

Liberty County, FL

Liberty County Board of County Commissioners Budget Workshop

Minutes

Thursday, July 10, 2025 at 4:00 pm

AGENDAS ARE POSTED ON THE BOARD'S WEBSITE AT WWW.LIBERTYCOUNTYFL.ORG;
ATTACHMENTS ARE PROVIDED TO THE BOARD MEMBERS ONLY AND ARE AVAILABLE TO THE
PUBLIC UPON REQUEST.

Meeting Location

Liberty County Courthouse - 10818 NW SR 20; Bristol, Florida 32321

Zoom link and call in numbers

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86236844637?pwd=wCUspGxQqA3bt9KcpX5p1k2en34jms.1>

1. Call to Order

Minutes:

- Chairman Dewayne Branch called the regular meeting to order in person and via zoom at 6:00 P.M. Present at the meeting were Commissioners Hannah Causseaux, Jim Johnson, Doyle Brown, Derrick Arnold, Clerk Jace Ford and Deputy Clerk Kaly Barfield.

2. Invocation

Minutes:

- Invocation was led by County Attorney, Ken Hosford.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes:

- Pledge of Allegiance was led by Sheriff, Dusty Arnold.

4. Audience Concerns

Minutes:

- There were no audience concerns.

5. Motion to Amend the Agenda

Minutes:

- There was no motion to amend the agenda.

6. Motion to Adopt the Agenda

Minutes:

- Motion to adopt the agenda made by Commissioner Causseaux, seconded by Commissioner Brown. Motion Carried.

7. Budget discussions for Fiscal Year 2025-2026**Minutes:**

- Clerk Ford addressed the Board to discuss the budget. In the packets that the board was given contains a budget for each constitutional officer.
- Brett Phillips addressed the board to explain his budget. FY 2024–25 Budget: \$2,999,854 (previous year), FY 2025–26 Budget Request: \$3,280,906. Increases Include: 7% health insurance increase, Retirement contribution increases, \$15,000 to relocate the communications unit to the new jail. Total Increase for Insurance, Retirement, and Relocation: \$29,052. Some cost increases expected to be offset by grant funding. No questions from the board at this time.
- Clerk Ford discussed the property appraisers' budget, Chris Rudd discussed his budget at the last budget meeting, he was unable to attend the July 10th meeting but is available anytime for questions or concerns. The budget increase is \$2500.
- Clerk Ford discussed the Supervisor of Elections budget. Grant Conyers discussed his budget last budget meeting. He was present for the meeting. The board had no questions or concerns for him.
- Clerk Ford discussed the Clerk's Office budget. The budget was presented at the July 10th meeting. Clerk Ford is available for questions anytime. The board had no questions or concerns for him at this moment.
- Clerk Ford discussed the Tax Collectors budget. The budget was received shortly before the meeting; board members were not able to review the budget. Marie Goodman was unable to attend the meeting. Total request from the Board \$471,441.42
- Clerk Jace Ford discussed Millage Rate. Deadline: Millage rate must be submitted by August 4, 2025. Fire Tax must be accounted for within the 10-mil cap, does not generate additional revenue, projected fire tax revenue: \$225,646. To accommodate this, the millage rate must be rolled back, effectively reducing it to 9.426 mils from 10 mils. Taxable Value updated figure from Property Appraiser (as of June 26): \$392,998,258, used to calculate the adjusted millage rate. Fiscal Year Comparison, current millage rate: 9.3037, yielding approx. \$3.4 million in ad valorem revenue, county budgets 95%: \$3.299 million is operational. Keeping 10 mil rate with updated values would result in \$3.7 million, an increase of ~\$300,000. Commissioner Johnson: asked if keeping the rate at 10 mils would maintain status quo. Clerk Ford clarified it would generate additional ad valorem due to increased property values, not because of rate change. Commissioner Johnson: mentioned if the board had considered 9.4 mils. Clerk Ford reiterated that 9.4 mils would not generate extra revenue, only accommodate the fire tax. Clerk Ford requested direction from the board. Commissioner Brown motioned to keep the rate at 10 mils. Commissioner Johnson agreed. County Attorney Hosford: recommended a formal vote since no further meeting would occur before the deadline. Board Action agreed to maintain the millage rate at 10 mils.
- Clerk Ford presented the budget document to the Board, which included current

numbers submitted by department heads. Fire Department: No documents were submitted, as Brian was absent. Building Department: The budget will be completed by the Clerk due to Department Head Katie Thomley being on leave. All other departmental budgets were submitted and included in the budget document.

- Karen Quinn addressed the board to discuss Tri County Ag. originally established in 1996 by the Department of Agriculture for use by Calhoun, Liberty, and Gulf counties. While often thought to be equine-only, the facility supports 4-H, FFA, archery competitions, and community events at no cost to those programs. Post-storm rebuilding is nearly complete, with electrical work remaining. Calhoun County covered FEMA's local match cost without requesting funds from the other counties. Each county is now asked to contribute \$5,000 for maintenance and power. Future plans include Farmers markets, concerts, and church events, Circus (already visiting twice a year). Airport collaboration on fly-in rodeos and infrastructure. Additional RV hookups and barn space. Commissioner Branch questioned how the advertising works. Quinn expressed marketing efforts, including social media and sponsorships, are planned once the facility reopens. FFA and 4-H will continue to use it free of charge.
- Clerk Ford discussed General Fund. Not all information from Department of Revenue has been received.
- Fund 102- Ambulance, Melissa Peddie was not in attendance at the beginning of meeting. Commissioner Brown request a log of how many times the ambulance department has called another county for assistance.
- Fund 103 – Landfill Budget, Cole Maloy discussed the proposed budget for Fund 103 – Landfill. The budget reflects a decrease of approximately \$14,000 compared to the previous fiscal year. Cole also expressed interest in initiating a county-wide can recycling effort by placing baskets in select areas. He plans to construct the baskets himself, resulting in no additional cost to the county beyond materials for construction.
- Fund 104 – Road and Bridge Budget, Boo Bryant discussed communication with a representative from Chipola Soil and Water Conservation. Clerk Ford noted that the organization had inquired about raises, expressing an expectation for one to be included for them as well. Boo Bryant shared that the representative had previously sought to work with the former superintendent but was unsuccessful. He stated he would like to be more involved moving forward and questioned her about past and current contributions to the county. She was unable to provide a clear explanation of work done specifically for the county, instead highlighting work done for citizens on a private basis. The organization is requesting \$15,000 this fiscal year.
- Commissioner Branch elaborated on the current situation with grant retrieval, stating that multiple individuals have been hired or designated to assist with finding grants. He noted that funding is currently scattered across several people, all of whom are allegedly responsible for securing grants. Commissioner Branch expressed a desire to consolidate grant efforts by hiring a single dedicated grant writer, whose sole responsibility would be to secure funding through grants. He emphasized the importance of grants to the county and the need for a more

streamlined and accountable process to improve results. Counties are being advised to be cautious of relying on standalone bills for future funding. This impacts Liberty County as follows:

- Clerk Ford addressed a recent letter from the National Association of Counties, noting a significant issue: In the recent large federal bill that passed, Secure Rural Schools funding was not renewed. The Title I funds included \$338,000 in the budget, but only \$53,000 has been received to date. The county is being warned not to expect the remaining funds and to plan accordingly for next year. In total, this represents a \$400,000 financial hit to the county. Additional points of concern: Road and Bridge Department Budget (presented by Boo Bryant) is currently showing \$1.75 million but does not include any funding for equipment. Without drawing from carryforward funds, the Road Department is approximately \$200,000 in the hole and lacks funding for raises or new equipment. The Sheriff's Office will also be affected by these funding shortfalls, estimated at around \$50,000. Clerk Ford emphasized the urgency of the situation and the importance of realistic budgeting as the county moves forward with planning.
- Commissioner Branch explains that Neal Dunn has fought for the county to ensure that funds are not stripped from the county.
- Clerk Ford and County Attorney Hosford discussed a previous decision regarding the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program and how the distribution of those funds has impacted the county financially.
- Clerk Ford provided an explanation of how carryforward funds work and discussed the strain they have placed on the county's operating account. He noted that while carryforward funds are a helpful budgeting tool, the simultaneous use of those funds by multiple departments, including for major road projects and the ongoing jail project, has created a significant financial burden on the county within a single fiscal year. Clerk Ford emphasized that while the money is expected to return, it will not come back in a single lump sum, which complicates the process of keeping the operating account stable.
- Commissioner Branch requested that any Board members who were not present at the June 26th meeting meet with Clerk Ford individually to gain a clearer understanding of the county's current financial position and the factors that have contributed to it. He emphasized the importance of all members being informed on the financial challenges and the decisions that have led to the present circumstances, to ensure transparency and cohesive planning moving forward.
- Commissioner Brown addressed concerns regarding the hauling of dirt within the county, stating that the majority of loads are being delivered to private property. He referenced existing law, which states that the county must not charge less than the market rate for such services. Commissioner Brown emphasized that if the county continues to haul dirt, the pricing should be adjusted to reflect the market rate, rather than being less than half of what is appropriate.
- The Board unanimously agreed to open communication with the wardens at the prison to reach an understanding regarding the release of inmates for county work programs. The Board expressed interest in utilizing inmate labor where appropriate and in accordance with regulations, to assist with various county projects. Further discussion and coordination with prison officials will follow.

- Fund 106 – Transit - Monica Welles expressed no significant changes in the overall budget. A few employees are retiring, and the department will need to hire replacements. A new transit building is scheduled to be completed next year.
- Emergency Management Budget - Lisa Shuler noted that federal funding was lost for Emergency Management. To compensate, expenses were reallocated between Emergency Management and 911 services. Higher than usual due to CMP and LMS (Comprehensive Management Plan and Local Mitigation Strategy) updates, these costs occur once every five years. The department is not filling the vacant 911 position at this time. \$14,639 allocated for cybersecurity upgrades. This amount was received last year but returned to fund balance and is now being re-appropriated. Only an additional \$5,000 is being requested beyond current levels. No changes to the mosquito control portion of the budget.
- Fund 114 – 911 and Mosquito Control - Lisa Suler explained cash Carryforward: Increased to \$19,000.
- County Extension Office Budget - Marie Arick had a special request due to Shelly King's upcoming retirement, Arick requested approval to hire a replacement in advance to allow time for proper training and transition. The overall budget request remains approximately the same as the previous year.
- Ambulance Department Budget - Fund 102. Melissa Peddie joined the meeting later to discuss the ambulance budget. The budget for the current and previous year is under \$1 million. Noted a discrepancy last year between the numbers she submitted, and the final budget received. This year's actual expenditures are projected to be lower than last year's. Budget includes a small buffer for emergency situations, such as storms. Commissioner Brown questioned if transfers from the general fund would be necessary. Peddie explained that revenue comes from self-pay patients and various insurance providers and timeline on receiving funds. Commissioner Branch inquired about making ambulance runs to prisons to increase revenue. Melissa Peddie acknowledged the potential and will pursue those calls in the future. Discussion was made about providing additional support during local sporting events.
- Motion to adjourn, motion by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Causseaux. Motion carried.

8. Adjourn Budget Workshop

9. Signature

Florida Statute 125.001 requires that due public notice be given of all regular meetings of the Board of County Commissioners of a County in the State of Florida. Florida Statute 286.0105 requires that notices of any meeting or hearing, if a meeting or hearing is required, must include the following language, "if a person decides to appeal any decision made by the board, agency or commission with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearing he will need a record of the proceedings, and that, for such purpose, he may need to insure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based."