

**AT A BUDGET WORKSHOP OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN
COUNTY, FLORIDA ON SEPTEMBER 13, 2021, THE
FOLLOWING PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ:**

Present: Brenda Holt, Chair, District 4-here
Dr. Anthony "Dr. V" Viegbesie, Vice Chair, District 2
Eric Hinson, District 1-via phone
Kimblin NeSmith, District 3-here
Ronterious "Ron" Green, District 5-here
Georgette Daniels, Assistant County Administrator
Opal McKinney-Williams, Assistant County Attorney
Sara Green, Deputy Clerk

CALL TO ORDER, INVOCATION, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Holt called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m. She asked for a moment of silence and then led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the U. S. Flag.

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 noon on Monday, September 13, 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 NeSmith read aloud the above statement.

Introduction / Overview (Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator)

- 4.** Ms. Daniels came before the Board to give an overview of the budget. She said they were going to go through some of the highlights of the budget they tentatively adopted last Thursday but there were questions on a few things so they need to make some clarifications.

The first area was with the County Commission, they increased the funding in that area. There were several insurance claims they had to pay the deductible on in the current fiscal year and did not have money budgeted for that. They increased the funding on that to have something in place in case there were insurance claims made against the County in the future and needed the funding. Chair Holt asked how much that was and Ms. Daniels explained they had only put in \$10,000 and have spent out \$50,000 this year. She also said they have increased their reserve for contingency from \$50,000 to \$100,000 so there would be money available to move around if needed.

Chair Holt asked regarding the insurance, did CHP give numbers from the meeting that was had? Mr. Dixon said those numbers would not be available because they were under at a community situation, numbers were not available until next year. He said the numbers were based on community rates right now. Chair Holt said the 4% was over what number? How do they adjust

for it? Mr. Dixon said they could not adjust for it now, it was based on the community rate. Ms. Daniels said they have already included that amount in the overall budget.

Mr. Dixon asked to be excused from the workshop due to a DOT issue.

Commissioner Hinson entered the workshop at 4:10 p.m.

Commissioner Nesmith said he was confused and the \$10,000 from contingency had nothing to do with Health Insurance, that was on the liability? Ms. Daniels explained the 10,000 was liability. Chair holt said they were talking about insurance. Ms. Daniels said it was in the commissioners' budget because that is where the liability insurance was budgeted, but there is also a reserve for contingency which could be anything that was not perceived and they needed money for. Commissioner Nesmith asked if there were actions pending the Assistant County Attorney said there were pending claims but she did not know the number. Ms. Daniels said the claims may not be resolved in this fiscal year or may be resolved without a claim against the county's liability insurance. She said in speaking of insurance, there is a 4.47% increase in the CHP Health Insurance that has already been put into this budget. Ms. Daniels reminded them that they did approve free Health Insurance for employees that had single coverage.

Commissioner Green asked if she had an estimate of what that number would be. Ms. Daniels said she could get that number, it just was not in her packet.

She said they have also included funding for legislative assistants for the commissioners.

Public Works

She said they included an additional six man mowing crew along with the equipment and is approximately \$500,000 and 400,000 of that is a one-time equipment cost. She said currently the county has about 700 miles of paved roads and both sides of the road has to be mowed. Chair Holt said Ms. Daniels mentioned the paved roads but there were also dirt roads the county owned that had to be mowed as well.

Missed annual said she would continue with the striping program, there was currently approximately \$150,000 in the budget for roads striping and that was for roads that would not be repaved at the moment. She said they were looking to increase the bulky item pick up, is currently done twice a year in the fall and spring and was looking to add a third bulky item pick up date in the summer.

Commissioner Green said his first question was regarding the \$150,000 budgeted for striping. Would each district have an amount that was allotted to them. Ms. Daniels said currently it was one pot but was not sure how the Public Works Department allocated that funding. Chair holt said they could also apply for grants that goes toward striping.

Commissioner Green asked with regard to the bulky item pick up, could they suggest a way of marketing and giving information as to where they could take the bulky items to be picked up. Ms. Daniels explained that was a part of the "Love Where You Live Campaign". She reminded them that they voted to reallocate funding from the CARES program to the "Love Where You Live Campaign" and to continue that program there will be funding inside the public works department and part of that would be the media campaign.

Commissioner NeSmith asked questions to determine how they arrived at \$150,000 for striping and was it enough. Ms. Daniels said they do not budget for grants in their operating budget. Chair Holt said they could apply for striping money through the State. Ms. Daniels said the \$150,000 is just in house but could apply for more through the State.

Commissioner Viegbesie entered the workshop at 4:30 p.m.

Commissioner NeSmith stated there were quite a few roads in District three that needed to be striped.

Chair Holt said this was a conversation that they as commissioners would need to have.

Commissioner Hinson said they might need to put out a contract to see how long the striping lasts. He said to look at Hinson Circle in the Hampton Heights community, those roads have been resurfaced but you could not see a stripe at all. Chair Holt said they would need to have that as a discussion item with Road and Bridge. She reminded them this budget is set when they set it but it was moveable within that once it was sent off as long as it was not restricted.

Commissioner Viegbesie said on point where the budget amendment comes in during the fiscal year. With regard to the striking, there are two types of striping they use. They need to get with the contractor and find a way to scrape the old stripe so it lasts longer. He thought they were working on buying striping equipment so it was not contracted out. He asked where they were on that? Ms. Daniels said she was not sure; Public Works had a meeting so she could not say. Commissioner Viegbesie said they were looking at buying a pot hole filling, one was striping, and a third piece of equipment that was earmarked.

Chair Holt said to get the contractors and Road and Bridge in the room and they could ask all of their questions and get that taken care of.

Commissioner Hinson suggested they not just talk about it, they need to do it. He suggested surveillance on most prominent curbs with trash. Chair Holt said people were dumping large items and they had a process where they got an opinion from the judge about dumping of items. They learned quickly if you ask people to put large items out by the road, they will. If you tell people to put large items by the road then they will put others things by the road.

Commissioner Green said based on a conversation he's had with the County Administrator, they should be expecting something about cameras in several of the hotspot communities. Ms. Daniels said they have not had that specific conversation, they can look into it. She knew he has been working with the IT department on the whole camera issue.

Commissioner NeSmith said in the last month or so and he has stopped to take pictures of items, trash to share on social media and has added a caption to please not do that. He said they have to play a role in changing the mindset that you can ruin the County. Chair Holt said if they encourage the dump/landfill in the first place then it would not be there anyway. She said what does that say to the business people who are trying to come here?

Commissioner Green stepped out at 4:46 p.m.

Ms. Daniels said along with the ordinance for bulky item pick up, they will be looking at Code Enforcement ordinances to refine them so there are more stringent rules. Chair Holt asked if they needed another person in that department. Ms. Daniels said they need to look at that because currently they have only one code enforcement officer and also need to look at animal control. Both need to be revamped and looked at. Chair Holt said they knew the problems.

Ms. Daniels said they were looking to move fuel storage tanks underground.

They are looking to continue to fund the “Love Where You Live” and “Pick it Up Mondays” which would be moving to the weekend so community organizations can participate.

EMS

They are looking to maintain business as usual with a high level of service, the Medical Director contract has been renewed.

There is \$75,000 in the budget for the heart monitor equipment and maintenance of that equipment for EMS.

Commissioner Green returned to the workshop at 4:50 p.m.

Chair Viegbesie stepped out at 4:50 pm

She said they have replaced two ambulances and there still was a need for two additional ambulances to the tune of four or \$500,000. She said there were backups they could pull from but recently they were down so they couldn't pull from anywhere. She said the fleet was aging. She said they did not allocate all of the American Rescue Plan funding that was received and may be asking to allocate some of that.

Commissioner Green asked if they were able to get any grant assistance for ambulances? Ms. Daniels said grant funding is hit or miss and they could not solely depend on it.

Chair Viegbesie returned at 4:52 p.m.

She added there are times there are no grants available. Nothing was included in this budget for ambulances but wanted to bring awareness that it is a need.

Commissioner NeSmith asked how many EMS vehicles are there? She responded there are currently six or eight. They'd need to replace at least two of them. Commissioner NeSmith asked the two that were not currently in the fleet, are they maintenance ready to go? Ms. Daniels said no, at some point they become too old to be in the game safely. Commissioner NeSmith asked how many of the 8 should be retired? She said currently there were two that definitely needed to be retired. They have six that are able to be in use now. Commissioner NeSmith asked the cost of an ambulance? Ms. Daniels replied approximately \$250,000. Commissioner NeSmith asked if they have not budgeted for a new one? Ms. Daniels said no. Chair Holt said it would be a closer to \$300,000 to retrofit for COVID.

Commissioner Viegbesie said they purchased two with CARES funding and should have bought four.

Chair Holt said several agencies came together and one topic came up that you could not fix them because they are so expensive to fix but they could do a lease to own program.

Building Inspection

Ms. Daniels said they were anticipating a decline due to some citizens using private providers for their building inspection services and some cities were contracting with other providers and not the County to provide that service.

Supervisor of Elections

Commissioner Viegbesie said with the Supervisor of Elections situation, he has the statute number that mandates the accessible canvassing areas. Florida Statute § 102.141(4)(a), §101.5614(8), §101.572(2), §102.166(4) mandate that the County Commission find and create space for canvassing and access to the public during the coming election.

Ms. Daniels said as mentioned before, County enforcement ordinances needed to be revamped and that included Code Enforcement and Animal Control.

She said the Mobile Medical Unit that was awarded to the County, as they know is a cost reimbursement, they have to pay for the unit first and then get reimbursed. She said they were looking to purchase the unit from the Indigent County surtax funds and then be reimbursed for it.

Commissioner NeSmith asked if it was one for one reimbursement and she said yes.

GCDC AND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The GCDC and Chamber of Commerce currently have \$60,000 for both. GCDC previously had more budgeted to them and they requested about \$160,000 but currently have \$60,000 for both. They have a small amount \$5,000 that was not there before for Hoover Wood tax relief funding as per their contract. The agreement says up to \$5,000 per year.

Commissioner NeSmith asked for clarification on Hoover and Chair Holt explained.

Chair Holt said for GCDC, that board was set up by the BOCC. If they did not want it, they could disband it, they can tell them what to do as far as economic development. They control that board. The Chamber of Commerce is a members group, they can get them to encourage economic development. They should have someone on the Board that represents the County. She said they fund what they want to happen.

Commissioner Green said in his opinion he has not seen what they have benefitted from the Chamber of Commerce. He can see the possibilities and benefits from GCDC. He asked if they could consider funding just one that was actually providing work for the County, which was GCDC.

Chair Holt said that was up to the Board to decide.

Commissioner Hinson said he had a great relationship with the Chamber of Commerce and also with GCDC. He added they have to have a goal for them to shoot for. He felt they should fully

fund and invest in infrastructure. They should fund the Chamber of Commerce, they help a lot of folks out. He thought they should fund both. They should have someone in the office to drive the trains because the Commissioners were “too busy”.

Commissioner Viegbesie said he did not think they should abandon the Chamber. He did not see why GCDC and the Chamber of Commerce could not work together, they should not be in competition especially if they are funded by the County. He asked they not alienate the chamber. He said there have been members of the Board who wished to sever ties with the Chamber. It was his opinion it is not operating in the way it should be. He said they need to find a way to bring them to the table, be part of the conversation and impress on both of them they were not in competition, they were a team.

Commissioner Green said he agreed with Commissioner Hinson and said since he has been on the board he has not seen any documentation to see what the money is going towards. He also would like to see the two departments work together. He wanted to see what they have done up until this point.

Commissioner NeSmith said he has not heard of any dissension or animosity between the two. He added he felt it was important that every state, every city/town, have a department of economic development. He said the issue was they have to have an Office of Economic Development within the county. Out of all these years, why isn't there one?

Chair Holt asked Ms. Daniels how much was and she said between the two it was \$120,000.

Commissioner Hinson said he felt this year was the year to be bold. The Chamber brought in Trulieve. He said to divide the money equally according to their roles and to not take the money from general fund but American Rescue Fund instead. He said people need help and information. He suggested \$200,000 from the American Rescue Plan for Office of Economic Development. Chair Holt asked how much they wanted to fund each. Commissioner Hinson wanted to put money aside to put more time into getting numbers. Commissioner Viegbesie suggested GCDC as the economic development entity for the County. They already have the people and let the Chamber do what they do. He suggested \$160,000 for GCDC and \$60,000 for the Chamber.

Commissioner Green felt this has been the best discussion. He suggested funding a total of \$180,000 and find a Director of the department that can combine the two; \$180,000 across the board, \$60,000 for each and create a \$60,000 position for a director position.

Commissioner NeSmith suggested to merge everything and bring an Executive Director in-house. Allocate \$240,000 for that person to have a staff to work with the County.

Chair Holt said she put \$20,000 for the Chamber and \$100,000 for economic development.

Commissioner Viegbesie said they could not have champagne taste with a malt liquor wallet. They do not have the revenue source now to exceed the \$120,000 that was already allotted. He said the American Rescue Plan funding was a one-time thing. What happens when it ends?

Chair Holt said the money would get pulled from other positions so stay within the \$120,000; \$100,000 to GCDC and \$20,000 to the Chamber.

Commissioner NeSmith said he was confused. Ms. Daniels explained.

Chair Holt asked how they wanted the \$120,000 divided. Commissioner NeSmith said his answer would be to keep the budget the same as it was last year, \$60,000 each; however, he wanted changes to the budget.

Commissioner Hinson encouraged the new commissioners to go to the Florida Association of Counties. He said he was a fan of both entities and would like to give them more instead of less, they are a nonprofit organization and were able to write grants. Chair Holt interrupted and asked him for his numbers and he said he would bring his numbers to the next meeting. He asked they look at working with Capital City Chamber.

Commissioner Green asked based on the funding they had in the American Rescue Plan, could they move some of the money into the budget to create the director's program.

Ms. Daniels said they had to be cautious. ARP funding has to be related to the COVID pandemic.

Commissioner NeSmith said he was confused as to the three entities, The Chamber of Commerce, GCDC and the proposed new EDC. Chair Holt said for them to stick to the agenda.

Chair Holt asked if they accounted for money to challenge the census? Ms. Daniels said the census is not in the budget because they did not have the figures for it. The only place to take money for the census challenge would be from contingent funds.

Ms. Daniels said currently they had \$120,000 budgeted, \$60,000 for GCDC and \$60,000 for the Chamber of Commerce.

Commissioner Viegbesie said this was a budget workshop not an economic development workshop and the conversation they were holding was definitely an economic development conversation. They need to work with what they have. They have to be able to move things around. He said his numbers would be what staff recommended from last fiscal year of \$60,000 to GCDC and \$60,000 to the Chamber.

Commissioner Hinson said they have a \$2 Million shortfall and have not seen any decrease. He said last year CARES funding helped with the shortfall. Chair Holt interrupted to remind them that currently, the budget was balanced and when they have the economic development workshop, they could discuss the \$2 Million then.

Commissioner Green asked if the department heads given them the documents to show what was needed to fund them? Chair Holt said they have not. Commissioner Green said to stick to \$60,000 and \$60,000. He said they have to give some direction in reference to what they want and need an economic development meeting. He suggested they get some type of reports.

Commissioner Viegbesie said funding means accountability.

Commissioner Hinson said he wanted to know where the \$2 Million shortfall was coming from and wanted to see it itemized.

Chair Holt said it was explained it was in Accounts Receivable and should have never been there. With EMS, it was money that was charged and never received and was the same thing the Clerk said.

Commissioner Hinson said they did a Budget Public Hearing last week and received the budget the same day. Normally, the budget should be out in front and on the website. He said it should have been posted ahead of time so the citizens could see it and the Commissioners could not even see the budget until 15 mins after the meeting started so the citizens could not either. He asked if it was legal and if not, they may need to do another public hearing and get the budget posted ahead of time.

Commissioner Viegbesie asked when the budget was going to be advertised? Ms. Daniels said on Thursday.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR HOLT DECLARED THE WORKSHOP ADJOURNED AT 6:25 P.M.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

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

ATTEST:

NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk