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WASHINGTON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Location: Commission Board Room  
1331 South Blvd., Chipley, FL 32428

DISTRICT 1	DISTRICT 2	DISTRICT 3	DISTRICT 4	DISTRICT
Alan T Bush	David Pettis, Jr.	Tray Hawkins	Wesley Griffin	David Corbin

1. PROCLAMATION

- 1.1 Call to Order – Chairman Pettis
- 1.2 Invocation – Reverend Chris Smith, Grace Assembly, Vernon, FL
- 1.3 Pledge

Present – Commissioners Bush, Pettis, Hawkins, Griffin, and Corbin.  
Also attending – Deputy Clerk Brantley, Finance Director, Johnnie Pettis, County Administrator, Jeff Massey, and Fuqua & Milton, P.A.

2. PUBLIC HEARING – None

3. ADOPT THE AGENDA

Agenda Amendments

11.2 – County Administrator – Discussion to set the Tentative Millage Rate and Meeting Dates

7.7 – Remove Item 6.1 (Benecon) from the Consent Agenda and transfer to the Regular Agenda

7.8 - Old Debt Discussion - Tray Hawkins

Commissioner Hawkins offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Griffin, and unanimously carried to adopt the agenda as amended.

4. ADOPT PREVIOUS MINUTES

4.1 Workshop for June 17, 2024

4.2 Regular Board Meeting for June 20, 2024

Commissioner Corbin offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Griffin, and unanimously carried to approve the above listed minutes.

5. NON-AGENDA AUDIENCE/PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - Effective October 1, 2013, Florida Statute 286.0114 mandates that “members of the public shall be given a reasonable opportunity to be heard on a proposition before a Board or Commission.”

- The Washington County Board of County Commissioners has expanded this provision to allow members of the community to speak on a topic which is not currently before the Board/Agenda. To do so the community members should, prior to the start of the meeting, sign the public participation form provided at the door of the commission room, and shall state their name and the topic on which they wish to speak. During the Non-Agenda Audience portion of the meeting, the

Summary Minutes

individual shall be given up to three (3) minutes to speak.

- Each individual shall have three (3) minutes to speak about a proposition before the Board. Prior to the time a meeting has been called to order, should an individual or group wish to address an item which is on the agenda for consideration, the individual or group shall obtain, from the Commission Secretary or Clerk, a public comment form and may write on the form their name and the agenda matter which they wish to address. The completed form(s) shall be returned to the Commission Secretary/Clerk, who shall provide the form(s) to the Chairperson. Should a particular group wish to address an item, they shall nominate a spokesperson to voice their ideas, comments, and concerns. In the event an individual wishes to speak on an item and has not signed up in advance, those who have signed shall be given priority.
- Any public comment before the board shall be directed to the Chairperson of the Board. It is not a question-and-answer period. Public comments concerning individual employees (other than those hired directly by the Board (County Administrator/County Attorney) shall not be entertained. Any comment, pros, or cons, regarding a county employee who does not report directly to the Board shall be addressed to the Human Relations Department or the County Administrator.
- Troy Cunningham, Country Oaks Fire Department Chief addressed the board about the following items.
  - 8 Questions Submitted Last Month – There has been no follow up from the county.
  - June 29 Kids Event – 26 kids attended, sixteen blood donors (One Blood), and lunches were donated instead of being charged for. News 13 attended and different news outlets posted the event. Recognition was given to Washington County Fire Services, however, that was not mentioned on the news. An event is being planned for October for Fire Prevention Month.
  - Water Supply – Working on a water supply of a 30,000-gallon tank. They are trying to resource one, and if it is received it will help with lowering the ISO and provide better coverage for the area.
  - Hartford Boulevard Drainage – Normal drafting spots are too far from the road or have been filled in by erosion from county drainage on Hartford Boulevard. The fire department was unable to draft water from their normal spot during a brush fire in the White Oak Creek area, which put a strain on their 9,000-gallon tank. Two of the three culverts have partially been filled by dirt and it has also filled in some of the spring bottom.
  - Grant – Country Oaks has applied for a grant to update hoses.
  - Firefighters – There is one Firefighter II currently in class.

Chairman Pettis responded that the comments from the kids' event have been positive.

- James Brooks told the board that he has a Facebook page called Washington County Florida Citizens for Government Transparency. He addressed the board about the following.
  - Camp Sonrise located on Cook Road (western part of the county) – Some citizens are afraid to voice their opinion or report wrongdoings by the county. A couple has recently expressed to him they do not want their house burned down. Around the time the page was started, former commissioner Lynn Cope told him to be careful what he does because they will burn your house down. A citizen contacted him with information about the paving on Camp Sonrise, which is private property. The policy allows for 50 feet from the road; however, this was 140 feet in two places. The work orders originally reflected six loads, however, the amended work order reflected two, crossing out and circling the six. The county was emailed about this, and the response was a new employee had done the work and was not trained.
  - As of confirmation yesterday, New Jerusalem is still at the FEMA level.

Chairman Pettis read the email that was sent to Mr. Brooks. Thank you for following up on the driveway maintenance on Cook Road. As promised in my initial response, I have been working to find out the facts surrounding the maintenance activities. Monday afternoon I met with Mr. Barbee, Mr. Evans, and Mr. Massey. Mr. Evans observed two driveway connections on Cook Road that needed maintenance. Without external direction from county staff or commissioners, Mr. Evans directed a maintenance crew to address the driveway maintenance. Existing policy allows for county maintenance of up to 50 feet of driveway which connects to a county right-of-way. While performing the maintenance a newer employee unfamiliar with the 50-foot limit spread the material beyond that limit. When notified of the mistake, the employee attempted to correct his mistake by pulling material back toward the right-of-way. The employee has received additional training on the 50-foot limit for driveway maintenance. The maintenance team will be reminded to follow the policy limit of 50 feet. Thank you again for reaching out about the situation. As always please continue to contact myself, other commissioners, or county staff.

Chairman Pettis said his position is this is what occurred after speaking with county employees. In no discussion was it mentioned that any commissioner, or any other county staff directed this person to do this work for any political purpose or gain. If that happens in the future and that information is brought to light, then it can be addressed at that time. The public works supervisor in his day-to-day operations and business as a supervisor has discretion to perform this work.

As Chairman, there will never be a threat of burning anybody's house down in the event he is contacted about a matter. Responses will be given as honestly and accurately as possible. They must move past this situation of all the things that are said in the community without these guys being contacted and spoken with. Please reach out to the board with concerns, and if necessary, he will be the point of contact.

Commissioner Griffin said that he looked at it and what took place was ridiculous. There were three road and bridge supervisors at the workshop and there are two in attendance now. If there is an employee that is not trained, instead of attending a board meeting one of them should make sure those things are taken care of.

County Administrator Massey said that it has been taken care of.

Commissioner Griffin said it has taken three months for work to begin on Monroe Sheffield, which is a county road. 280 feet of work was done on a private road. There are things in the county that need to be taken care of before they address private driveways. It is understood that it may have been a mistake. If untrained people are being sent out to do work, they may need supervision.

Chairman Pettis said unfortunately at times it takes situations such as this to realize that and those steps have been taken to prevent this from occurring again. They will not be perfect in the future but can learn from this experience. This is a personnel/public works issue, and it has been handled internally.

## 6. CONSENT AGENDA

- 6.1 This item was moved to the regular agenda as item 7.7.
- 6.2 Approval of Tourism Lodging Tax Increase Ballot Language
- 6.3 Approval of 2024 Mud Hill Landfill Professional Engineering Services Proposal from Dewberry for \$11,528.75
- 6.4 Approval of SHIP Annual Report Certification Washington County 2021 – 2022
- 6.5 Approval of FY 2024 – 2025 Emergency Preparedness and Assistance Grant (EMPA)
- 6.6 Approval of Vernon Recreation Field Land Exchange using District 1 and District 3 Funds for \$3,000 Cost of Exchange
- 6.7 Approval for Chairman to Sign Letter of Agreement for Crime Stoppers Trust Fund Grant
- 6.8 Approval to Appoint Danny Exum to Tri-County Airport Authority Seat 8
- 6.9 Approval to Purchase 4 Pickup Trucks Totaling \$173,836.08 from Cash Carried Forward

- 6.10 Approval to Change Submittal fee from \$25.00 to \$35.00 striking the “or 15%” that was approved at the June Board Meeting
- 6.11 Approval to Purchase a 2022 Kenworth T880 Semi Truck Totaling \$140,053.94 and Surplus Existing Mack Semi Truck
- 6.12 Approval of Close Out for Ag Center Portico Project
- 6.13 Approval of Change Orders for Ag Center Drainage Project Totaling \$26,540.00
- 6.14 Approval of Fanning Branch Environmental Project and Sylvania Road to be added to Resilient Florida Grant
- 6.15 Approval of Classification Pay Plan Update of Building Official from Paygrade 113 to 114

Commissioner Hawkins offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Griffin, and unanimously carried to approve consent agenda items 6.2 – 6.15.

## 7. AGENDA ITEMS

- 7.1 Grassy Pond Ranches Homeowner’s Association Discussion – Heston Hicks, Association President read into the record the letter that was sent to the commissioners dated June 28. The letter was read as follows: I am writing to you to let you know the status of the Grassy Pond Ranches Homeowners Association in south Washington County and to offer the donation of two parcels in our community to Washington County on behalf of all Washington County first responders. As you may know, the HOA was made aware in 2022 that the covenants for the HOA had expired in 2014. The community attempted to revitalize the HOA twice and it did not pass. As of June 21, 2024, the Grassy Pond Ranches Homeowners Association is no longer active. The Grassy Pond Homeowners Association, Inc. is still listed in Sunbiz and will remain active only for the purposes of closing out the business of the corporation and the HOA, finalizing all debts, and repurposing the common property through a donation to Washington County. We wish to extend the offer of a donation of two parcels to Washington County on behalf of all first responders in the county. The two parcels in question are parcel id 3072-0002 (Grassy Pond Bottom), and parcel id 3072-0003 (Grassy Pond Pavilion). We believe that these assets can be used by the county and its various organizations for a variety of benevolent purposes. In consideration of this donation, we have only a few conditions we would like to make a part of the transition. The properties will not be sold by Washington County. The properties will not be open to the general public. The property owner that shares a boundary with the pond will have continuous perpetual nonobstructive access to the pond. The property owners of Grassy Pond in its entirety will have the use of the pond and the pavilion area through the process established by the county to gain access to the pond and pavilion. It is our sincere hope that you will find this offer to be a benefit

to the county and will accept our offer as soon as possible.

The recipients of the letter were Alan Bush, District 1, David Pettis, District 2, Tray Hawkins, District 3, Wesley Griffin, District 4, David Corbin, District 5, Matt Fuqua, Washington County Attorney, Jeff Massey, Washington County Administrator, Kevin Crews, Washington County Sheriff, and Justin Leach, Coordinator of Washington County Fire and Rescue.

Commissioners Corbin and Bush expressed concern about county ownership of a boat ramp and pavilion that has limited citizen use.

County Attorney Fuqua mentioned there were a lot of issues regarding the property the county obtained due to flooding. This would be a case of using county property for private usage, which is not recommended.

Heston Hicks said the second parcel includes the roads and the pavilion area. The residents want the county to maintain the roads, but not improve them. The parcel is largely Grassy Pond Road/Pinewood, Pinto, and Maverick.

County Administrator Massey said that he and Johnny Evans looked at the roads some time back and they concluded that another grader would have to be added on for maintenance.

Commissioner Griffin said that he feels they need two additional graders in the county to keep up with the current maintenance.

Commissioner Hawkins said that if the board decides to take this on, it will open every other privately owned subdivision throughout the county. This is not an expression for or against taking the roads on.

Commissioner Corbin said more discussion is needed.

Commissioner Bush said the letter says the properties will not be open to the general public. They have received this request from private roads as well. In most cases they are not up to standard. It is heard all the time that they cannot maintain their roads. If the county cannot maintain the current roads, why take on more roads?

Heston Hicks said that portion of the letter can be amended. The roads have always been public. The pavilion area is gated and locked at times. The community does not want it turned into a free-for-all.

Commissioner Griffin suggested this item be included on the next

workshop agenda. In the meantime, Johnny Evans and others can update the board with what it would take to maintain the roads/get them up to standard. If the county takes it back, the county would be able to access the property openly.

Terri King, Grassy Pond resident said that he feels the Grassy Pond Community will abide by what the county wants. They followed the state law and tried to revitalize the HOA twice. They were told by the state that they could dissolve it, which has been done. The only thing remaining is the LLC, with three members. The group of them gave them permission to go ahead and dispose of the property. The property was offered to the sheriff, fire department, and EOC to use for the kids. The residents will adopt what the county needs to control access to the pavilion, etc.

County Administrator Massey said if the board would like he would have Mr. Swauger look at the pavilion and public works look at the roads.

- 7.2 Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary CCMP Resolution – Melinda Gates, Interim Executive Director for Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program told the board the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan is complete. She expressed her thanks to Commissioner Bush for seven years of commitment to the Estuary Coalition as well as the other commissioners for their support of the program. A resolution is presented before the board today for approval and acceptance of the CCMP.

The program was initiated in 2015. Interlocal agreements were signed with Okaloosa, Walton, Washington, and Holmes Counties to form a 163 entity where they come together for the common good of the Choctawhatchee Bay and watershed. They look for opportunities to improve the water quality, as well as habitat throughout the watershed. Eglin Airforce Base, Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance, Choctawhatchee, and the Choctawhatchee Pea Yellow River Watershed Authority are involved as well. There are twenty-eight national estuary programs in the United States. They are new. They are applying for help through legislation for continuous funding from the Environmental Protection Agency to help move projects forward and continue the program with multiple communities.

Commissioner Bush offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Hawkins, and unanimously carried to approve the CCMP Resolution as presented above.

- 7.3 Discussion Regarding Debris of River Road – Sheila Engum, Citizen (The citizen was not present at this point in the meeting. This was discussed further in the meeting.)

- 7.4 FL Commerce Grant Agreement for Chipley Library Expansion – Renae Rountree, Library Director addressed the board with the agreement to support the February award of \$4 million for the expansion of Chipley Library. The project must be complete by December 2026.

Commissioner Bush offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Corbin, and unanimously carried to approve the agreement with the Florida Commerce Grant for the Chipley Library.

- 7.5 Request for Approval of Resolution and Grant Agreement for CR 280 Douglas Ferry Road Improvements – Jane Dellwo, Administrative Secretary addressed the board. The design phase is complete. The resolution and grant agreement for CR 280/Douglas Ferry is before the board for approval to accept the SCRAP Funding for \$5,529,159.00 (construction dollars).

Commissioner Bush offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Griffin, and unanimously carried to approve the agreement and resolution for CR 280/Douglas Ferry Road.

- 7.6 Discussion Regarding Contract with DRC Emergency Services – David Pettis, Jr., Chairman

County Administrator Massey requested this item be moved to the meeting in August. The contractor has verbally agreed to honor their original pricing, however, that has not been received in writing.

- 7.7 Approval of Benecon Insurance Rate Approval for 2024 – 2025 with Board approving to cover up to \$200,000.00 – Tray Hawkins, Commissioner said that the insurance consortium was able to lower the increase from 9.3% to 7.9%, which totals a maximum of \$220,956.00. Instead of \$200,000.00 from the insurance fund, \$220,956.00 would need to be moved over for budgetary purposes and the remaining from that would revert to the insurance fund, with the knowledge of \$180,000.00 coming back into the fund for this year. This would allow 10%+ to be carried over.

Commissioner Bush confirmed that the increase would be absorbed by the county without an increase being passed on to the employee.

Commissioner Hawkins offered a motion to move \$220,956.00 from the claims/insurance fund into the general fund to balance the budget for the 7.9% increase for healthcare insurance. Whatever the final number is,



that number will revert into the claims/insurance fund along with the \$180,000.00 that is due to come in from this year's cash carried forward from the claims fund. Commissioner Corbin seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously.

- 7.8 Old Debt Discussion – Tray Hawkins, Commissioner suggested that the incoming \$1.6 million from the state could be used to pay down debt. \$500,000.00 is included in the budget to pay a prior debt. The debt has gone from \$9 million to \$1.9 million. There is \$2.6 million in the American Rescue Act Fund. The funds were set back to offset items that were not part of FEMA's scope of work. With the work stoppage and uncertainty, the \$500,000.00 that is coming out of the general fund is more important than contingency. Using the \$2.6 million to service the \$1.9 million debt would free up \$500,000.00 in the budget, which would help with the upcoming budget year.

Commissioner Hawkins suggested they seek a letter saying the money has been offset by revenue expenses/sheriff's budget and make sure the money is unencumbered and can be used for that.

Commissioner Corbin said that he would like a letter from somebody be it state or federal; a letter from somebody, not just their contractor. Someone with the power to say yes, it is okay.

Chairman Pettis agreed to work with County Administrator Massey regarding this.

This will be a workshop item.

Commissioner Bush commented that the old debt was \$11 million when he became a commissioner and with some of that being from 1992.

Chairman Pettis said he is careful to say since it has not been received, but the state has worked toward \$1.6 million of what is owed.

7.3 – Discussion Regarding Debris on River Road – Sheila Engum, Citizen addressed the board regarding a county employee cutting her azaleas back in June, which have been there for 30 years, and she has maintained.

Sheila Engum thanked Commissioner Hawkins for coming out to look at her concern.

There have never been any complaints about them hindering vision. The cutting that was done was terrible and there was a lot of debris left behind

with some of that being in her yard. Commissioner Hawkins came out along with an inmate crew and did some cleaning. The cutting that was done was approximately 30 – 35 feet from the center of the road. It seems that the county has encroached on her property and cut down the bushes that did not need to be cut down. The county needs to thoroughly clean this up and the azalea bushes need to be replaced.

Trey Barbee said that he sent an inmate crew out yesterday to clean the ditches, but he will not send them in someone's yard without board direction.

He went on to tell the board that he would go out and measure. (The measuring is regarding right-of-way).

Commissioner Griffin told County Administrator Massey that he needs to be involved.

Commissioner Hawkins suggested in the future, the skid steer with the grinder head clean the right-of-way behind the cutting.

Commissioner Griffin suggested West Florida Electric could allow them to put the debris in the right-of-way since they are paying a franchise fee. There are other ways of doing it.

Chairman Pettis said they would work through the administrator and public works and continue to reach out to Commissioner Hawkins.

Commissioner Bush told Sheila Engum that he returned her call on July 4 at 12:30, which went to a law office in Bonifay to which he left a message on the voice mail machine.

8. FEMA COORDINATOR – None  
Recess 10:10 a.m. – 10:19 a.m.
9. MSBU ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATE – None
10. PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR – None
11. COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR – Jeff Massey addressed the board.
  - 11.1 Building Fee Schedule Update with Adoption Date of September 1, 2024

Commissioner Bush said the workshop discussion was left to determine the cost. They would use the current International Code Council as updated instead of referencing a particular year.

Chairman Pettis said the paperwork that was submitted suggest adopting the current International Code Council square foot construction cost which is updated annually in February and August.

County Administrator Massey said the second part of the fee update is a proposed increase in building permit fees. The standard building fee is \$65.00, and the proposal is to increase it to \$100.00. There is a sliding scale based on the value of the structure on what those building fees would be. \$10,001.00 - \$50,000.00 would be \$100.00 for the first \$10,000.00. Washington County has been charging \$5.00, with \$6.00 being recommended for each added \$1,000.00 or fraction thereof. Other counties are already charging \$8.00.

Chairman Pettis said the option for discussion is the minimum permit fee of \$100.00, adopt the current International Code Council Square Foot Construction Cost which is updated annually in February and August, and the new proposed building permit fees as listed.

Commissioner Hawkins mentioned revisiting the fees in six months.

Commissioner Bush suggested they should have a year's excess revenue to run the department. Set that as a threshold and when that amount is exceeded it would be brought before the board.

Commissioner Bush offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Hawkins to accept the updated building fee schedule, updated minimum permit fee, and the current International Code Council Square Foot Construction Cost effective September 1.

Recommendation by the board - The budget will be evaluated on a quarterly basis by County Administrator Massey based on the department's budgetary threshold/set by the county administrator.

James Brooks questioned whose responsibility it was in the past and going forward to make sure the fees are in line. Commissioners or the county administrator?

Chairman Pettis responded that it is both. Part of adopting the new code would allow that to stay updated.

Mike Gerald said the building department is not out of money. There will be a need for more staff in the office in preparation for the future.

The motion on the table carried unanimously.

Mike Gerald said that he agreed to the building official position for at least three months. Today he is requesting a vote of confidence from the board to keep him and Mr. Wright for six months or more. They would

like to come back before the board in January.

County Attorney Fuqua said unless they go out for proposals; he does not see anything changing.

- 11.2 Tentative Millage Rate Discussion – Deputy Clerk Brantley said the rate is due to the property appraiser by August 4, but she would like to have it by the end of the month.

County Administrator Massey addressed the board. Deputy Clerk Brantley has provided a millage/revenue synopsis. In the past the millage was frozen during the American Rescue Act.

Commissioner Hawkins asked Renae Rountree, Librarian if she was aware of any grants under the library that has a minimum local effort to be able to be applied for?

Renae Rountree said the State Aid to Public Libraries Grant. Part of it is the local maintenance of effort/general revenue transfer and the millage rate, which is in Florida Statute.

Deputy Clerk Brantley said the millage has been at 8.5 since 2020.

Commissioner Bush confirmed with Deputy Clerk Brantley that the tentative millage rate can be lowered.

Commissioner Bush offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Hawkins, and unanimously carried to set the tentative millage at 8.5, tentative hearing date for 9/10, and final hearing date 9/23 with both being at 5:05 p.m.

## 12. CLERK

- 12.1 June Vouchers Totaling \$2,478,875.31

Commissioner Griffin asked for an update on Culpepper Dock and Ramp.

County Administrator Massey said they are waiting for the permits from the Army Core.

In response to Commissioner Griffin, Jane Dellwo confirmed that it is still in the permitting process, and she would speak with Jonathan Sims and have him follow up.

Commissioner Griffin asked County Administrator Massey if he has checked on getting the cameras at the annex in operation. The cameras

should be working since there is access to the building by key fob.

County Administrator Massey said if that is the board's direction. The cameras in the back have not worked since he has been with Washington County.

It was the board's consensus for County Administrator Massey to have the cameras operational.

Commissioner Bush reminded the board that George Swauger had said that he was struggling to find a vendor to put in the floating aluminum docks at Gap Pond. Renae Rountree has information for George Swauger on a more PVC related dock than aluminum.

County Administrator Massey said that he has sent the information to George Swauger for that alternative option.

13. COUNTY ATTORNEY – None
14. ADJOURN – Commissioner Hawkins offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Corbin, and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting.