptiste read resolution 2025-047 into the record. After the resolution is read, they will take public comments. Citizens will be given a separate chance to comment on the millage rate and a separate chance to comment on the budget. At this point, they are asking for public comments on the millage rate.

Mr. Baptiste asked for the citizens requesting to be heard on this item to stand so they could be sworn in at once.

Marcella Blocker, 144 Brangus Lane Quincy, FL

Mrs. Blocker appeared and asked for them to adopt the rollback rate and not raise the millage rate. She stated the rollback rate of 8.6386 mills would generate the same amount of revenue for the taxing authority as the previous year. There has been 6 million dollars in property tax revenue in the past 3 years. The board cannot come up with a true balanced budget and return constantly with budget amendments to move money around. She stated they need to trim the budget and live within their means.

William Farr, 564 Middle Creek Rd. Quincy, FL

Mr. Farr appeared to propose a reduction in the millage rate. He stated it was the county's responsibility to spend their tax dollars wisely.

Cathy Farr, 564 Middle Creek Rd. Quincy, FL

Mrs. Farr appeared to propose a reduction in the millage rate. She also mentioned that the PowerPoint was misleading because most of the people that they know had their assessed value increased, and it was not represented in those examples.

Hugh Stevens, 701 Woodland Rd. Quincy, FL

Mr. Stevens appeared in favor of reducing the millage rate.

Mark Moore, 5924 Memorial Blue Star Hwy

Mr. Moore appeared in favor of reducing the millage rate. He stated he has looked at budget reports and the expenditures were enormous. It seemed like the only thing growing in the county was the government. The budget for this year has already been blown by several line items.

Doug Croley, 255 Longview Lane Havana, FL

Mr. Croley appeared and mentioned cutting expenses. He was in favor of the rollback rate for the millage.

Neill Wade, 1259 Timber Run Havana, FL

Mr. Wade appeared and stated he was in favor of the rollback rate. He stated everyone was affected by property taxes, not just the ones who own property.

German Walas, 2329 Juniper Rd. Quincy, FL

Mr. Walas stated they need to cut expenses and do the rollback rate.

Derrick Elias, PO BOX 2171 Quincy, FL

Mr. Elias appeared before the board and stated he was going to discuss raising the millage rate, but not tonight. He felt the same way as the previous speakers. He mentioned roads in the city of Quincy needing attention and asked what does he get from paying both city and county taxes. He stated to stop the wasteful spending and show where they cut out real expenditures.

Catherine Russ, 1144 Hill St. Quincy, FL

Ms. Russ appeared to discuss the millage rate and opposed raising it.

Mike Watson, 2793 Sycamore Road Quincy, FL

Mr. Watson appeared and was in favor of keeping the millage rate the same as last year or lowering it.

Brent Watson, 3325 Solomon Rd. Quincy, FL

Mr. Watson appeared and was opposed of raising the millage rate.

Commissioner Wood stepped out at 7:17 p.m.

John Stehmeyer, 930 Kemp Rd. Quincy, FL

Mr. Stehmeyer appeared before the board in favor of lowering the millage rate.

Mark Trevithick, N. Calhoun St.

Mr. Trevithick appeared before the board in favor of lowering the millage rate.

Bonnie Foschi, 917 Sugar Hill Havana, FL

Ms. Foschi appeared and stated she was confused about the September 30 hearing. Mr. Baptiste stated today was for a tentative budget hearing and the final budget hearing will be on September 30. The resolution he read aloud will be the same resolution read at the final hearing.

Ed Hall, 825 Greensboro Hwy Quincy, FL

Mr. Hall appeared and stated taxation was theft. It should have never been constitutional.

Deborah Morningstar, 112 Blue Heron Point Havana, FL

Ms. Morningstar appeared and recommended them to do the rollback rate. They will still be getting more money than they did last year if they go back to the rollback rate.

Elaine Howell, 855 Greensboro Hwy. Quincy, FL

Ms. Howell appeared and stated she is a senior citizen living on fixed income. She put a mobile home in the county and stated the assessed value was unbelievable. It was not what she moved here for and hoped they would consider lowering the millage rate.

Dylan Turner, 1538 Glade Rd Havana, FL

Mr. Turner appeared and was opposed raising the millage rate.

Commissioner Holt stated the 9.5 rate was tentative and they never intended for it to be that. She stated as far as ISO ratings in the county, they need full time Gadsden County fire stations. She mentioned them not doing a strategic plan when they should have.

Commissioner Wood stated if they do put property tax on the ballot, he was almost positive that it would be voted to where there is no property tax. It sounded good, but the reality is when ambulances do not show up and the fire truck does not show up, it is a problem. For the commissioners, it becomes a balance of what is being a good steward of their money. He hears a lot of citizens asking about how they spend their money and if they should be spending it on certain stuff. He stated there was a reason for taxes, but he was never with the 9.5 millage rate.

Commissioner Simpkins stated since the beginning of this budget season she has asked for the rollback rate of 8.6. Families in this county are struggling and groceries cost more. They have over 11,000 seniors living on fixed income. How could they, as leaders, look them in the eye and ask them to pay more taxes when the board has not been willing to make tough decisions. Cuts may not be popular, but leadership requires courage. She asked her fellow commissioners to consider the rollback rate of 8.6.

Commissioner Holt stepped out at 7:51 p.m. and returned at 7:53 p.m.

Commissioner Green stated this was a tentative budget so they can see what they can and cannot do. They definitely did not want to go with the 9.5. There are certain services that are asking for increases as it relates to protecting their county. They are making cuts in every department and they are working as hard as they can to make it make sense for the citizens. He thanked the citizens for coming out tonight and stated it would be nice to have input from them earlier in the budget season.

Commissioner Simpkins stepped out at 7:56 p.m. and returned at 7:59 p.m.

COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE A MOTION TO SET THE FY 2025/2026 TENTATIVE MILLAGE RATE AT 9.0 MILLS AND COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE THE SECOND. THE BOARD VOTED 3-2 TO APPROVE. COMMISSIONER SIMPKINS AND COMMISSIONER WOOD OPPOSED.

Commissioner Green stepped out at 8:02 p.m. and returned at 8:05 p.m.

Mr. Baptiste stated the next item they have is the budget. The proposed operating budget expenditures of Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners are 9.8% more than last year's total operating expenditures. The general revenue fund total appropriated expenditures in reserves is

\$33,610,370. The special revenue fund is \$33,105,643. The debt service is \$3,206,603. Trust and agency funds are \$170,000. For a total of \$70,092,617.

Chief Andre Walker appeared to provide a presentation on fire services. He mentioned the need of new fire trucks to improve emergency response and safety of their firefighters. The estimated cost of a new fire engine is \$600,000 and \$350,000 for a fire brush truck. Commissioner Holt asked for a repair list per fire truck. Chair Hinson asked how many trucks were they asking for. Chief Walker stated at least 10; one truck per year.

Ms. Perkins, Project Manager for Public works, appeared to provide a presentation. They are requesting consideration to increase their budget to be able to address critical staffing shortages and maintain essential infrastructure. Public Works currently has 14 vacant positions. Several mower tractors have reached the end of their service life and timely replacement was needed to maintain the rotating mowing schedule. They have been getting requests for roadway clearance. She stated they have 4 Massey Fergusons that are unrepairable and 2 tractors in need of repair. Commissioner Green asked if they have the cost factors. Ms. Perkins stated yes.

Commissioner Green stepped out at 8:37 p.m. and returned at 8:40 P.M.

Dewayne Ford, EMS Chief, appeared to provide a presentation. He stated Gadsden EMS responds to approximately 9,000 to 10,000 calls for service per year. They currently operate a combination of 6 ALS and BLS ambulances. He stated he currently has 11 full-time vacancies; 8 paramedic positions and 3 EMT positions. Chief Ford stated he did exit surveys and top things listed were high call volume, poor station conditions, and no structured step plan for wages. Since April, he has hired 15 PRN staff members.

Chief Ford stated their proposed 24/72 schedule lowers required hours of overtime to 312 hours per year, averaging out to 42 hours per week. It could offer significant burnout relief, improving retention.

Deputy Chief, Chris Uzzell, appeared and stated they only have 2 full-time employees living in the county. The 24/72 schedule could lead to more employees and they could lose some if they do not make this change.

Colonel Collins appeared on behalf of the Sheriff's Office. He mentioned that the Chair made a comment earlier regarding Jackson County Sheriff's Office and the Colonel wanted to clarify that Jackson County does not run jail operations. That was a huge part of the Gadsden County Sheriff's budget.

Commissioner Green stepped out at 9:02 p.m. and returned at 9:04 p.m.

Commissioner Simpkins stepped out at 9:03 p.m.

Colonel Collins mentioned emergency operations and stated Ms. Whaley only receives \$13,000 annually. Other counties receive between \$50,000-\$150,000. They do house emergency

management, and when Ms. Whaley has shortfalls, they do try to help her out because it was helping the whole county.

Commissioner Simpkins returned at 9:08 p.m.

Colonel Collins stated the board has not really supported them the way they should. Chair Hinson stated he cannot say the board has not supported them; the board gave them \$600,000 a couple years ago.

Colonel Collins stated the main issues they have in their department was retention and recruitment. They have 3 budgets: law enforcement, corrections, and court services. From a law enforcement standpoint, they are asking for an increase of \$343,652 for salary and retirement. For corrections, they are asking for \$252,341 for salary and retirement. For court services, they are asking for \$70,855. They are also asking for 4 leased vehicles and it is about \$14,000 for each vehicle. He stated these were necessary asks. For dispatch, they are asking for a dispatch supervisor and 4 positions that will cost \$206,000; which is included in the total number.

Commissioner Green asked for clarification on what the asks were from emergency management. Ms. Whaley appeared and stated they received \$13,320 and they are asking for an additional \$50,620. Ms. Whaley stated the total amount they are getting from the state was \$157,269.

Mr. Baptiste stated the proposed operating budget expenditures of Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners are 9.8% more than last year's total of expenditures estimated at \$63,827,243 dollars. He read aloud resolution 2025-048 for the record and then asked the Chair to allow any public comments.

Doug Croley appeared before the board. He stated chair Hinson was incorrect when he said that he did not raise taxes. That was incorrect since they kept the millage rate at 9.0. Mr. Croley mentioned right-of-way issues within the county. He stated they need to look at privatization and consider it for EMS.

Derrick Elias, P.O. Box 2171, appeared and asked how many dollars of their budget for 2025 were spent on any city streets. He stated he wanted more specificity on cuts they have made in the budget.

Michael Brown, 635 Charles Brown Rd Quincy, FL, appeared before the board regarding mowing issues. He recommended John Deere tractors, but they also need the manpower to get the mowing done.

COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE A MOTION TO ADOPT THE TENTATIVE FY 2025/2026 COUNTYWIDE BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$70,092,617. COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE THE SECOND AND THE BOARD VOTED 4-1 TO APPROVE. COMMISSIONER SIMPKINS OPPOSED.

COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE A MOTION TO DIRECT STAFF TO ADVERTISE ON SEPTEMBER 19, 2025 THE TENTATIVE MILLAGE RATE AND BUDGET FOR FY 2025/2026 AND THE DATE, TIME, AND PLACE OF THE FINAL PUBLIC HEARING. COMMISSIONER GREEN MADE THE SECOND AND THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 TO APPROVE.

Motion to Adjourn

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR HINSON DECLARED THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 10:07 PM.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

**ERIC F. HINSON, Chair
Board of County Commissioners**

ATTEST:

NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk