

Liberty County, FL

Liberty County Board of County Commissioners Tentative Budget Hearing

Minutes

Thursday, September 4, 2025 at 5:01 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

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83349243268?pwd=1EyZBVeCjmfjY9RyDOoVyaQaOaK35m.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, Doyle Brown, Derrick Arnold, Clerk Jace Ford and Deputy Clerk Kaly Barfield. Commissioner Jim Johnson arrived to meeting late.

2. Invocation

Minutes:

- Invocation was led by Commissioner Causseaux.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes:

- Pledge of allegiance was led by Clerk Ford.

4. Audience Concerns

Minutes:

- There were no audience concerns.

5. Motion to Amend the Agenda

6. Motion to Adopt the Agenda

Minutes:

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

7. Budget Review

Minutes:

- Clerk Jace Ford discussed the budget for review and discussion. He noted that Chris Rudd had presented in prior meetings but was unable to attend. He advised that any questions could be directed to Chris separately. He also acknowledged that Marie Goodman and the Sheriff's Office were present if the Board wished to address them.
- Commissioner Branch addressed Brett Phillips at the sheriff's office about the request of an additional \$80,000.00. Brett Phillips explained why an additional \$80,000 was added into the budget. He stated that the amount had originally been included, then pulled, but after taking a closer look and receiving a more accurate revenue estimate—or lack of revenue estimate—from Calhoun and Gulf Counties, it was necessary to put the funds back in.
- Marie Goodman had no comment unless the board had questions.
- Clerk Jace Ford reviewed the budget and millage rate. He noted the new millage rate was set at 9.224 mills, generating about \$3.44 million in ad valorem taxes, a modest increase from last year. He explained that lost revenues from Title I and III forest funds and the expiration of ARPA funds, combined with rising costs for insurance, fuel, utilities, and inmate medical, had created a \$1.99 million deficit. He stated the issue was not overspending but a lack of revenue, with most of the increase driven by transfers to constitutional officers and departments. He emphasized the need to adopt the new millage rate resolution and tentative budget to meet TRIM requirements, while noting adjustments could still be made before final adoption.
- Commissioner Branch discussed budget concerns and noted that the County often started in a deficit from the beginning. He raised the issue of funding for the Chipola Soil and Water Conservation program, which received \$15,537.75. He explained that, based on his research with the Property Appraiser, 57% of landowners in the county owned less than five acres and did not qualify for the program, while only 43% owned five acres or more and did qualify. He expressed the opinion that if the majority of residents could not benefit, the County should not be responsible for funding the program's payroll.
- Commissioner Brown discussed the Chipola Soil and Water Conservation program, noting that while the County itself did not directly receive funds, 43% of citizens qualified for the program. He stated that the money brought in through it provided justification for the relatively small \$15,000 expense.
- Commissioner Causseaux discussed exploring the use of ticket-writing cameras in school zones as a potential source of revenue for the County, noting that other counties had successfully implemented similar programs.
- Clerk Jace Ford discussed fiscal policies, emphasizing that revenues are received throughout the year and departments should avoid large capital purchases at the start of the fiscal year. He recommended delaying such expenses until revenues are secured. He also cautioned that grant funds, like the \$1 million for Veterans Park, should be used strategically to reduce future liabilities rather than create ongoing maintenance costs.

8. Tentative Budget Adoption

Minutes:

- Board to approve tentative budget adoption made by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Commissioner Causseaux. Motion Carried.

9. Millage Rate Resolution**Minutes:**

- Board to approve millage rate resolution 2025-26, it dropped to 9.224 mills, made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Arnold, motion carried.

10. Final Budget hearing date**Minutes:**

- Board to approve Final budget hearing date for September 15th @ 5:01 made by Commissioner Causseaux, seconded by Commissioner Johnson. Motion Carried.

11. Motion To Adjourn**Minutes:**

- Motion to adjourn made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Arnold. Motion Carried.

12. 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."