

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 – Chairman Pettis
- 1.3 Pledge

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

2. AGENDA

- 2.1 2024 – 2025 Budget – Chairman Pettis told the board the proposed 2024 – 2025 budget that has been presented before them is balanced.

Commissioner Hawkins questioned the trend in fiscally constrained revenue being down and went on to say that it may be an error, however, it should be looked into.

Deputy Clerk Brantley added that the taxes run a couple of months behind. Fiscally constrained revenue is linked to ad valorem.

Commissioner Hawkins said the population in Florida is increasing. The gas tax revenue may need to be discussed on the legislation side. The growth in urban areas shifting the population will cause the fiscally constrained counties to suffer greater on gas taxes. There needs to be some consideration regarding gas taxes on the legislative side to make the budgets work correctly. If it is being done based on population it is not fair because the counties continue to receive the same amount of traffic and needed road repair. The greater amount of transportation revenue will go to the larger urban counties.

What are the boards plan for the will fall that is in the budget?

Commissioners Bush and Hawkins said they would like to see it applied to the debt.

Clerk Bell said they have discussed allocating more on the expense side for debt this year than what has previously been there. Some of those funds would flow into that if that were something the board would like to do.

Commissioner Hawkins said there is \$1.3 million of non-reoccurring funds allocated through the will fall of the general fund.

Finance Director Pettis said the old debt is around \$1.8 million.

In response to Commissioner Hawkins asking, Clerk Bell said the ARPA Fund balance was \$2.6 million.

Commissioner Hawkins said there is a \$700,000.00 difference. \$500,000.00 is paid to debt service annually, which could be applied to debt payoff. Using a figure of \$1.9 million, removing \$500,000.00 leaves \$800,000.00 of revenue that you do not have that is not applied to the \$1.3 million. There is \$2.6 million, so there is \$700,000.00 of added revenue there out of the \$1.6 million. That leaves \$100,000.00, which could be found. It is \$100,000.00 off from paying the debt and servicing the same budget that has been presented. District three maintenance funds could be applied to leave the board debt free.

The budget that has been presented includes everyone's request. The budget is \$100,000.00 off from servicing the debt service and a balanced budget. Paying the old debt would open \$500,000.00 for the next budget.

Commissioner Bush said when he became a commissioner there was a considerable amount of debt. When the courthouse failed, they would not likely have been able to borrow money. It would be nice to vacate seat one and the incoming commissioner fill it debt free.

Money is coming in for the old debt. It would be appreciated if the board would approve to pay off the long-term debt.

Commissioner Corbin said that he would like to see it, however, is the new interest loan figured in the budget. It needs to be clear that they would not be taking away from that.

Clerk Bell responded, yes, it is an added \$500,000.00.

Commissioner Hawkins said road and bridge will be better than ever in the next 60 – 90-days. With the completion of Hurricane Sally Road work money is moved into their cash carried forward.

Clerk Bell responded that it is reconciled.

Commissioner Griffin requested the result of recent FEMA calls.

County Administrator Massey responded. The path to getting this solved has been clear from the beginning based on FEMA regulations. Things must be done a certain way, which will include an appeal and arbitration. FEMA and the state have said the case is so compelling that Washington County will win the appeal and the arbitration, making the county whole while the other is going on. Both entities have agreed to expedite the process. There are other avenues that will be pursued pertaining to the monies that is being held at the state level.

On a call with the Director of Region 4, Atlanta he understands the position the county is in and apologized. They are evaluating the projects that are being held at the state to see if there are any more eligible funds that can be pulled out and sent such as the \$1.9 million that the county has received. Once they determine there is nothing else that can be pulled out from the FEMA side, a determination memo will be sent. Their hands are tied based on their regulations and processes.

Chairman Pettis said in that conversation he requested clarification. There is no question that they approved some things against policy. They have checks and balances in places now that will prevent that from occurring again. The question was asked, since everyone involved knows that policies were not adhered to, why do they have to go to arbitration. The response was if they continue to violate their policies, it could cause trouble if audited. They have worked to release as much as they can. Once they verify a few other things to see if release is possible a de-obligation letter should follow soon, which is the point where they can move forward.

County Administrator Massey added once they receive the determination memo, they have 30-days to get it to the state, which they will receive in three. The state has 60-days to get it to FEMA and they will turn that around in 72-hours.

Chairman Pettis said per the call from the state and FEMA level they will expedite it within their power.

Commissioner Hawkins suggested to ask for the de-obligation letter.

Commissioner Griffin asked what the amount of de-obligation is.

County Administrator Massey said that it is a moving target. They are still looking

to see if there are any more eligible expenses, which would lessen the de-obligation amount. For the sake of conversation, a little over \$80 million has been spent for half the project. The amount that has not been spent is the de-obligation conversation. They made sure early on that they were not talking about the county being in a receivable situation.

Commissioner Hawkins added that they are not looking about clawing any funds back from the county coffers. They are looking at the funds that are in DEM coffers, that they are not going to approve for future projects. The only thing that is held up now is what is in DEM's cue to pay, which they are looking at to see what they could pay out of. As soon as they de-obligate it, the better off the county is.

Commissioner Bush clarified what they have spent, they will get back. What they have not spent they will not likely get.

Commissioner Hawkins said rock was used for mitigation in the Legacy Project, which was approved by FEMA. The county cannot let that slide. That is county policy. They currently mitigate roads without FEMA's help with rock.

Commissioner Hawkins reverted back to the budget discussion and suggested to find \$100,000.00 and have a balanced budget without debt.

Commissioner Bush asked the board to do what is needed with the \$100,000.00 for the long-term debt stemming from 1992. When they are discussing things, he likes to simplify things. It is requested that the Clerk's Office provide a simplified view of the budget showing the amounts that go to different departments as well as a list of the increases. The millage has remained the same. The road department is funded by gas taxes and not ad valorem.

The new Washington County Supervisor of Elections not only timely returned money, which was noted by the auditing firm. She also decreased her budget this year, which is unheard of. She has also been an integral part of the budget process. Thanks is due to her.

Commissioner Hawkins noted that a requirement that the millage remain the same until the funds were used was a part of the county accepting the ARPA Funds. Now that they have been used, there is more flexibility.

Commissioner Bush said it would be nice for the media to publish the millage rate for the last 20-years. During the last 12 years of being in office the millage rate has been lowered. In previous years, it was maxed out.

**WCBOCC Budget Workshop
Special Meeting
8/29/2024**

Commissioner Corbin spoke on something that stood out during the budget process, not to say it in a negative way, but positively. During election time, there is discussion about emergency services needing to be funded or funded better. In the two years since this board has been together, the sheriff's budget will have increased by \$1.29 million. The sheriff needs that and more. The EMS Department increase has been over \$800,000.00 in two years. A \$250,000.00 line item has been added for fire services.

Commissioner Bush said that in most counties in Florida, basically half the budget goes to the Sheriff's Office. There is a significant number that goes to emergency services.

Clerk Bell added that many do not realize the services provided outside of the constitutional officers.

Commissioner Hawkins added that the sheriff runs two operations that the board is bound to operate. The sheriff is not statutorily bound to run the jail or EMS. His budget has rightfully increased. It has been a partnership.

The consensus of the board is to compile a budget that will close the old debt out.

The workshop was closed.

Break 9:41 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

The meeting reconvened, opening the special meeting.

3. ADOPT THE AGENDA

Agenda Additions

- 4.4 EDA Grant Discussion – David Melvin
 - 4.5 Board Schedule Update
 - 4.6 Culpepper Dock Approval
 - 4.7 Statement of Assurance for Washington County Countywide Risk Reduction
- Follow-up
- 4.8 Change Order 2 – Ag Center Drainage

Commissioner Hawkins asked County Attorney Milton, with the recent lawsuit that was dismissed with prejudice, is there any discussion regarding the attorney fees that they need to pursue.

County Attorney Milton said that it was his understanding that a portion of it was dismissed with prejudice, and a portion without prejudice.

Commissioner Hawkins responded, the portion against the county was dismissed without prejudice.

County Attorney Milton said that he believes it was as to certain claims. He is not sure whether there are still claims that can be brought by one of the plaintiffs against the county or not. It is understood, there was a motion for sanctions filed and they are going to continue moving forward with that. The county's attorney will be moving forward with that.

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

4. 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 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.

5. AGENDA ITEMS

- 5.1 Statement of Support and Amendments for Duer Family Home Exemption – Candace Thames, Grants/Procurement Specialist addressed the board. Through the SHIP Program they are requesting \$50,000.00 in additional funds for the Duer

**WCBOCC Budget Workshop
Special Meeting
8/29/2024**

Family Home. Their income is extremely low, which contributed to their inability to put in a true well and power. The soil is soft and needs to be reinforced with additional dirt. They would like to have regular power instead of solar panels. Permission is needed from the board to sign a letter for them to be able to get the additional \$50,000.000. They may need up to \$225,000.00 instead of the \$175,000.00. They cannot take anything from their current home to the new home. They have been without power and water since Hurricane Michael. If it is not needed it will not be spent.

Commissioner Hawkins offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Corbin to approve the amendment for the SHIP Program related to the Duer Family.

Commissioner Corbin confirmed with Melanie Rowland-Mills, Program Coordinator prior to the meeting that the funds are state funds, which the county has a surplus of. The county administers the funds.

Commissioner Hawkins suggested that Candace may want to consider requesting the board amend their policy to increase the funds, based on home values increasing. Amendments have been done in the past. Do not allow the policy to prevent you from helping people.

The motion carried unanimously.

4.2 M0100 and M0132 Letter and Amendment for Reallocating Funds – Candace Thames, Grants/Procurement Specialist addressed the board. The letter and amendment say that the county would like to adjust the funds for the project implementation down to 5% allowing for the remaining funds to be reallocated to the demolition site, site improvements, and close-out outline in the agreement for both projects both connected to the Buyout Programs.

Commissioner Bush offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Hawkins to approve the letter and amendment for M0100 and M0132.

County Attorney Milton said that he and Mr. Melvin have been working with the state on some of these projects in other locations, dealing with whether they would pay the administration fee. Does the budget allow for reductions in administration to 5%? Has that been contracted out?

Candace Thames responded that she believes that it does handle that, however, she can get back with him on that.

County Attorney Milton asked does the contract provide for 5% admin.

Candace Thames responded that she believes that it does. Yes. They amended the contract for that.

The motion carried unanimously.

4.3 Henry Grimes DBA Grimes Farms Contract Discussion – Jeff Massey, County Administrator addressed the board. Since 2021 there has been an existing contract with Grimes Farms and the county to haul rock for public works. The contract includes four one-year extensions with this being the last one. They would like to keep the contract in place if they need help hauling rock.

Commissioner Hawkins offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Corbin to use the last extension for the Grimes Farms contract.

County Administrator Massey informed the board Mr. Grimes is okay with the contract as is.

The motion carried unanimously.

4.4 EDA Grant Discussion – David Melvin, Melvin Engineering provided an update on Project Gantry which is located at the industrial park. The project which involves CDBG Funds and EDA Funds began the spring of 2023. The EDA is coming upon their federal fiscal year October 1 and is ready to award their portion of \$4.9 million. They have been waiting for the CDBG agreement to come in. The original agreement/resolution included language such as “we are committing funds as Washington County, but we have a CDBG Grant coming in to cover that”. The language including CDBG Grant needs to be removed so the FED’s can approve their part. The CDBG Grant funds are still coming.

The original resolution shows that the governor announced Washington County’s award of \$3.4 million. All the grant work has been done. Florida Commerce has adopted the grant application and have been expecting the CDBG agreement since May. As of last Wednesday, Graham said the agreement is in the Florida Department of Commerce DocuSign process. The current update is that the agreement will be out in the next few weeks. The EDA has run out of time, and they need a resolution to announce the award to Washington County.

The application was submitted in May 2023. Some of the things the company they are working with (Excellor) has committed to include a minimum of one hundred jobs and building a 200,000 square foot industrial building. They are lining up their financing. The company was physically verified as a legitimate company and has recently provided documentation of work that they completed at the Orlando airport.

The resolution before the board for approval is the same as before minus the CDBG portion. It

**WCBOCC Budget Workshop
Special Meeting
8/29/2024**

sounds like a strong commitment from the county to commit \$3.4 million unrestricted/unencumbered funds to the project, however, the CDBG funds are coming. Once the grant agreement is before the board there is the option to decline it.

County Attorney Milton asked if either one of the grants are economic development grants with ties to job creation.

David Melvin responded they both have ties to job development creation, however, CDBG is the only one of the two that enforces it. If the jobs are not created, they will request the funds back. The county in-turn will have a participating party agreement with the company that will state the company will have to create the jobs, and if they do not, they would be responsible for paying the funds back.

County Attorney Milton asked when the final date is to pull out of the agreements before spending any of the funds.

David Melvin said he anticipates receipt of the CDBG agreement soon. The county is not responsible for anything until the funds are received, which is at least six months out. The county will not be out of anything if they decline to enter the agreement.

Commissioner Bush spoke on the county being tied to a project in the past titled Project Pipe, where funds had to be paid back.

County Attorney Milton asked what the grant funding will do at the park.

David Melvin said that it builds out infrastructure, rail spur, and leaves about half the park with infrastructure for future development. The CDBG grant only allows infrastructure for the participating party. The EDA grant allows future infrastructure.

Commissioner Hawkins offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Bush, and unanimously carried to approve the updated resolution/document related to Project Gantry removing any CDBG language.

4.5 BOARD SCHEDULE UPDATE – Jane Dellwo informed the board the workshop on 9/16 needs to be moved to 9/23 at 6:00 p.m. and the regular meeting needs to be moved from 9/19 to 9/26 at 9:00 a.m. The update is due to a scheduling conflict.

Commissioner Corbin offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Griffin, and unanimously carried to approve the schedule change.

4.6 CULPEPPER DOCK APPROVAL – George Swauger, Parks and Recreation requested approval to move forward with the GatorDock system for Culpepper Landing for \$26,343.69.

The Inmate Crew Budget can support the expense.

Commissioner Hawkins offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Bush, and unanimously carried to approve the purchase from GatorDock for \$26,343.69.

Chairman Pettis told George Swauger that he checked with engineering on the permitting process, and they feel the change shifting it downstream should not affect any permitting processes. They have not heard back from them about the approvals.

4.7 Statement of Assurance for Washington County County-Wide Risk Reduction – Candace Thames, Grants/Procurement Specialist told the board the above is a form that must be filled out for them to request funds for any federal projects. Approval is requested for the chairman to sign the request to move forward with the federal funding. It is a follow-up to the ongoing county-wide flood assessment.

Commissioner Hawkins offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Griffin, and unanimously carried to approve the Statement of Assurance for Washington County related to county-wide risk reduction.

4.8 CHANGE ORDER 2 – AG CENTER DRAINAGE, Brent Melvin, Melvin Engineering addressed the board. Change order two is connected to the board's request to address the flooding on the north side/rear of the building and adding in piping and downspouts with the remaining construction funds. Additional drainage pipe will be run along the rear of the building, connected in those downspouts' gutter modifications at the rear entrance, and ditch swell regrading along the backside of the main auditorium. There is \$62,960.00 in the mitigation funding, which is funding the county received upfront from FEMA. Change order two is for \$56,140.00, leaving \$4,820.00 in the construction budget. There was a slight cave in on the south side of the parking lot toward the west end which will be addressed as well.

Commissioner Griffin offered a motion, seconded by Commissioner Corbin, and unanimously carried to approve change order two for the ag center drainage.

5. ADJOURN