

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 Pettis, Hawkins, Griffin, and Corbin. Also attending – Finance Director, Johnnie Pettis, County Administrator, Jeff Massey, and Fuqua & Milton, P.A., Attorney Milton.

2. AGENDA ITEMS

2.1 Fire Services Discussion – Clay Milton, County Attorney addressed the board. The transition phase for the volunteer fire departments that made the choice to fall under the county is still ongoing. The types of departments include county departments – any volunteer fire departments that have chosen to fall fully underneath the county, volunteer departments through the city – funding is paid to the city which is over the administrative side of things, and volunteer departments – county volunteer departments.

Commissioner Hawkins confirmed that there has not been discussion about how the funding is disbursed. The county departments would use the purchase order system.

County Administrator Massey said the intent of this discussion is to redraw the lines in how the functions should work within the county, county fire department, 501c-3, and the city/township departments. The chief’s association is another part of the fire department.

Commissioner Hawkins added that the city departments fall under their own procurement policy.

County Attorney Milton addressed concerns/comments about the chiefs and the Chief’s Association once they fall underneath the county. The Chief’s Association is not set up for there to be four chiefs from county departments that control the Chief’s Association Board. One of the main reasons for the Chief’s Association is to distribute/give information from the county departments, and volunteer departments. If those volunteer departments fall underneath the county, they have a Chief’s Association; they vote on certain items. The county will have one vote. There will not be multiple votes because there are multiple departments that fall

underneath the county. The county volunteer fire departments answer to the county.

Commissioner Hawkins expressed concern about the fire departments not losing their ability to have a say about the departments needs and how the department should run.

County Attorney Milton said the chief's association is for grant purposes/additional agency funding. There are points for having the association, and having a particular need discussed. The association is not a decision-making body. The Chief's Association decides who takes part.

Commissioner Griffin questioned how the county will cover expenses that are now covered through the SAFER Grant once it ends.

Commissioner Hawkins said the current budget includes a line item for two fire fighters, which is funded within the general budget.

Commissioner Griffin questioned a possible tax increase in the future.

County Administrator Massey said a tax increase has not been discussed, however, they have looked at what other places have done that converted from volunteer to full-time paid fire fighters. They have created an MSBU/MSTU to fund full-time fire fighters.

County Attorney Milton said for a fire tax, or anything related, studies must be done/it is a big process.

Commissioner Griffin said he did not know if it was Justin's 5/10-year plan. He is trying to figure that out.

County Administrator Massey said it is a possibility, but nothing is written in stone, and it is a board's decision. It is a choice.

County Attorney Milton said it is not an easy discussion but if the board does want to shift to a completely paid department, there must be a revenue source to fund it. If that is the direction the board is going, there needs to be discussions about funding. To implement a fire tax a study must be done to decide their needs, how many departments they had, what kind of equipment they had, what kind of equipment they needed, how much revenue they wanted to generate, etc., which is a \$40,000.00 - \$50,000.00 analysis. There is the possibility to collect it on a utility bill. Most counties/cities collect it through the property tax bill, which is not any different than the Sunny Hills collection. The process to collect revenue from the beginning would be 2.5 – 3 years out.

County Administrator Massey said that it has been hard to secure/keep volunteer fire fighters. The county is growing and there needs to be a vision for the future. It is all branches of

emergency service that the county is bound to provide revenue for. It cannot be done on the spur of a moment. This discussion will have to be had along the way.

The distribution of funds formula was done by GSG many years ago. Since then, the dynamics of the county have changed/population changes/population center shifting. This would be one of the first things that would need to be done.

County Attorney Milton said that is a similar analysis that would have to be done about a fire tax. This is nothing that has been a discussion between him and any board member. This is something that has come up with another client.

County Administrator Massey clarified when they mention county paid, that does not exclude volunteers. Strong volunteers are needed as part of any paid effort. They are the ones that have built the current foundation. As part of the agreements with the townships/cities there is a mutual aid clause. Departments help one another.

Commissioner Griffin questioned if it was a Firefighter Association or Chief's Association to clear it up.

County Administrator Massey and Commissioner Hawkins responded that it is the Chief's Association.

County Attorney Milton said the county is a member of the Chief's Association.

County Administrator Massey said any gray area in this needs to be removed. The operation needs to be defined and followed.

County Attorney Milton said there are some bigger questions looming in the future about funding. If the board would like to go in the direction of paid departments, it is something that the board needs to discuss on how to get there. Commissioner Griffin has brought it up and it has come up a few times in other board meetings. It is not a popular conversation because the county is not in the business of generating revenue unless it is charged to the citizens in some way or by a grant.

County Administrator Massey said the grants are not typically reoccurring funds. Permanent positions must be covered by reoccurring funds. The county revenue is not matching the increase in needs for the county.

Commissioner Griffin said that is what he is trying to head off. They need to start talking about it.

Commissioner Corbin questioned if the study could be done as one. Would it be prudent for

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the board to enlist County Administrator Massey or County Attorney Milton to see what that would entail? What it would cost. Not meaning that anything will be done now but to have the information.

County Attorney Milton said the goals of the county would need to be defined for a company that does those studies.

County Administrator Massey said this discussion was for the board's awareness. Information can be gathered and brought back before the board, which would include the fire department's input.

Commissioner Pettis questioned the mutual aid agreements need to be updated due to the age.

County Attorney Milton said yes. Drafts have been sent to some of the cities, however, no real response has been received.

Commissioner Pettis asked if the Fire Chief's Association is listed with the state as the Firefighters Association, does that have any different bearing on what their by-laws call it.

County Attorney Milton said it is a non-profit corporation that has been set up with the state, however, he does not know the official name.

Commissioner Hawkins said there was an initiative that was issued by the governor for pay raises for first responders a couple of years ago. EMS and law enforcement were affected. Has there been money distributed throughout the state for paid firefighters that helped offset their salary to get them to a standard cost of living.

Commissioner Pettis addressed the firefighters in the audience saying that they understand that volunteers are not going away in Washington County. That is not the point of moving forward with paid firefighters. It is a supplement to what the volunteers provide. The volunteers are the backbone. There is no intent from the commissioners to move the volunteer firefighters out of the way.

Commissioner Hawkins said the volunteers are funded from a pledged ½ a mil. If the pledge is not specially defined for volunteer firefighters, it needs to be updated to say that it is solely for volunteer firefighters to ensure the funding source cannot be removed.

County Attorney Milton responded that he does not know the exact pledge, however, it likely says for fire services/fire protective services. It is the board's discretion how it is distributed. The board should be cautioned with going this direction there will be an overlap of equipment, facilities, etc. It is unsure how they would differentiate.

Commissioner Hawkins suggested by verbal commitment.

- 2.2 SHIP Annual Report and Certification – Candace Thames, Grants/Procurement Specialist – This item was removed and will be presented another time.
- 2.3 23PLN71 Washington County Vulnerability Assessment Change Order – Candace Thames, Grant/Procurement Specialist – Michael Baker International made an error using the wrong hour and fee breakdown in their task order dated April 20, 2023. The amount was \$481,691.00 for the assessment; however, the correct amount is \$491,361.00. The updated amount would be covered solely by the grant. - This item will be listed on the consent agenda.
- 2.4 Tourist Lodging Tax Increase Referendum Approval – Heather Lopez, TDC Director addressed the board on behalf of the Washington County Tourist Development Council for the proposal to place on the general election ballot in November a referendum to increase the Tourism Lodging Tax by 2%. The Tourist Development Council is governed by FS 125.0104. The tax is a dedicated tax that is only collected on short term rentals that are less than 6-months. This includes hotels, motels, RV resorts, campgrounds, Airbnb’s, and bed and breakfast. The tax is not collected on residents unless they book one of the places listed above. The Tourist Development Board includes one county commissioner, two municipality elected officials, three tourism industry seats, and three lodging tax seats. They are governed by the county commissioners; however, the revenues are not mixed with the county’s revenue. The statute states that they are to market and solely promote tourism domestically and internationally. The council’s mission is to develop local events, such as special events, festivals, and sporting events. They take part in multi-county and regional tourist activities. They also use advertising and promotions to increase the economic impact on the county using the available funds. The current tax rate is 3%. The first two pennies were enacted in 2000, with an added penny increase in 2004 (majority county commission). The increase before the board cannot be approved by the county commissioner. It is required to be on an election ballot per the changes to FS in the last legislative session. The increase would need to pass by 60%. If it does pass a county ordinance will need to be enacted. As part of this the tourism plan will have to be revised. The 2000 ordinance includes a plan of 30% administration, 40% promotion, and 30% recreation. The new percentages would be 40% administration, 60% market and promotion. The projected increase based on the 3% collection for 2022 – 2023 is \$74,465.00. Surrounding counties except for Holmes County are at 5%. Per FS the increase caps at 5%. – Approval for this to be added to the referendum for the general election will be listed on the consent agenda.
- 2.5 Tri-County Airport Authority Appointment of Jonathan Barnett (EDC Director), David Pettis, Chairman – Frank Acuff has resigned. Mr. Stantham and Mr. Lock contacted Mr. Barnett to fill the seat. This item will be listed on the consent agenda.

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6:00 p.m.

2.6 Value Adjustment Board Appointee Discussion – David Pettis, Jr. Chairman – Gary Hartman agreed to accept the VAB reappointment. This item will be listed on the consent agenda.

2.7 Sunny Hills Meeting Room Policy – Renae Rountree, Library presented a policy before the board, which reflects the rental fee decrease she mentioned in an earlier meeting. The draft has been reviewed by County Attorney Fuqua and would be included in the policy as appendix G to the Washington County Public Library Services Policy Manual. – This item will be listed on the consent agenda.

3. FEMA COORDINATOR – Kevan Parker

3.1 FEMA Update

- Hurricane Sally – All the roads have been encumbered to bring them back to pre-disaster condition. This does not include any mitigation. They did not go out for a bid to get a true cost for these roads. The work would be done by force account labor. A scope of work has been developed which includes how many loads should be on each road. All the roads will be put back to pre-disaster condition except the one that has Duncan Community Road in it. The roads have been funded and approved totaling \$4.3 million. Hurricane Sally includes thirty-seven projects, with 15 being road projects. The choice before the board is to do the work in-house or send the money back.

Approval to accept the incoming funds related to Hurricane Sally and the work be performed by public works. – This item will be listed on the consent agenda.

- Ag Center Drainage – The contract has been received from the contractor and is awaiting the county's signature. Pre-con is next Thursday at the ag center.
- Worley Road Project – The expected start time is the end of June with an estimated completion time of 90 days. Advance funding has been requested and should be received prior to invoicing.
- Williams Road Bridge – The last invoice was more than what was advanced, which they are working through. The next advance will be for \$777,000.00.
- HMGP Closeouts – A field review has been done. One issue was found in Pineridge. The old Tang home has a fence around it. The first fence that is next to the white fence; they are requiring the fence be taken up so that it does not impede any water flow. A request has been made to them to leave the fence up, until they can use the material. There have been discussions of the material being used around a tower. Public works could possibly use the gates. This is the only thing outstanding on the county's end to close out those parcels. Hopefully, the project will be closed out by 60 days on the old Buyout program.
- COVID Buyout / Ian Buyout – The program began with an estimated forty-five parcels; however, some have dropped out since then. The projects initially had to be split between dry and wet. Now the parcels are dry, and the plan is to move them all to the COVID Buyout ending the Ian Buyout. The storm is 90 - 10. The homeowners will not be paid any more than the county gets for the buyout. It is the other things, such as demo, survey, landfill,

hazard mitigation, and closing cost, which could possibly be up to \$50,000.00 county cost.

County Administrator Massey said they want to help people; however, the county staff is not staffed to handle this, which is the biggest concern if the board selects to continue. The money is there.

Commissioner Griffin expressed concern about the county having money to cover the cost share.

Kevan Parker said the state budget has some new line items that could be a revenue source to help. If they are all transferred to the COVID Buyout it would be 100% advanced.

Commissioner Hawkins said a certain amount of funding was issued to the small counties and the counties that could not put together to fit that criteria they were asked to set the money aside to offset the cost of buying the homes. It was a state initiative to help with buying the homes.

County Administrator Massey said the work for county staff is a lot and is time consuming. With the number of projects, there is no way Candace could keep up with that.

Kevan Parker said that he would send letters to the homeowners to see how many are still interested in the project.

- Generator Project – The contract has been signed based on an increase of \$19,500.00, which has been sent and approved by the state. The intent is to begin the installations at the end of August-beginning of September.

County Administrator Massey said there is a \$60,000.00/60% match for the generator installation at the annex. The annex was presented to the state as a secondary EOC, however, the state did not agree. The current generator at the annex will only power the section that was the old EOC. None of the other departments in the building have access to the generator. The current generator does not have the capability to run the entire annex. The generator at the annex can be moved to another location. The health department and the sheriff's department's match were approved due to the type of facility.

Kevan Parker said they can apply for some of the \$33 million funds for hazard mitigation.

Commissioner Griffin said that he supports making things better, but they must be realistic, considering the line of credit.

- EMS Building – 4 – 6 weeks ago they were told the material cost needed to be separated out, which has been done and approved. A few weeks later they requested the labor be

separated out. The project is said to be in the final stages.

- Wheeler Task Work Orders for July – September – The board may want to continuing doing the task orders month by month with the chairman and county administrator approving them.

There were no comments from the board.

Commissioner Hawkins said early voting is August 5 – 17. The Supervisor of Elections has asked to make sure that the board is mindful of that period during construction.

4. MSBU ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATE – Gary Hartman mentioned the public hearing would be held at the BCC regular meeting this month to increase the MSBU assessment for the largest amount of \$39.00 annually/5%, which the MSBU committee has approved. Homes are being built in Sunny Hills, with 40 – 50 being sold in the last few months. Deltona has taken over the maintenance on the fountain and the mowing of the two big lots in the median of Sunny Hills Boulevard, which is known as the football field. This will free up around \$25,000.00, which will be applied toward new playground equipment at Wilder Park.
5. PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR – None
6. ENGINEERING PROJECTS UPDATE – None
7. COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR – Jeff Massey
- 7.1 St. Joseph Park – George Swauger has done a tremendous job with the updates at St. Joseph Park.

Commissioner Griffin questioned when the repair would be done at Monroe Sheffield from the church to Gainer for St. Joseph Park. There is a spot at Gilberts Mill that also needs to be addressed.

Trey Barbee responded that he does not have a set time on this.

- 7.2 July 5, 2024, Discussion – July 4 is on Thursday. Last year the governor approved a state paid day off for July 5. If the board would like to address this earlier than last year, it can be put on the consent agenda contingent upon the governor approving July 5, 2025, as a paid holiday.

Commissioner Hawkins said they offered a floating holiday throughout the year for employees that were mandated to work. - This item will be listed on the regular agenda.

8. CLERK – None
9. COUNTY ATTORNEY – None
10. ADJOURN