

August 3, 2017
Board Budget Workshop
Judicial Annex Building
Live Oak, Florida

9:00 a.m.

The Suwannee County Board of County Commissioners met on the above date and time for a recessed budget workshop and the following were present: Chairman Ricky Gamble; Commissioner Clyde Fleming; Commissioner Don Hale; Commissioner Larry Sessions; and Commission Ronnie Richardson. Clerk of Court Barry A. Baker; Chief Deputy Clerk of Finance Ken Williams; Neena Funicelli, Eric Musgrove, and Logan Woods, Deputy Clerks; Randy Harris, County Administrator; and James W. Prevatt, Jr., County Attorney, were also present.

Chairman Gamble called the recessed workshop back to order at 9:00 a.m.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss requests by various County-funded entities.

The first request was from the **Animal Control Governing Board**.

Sheriff Sam St. John asked for questions.

Chairman Gamble stated that there were no questions, but the Board had previously discussed disbanding the Animal Control Governing Board.

Sheriff St. John agreed that his office could take over the animal control services.

The Board reached a consensus to fund the Animal Control Governing Board the same amount as the past year, but would discuss disbanding the Board at a regular meeting.

The next request was from the **ARC of North Florida**.

Ms. Beverly Standridge, Executive Director, thanked the Board for their continued support. She briefly discussed the mission of ARC, which assists those with disabilities to find employment and become more self-reliant. She asked for the same funding as the current fiscal year.

The Board thanked Ms. Standridge for her work with the disabled of Suwannee County.

The next request was from **Guardian Ad Litem**.

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Ms. Linda Dedge thanked the Board for their continued support. She asked for an approximately \$50 per quarter increase in funding due to a building rent increase. The purpose of Guardian Ad Litem was to support abused children.

The next request was from the **Historical Commission**.

Mr. Eric Musgrove, Chairman of the Suwannee County Historical Commission, thanked the County for their continued support. He then gave a brief overview of the activities of the Historical Commission over the last year, including oral history projects, historical brochures, presentations, the adoption of new bylaws, and a \$440,000 grant application for a new Museum roof that would be reviewed in September. He noted that he was requesting \$6,000 from the County, half of which would go to insurance for the Museum. Mr. Musgrove added that repeated attempts to merge with the Museum Association had been unsuccessful, and the Historical Commission may be asking for additional funding in the upcoming fiscal year for needed repairs for air conditioning.

County Attorney Prevatt reminded the Board of the history of the County's attempts to have the Historical Commission and Museum merge over recent years, which had so far come to naught. The County had decided not to fund the Museum Association to encourage them to merge with the Historical Commission. He recommended that the County submit a letter to the City of Live Oak withdrawing from the agreement that created the Museum Association at their next regular meeting. The terms of the agreement allowed for a one-year notice to the Museum, but if the City of Live Oak also withdrew, then the matter could be handled much quicker.

The next request was from the **Suwannee County Conservation District**.

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Mr. Andy Jackson, Chairman, and Mrs. Joni Fortner, assistant, stated that the Conservation District had been active working on various projects, and the only increase had been in salaries.

Commissioner Sessions stated that the District did a great job with their limited funding.

Discussion ensued on the money brought into the County by the Conservation District.

The next request was from **Suwannee Valley 4Cs**.

Ms. Patty Stevenson, Fiscal Administrator, thanked the Board for their past support and then discussed the 4Cs' support of low-income and disadvantaged children.

Commissioner Richardson asked about the \$5,000 in additional requests. Chairman Gamble replied that 4Cs had been funded \$10,000 for many years, but was cut to \$0 and then \$5,000 last year. The request was simply to get the 4Cs back to their original funding amount.

Discussion ensued on the number of children helped in Suwannee County and other programs that were similar.

The Board discussed increasing the 4Cs budget from \$5,000 to \$10,000, but decided to wait until hearing all the other requests first.

The next request was from the **Suwannee Valley Genealogical Society**.

Mr. Al Williams, along with Jinnie Hancock, President, asked for the County to support the Genealogical Society at the same amount as the current fiscal year. Mr. Williams discussed some of the work of the Society.

The next request was from the **United Way of Suwannee Valley**.

Mrs. Rita Dopp, Executive Director, thanked the Board for their support over the years. She discussed the Capital Campaign Committee to pay off United Way's mortgage in the near future, as well as other programs.

Commissioner Richardson asked about overlap in funding with United Way and other related entities funded by the County. Mrs. Dopp replied that there was no overlap, and explained the differences in more detail.

The next request was from **Vivid Visions, Inc.**

Mrs. Kathy White, Executive Director, stated that Vivid Visions was the certified domestic abuse shelter in Suwannee County. She stated that all of Vivid Visions' grants were reimbursement grants, and there had been difficulty in providing up-front funding for the various grants. Mrs. White noted that she was requesting a raise in the upcoming fiscal year. She discussed historical ghost tours that had begun in the current year as a fundraiser, and the near-closing of the shelter due to a lack of funding. Mrs. White pleaded for additional funding, noting that domestic violence in Suwannee County had increased 22% this year.

Commissioner Richardson asked the annual amount of grants applied for each year. Mrs. White replied that on average, the amount of grants received was \$410,000, and then discussed specifics.

Discussion ensued on the various grants received by Vivid Visions.

Commissioner Richardson left the meeting at 9:39 a.m.

After a request by Mr. Thomas J. "Joe" Skierski, Chairman Gamble noted that although it was not on the amended agenda, he would allow a discussion from the **Museum Association.**

Mr. Skierski, former chairman of the Museum Association and now president of the Suwannee Valley Heritage Museum, Inc., stated that a new 501c3 group had been incorporated due to Museum Association issues. He stated that the Museum Association did not need to be dissolved by the County because it had dissolved itself and been replaced by the new incorporation.

Commissioner Richardson returned to the meeting at 9:40 a.m.

Mr. Skierski stated that the Heritage Museum had helped the Historical Commission with their grant for the Museum, and his organization would probably ask for funding to help temporarily move items from the Museum if the grant was awarded. He discussed repairs needed for the Museum and the adjoining Passenger Depot, especially due to some water issues that may be affecting the foundations. Mr. Skierski added that he was not requesting funding from the County at this time.

The next request was from the **Suwannee Valley Transit Authority**.

Commissioner Larry Sessions, Executive Director, stated that there had been an increase in riders over the year while reducing the overall budget. He appreciated the Board's support.

Discussion ensued about funding for the Transit Authority.

The next request was from **Jimmy Norris, Chamber of Commerce**.

Mr. Norris stated that the funding request was the same as the current year, and discussed some of the Chamber's operations. He mentioned the Small Business Development Center housed by the Chamber of Commerce, and the direct positive economic impact to Suwannee County.

Commissioner Richardson asked about overlap between the Small Business Development Center and the Economic Development Director. Mr. Norris replied that there was no overlap, as they focused on different aspects of development. He then discussed specific projects.

Commissioner Richardson asked about the possibility of a Chamber in the Branford area. Mr. Norris replied that an attempt had been made in previous years, and it would depend upon the support of the community.

The next request was from **Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Inc.**

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Margarita Labarta, Ph. D., President/CEO, submitted handouts describing Meridian's work in Suwannee County. She noted that there had been an increase in services over prior years, and then discussed specific services provided in great detail.

Commissioner Richardson asked for clarification about levels of care. Dr. Labarta replied that the perceived difference in overall numbers was because some people were repeat visitors.

The next request was from the **Florida Veteran's Foundation**.

Chairman Gamble asked if there would be anyone present to discuss the Veteran's Foundation. County Administrator Harris replied that he had received a short email, but did not know if anyone would show up.

Chairman Gamble called a recess at 10:04 a.m.

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10:21 a.m.

Chairman Gamble called the meeting back to order and returned to a discussion of outside agency funding. He asked for a consensus from the Board.

The Board reached a consensus to fund the Historical Commission at \$6,000; Animal Control Governing Board at \$10,000 (and discuss disbanding it at a regular meeting); Genealogical Society at \$1,500; ARC at \$29,500; Suwannee Valley 4Cs at \$5,000; Vivid Visions at \$20,000; Office of Criminal Conflict at \$3,402 as required by State mandate; SVTA at \$414,000; Health Department at \$100,000; Chamber of Commerce at \$15,000; and Meridian Behavioral at \$60,000 (in addition to \$55,000 of in-kind services).

The Board reached a consensus to fund United Way \$0 for the upcoming fiscal year.

The next request was from **Hooked on Heroes.**

Ron Cadle, president of Hooked on Heroes, stated that his organization was established in Suwannee County three years ago and with the assistance of many volunteers, took veterans on free fishing trips in the area. He stated that the group was growing and was therefore requesting \$1,000 in funding.

Commissioner Richardson asked how many veterans were served per year. Mr. Cadle replied that there were over 200 veterans served each year, with more signed up but unable to be taken due to a lack of volunteers.

It was noted that Hooked on Heroes had sponsored the Branford Veteran's Day Parade this past year as well.

The Board reached a consensus to fund Hooked on Heroes \$1,000 in the upcoming fiscal year.

The next request was from the **Florida Veteran's Foundation.**

Chairman Gamble briefly discussed the Foundation.

The Board reached a consensus to fund the Veteran's Foundation \$0.

After including \$88,000 in outside agencies, \$957,300 remained in the contingency fund. Statutorily-funded "outside" agencies were moved to other County funding sources.

County Administrator Harris briefly discussed knuckle-boom trucks that had been mentioned in the previous day's workshop. He asked for clarification on the amount appropriated for a knuckle-boom truck.

The Board reached a consensus to fund \$205,000 for a 40-yard knuckle-boom truck, an increase from what had been budgeted for a smaller knuckle-boom truck.

County Administrator Harris stated that it would cost approximately \$37,000 to open the solid waste collection sites on Sundays, but did not see there being much of an issue.

Commissioner Richardson suggested only opening those collection sites most affected by weekend and seasonal travelers, but he was willing to wait to make a decision if need be.

Chairman Gamble suggested budgeting \$37,000 for the expanded collection site hours, even if it was not used right away.

County Administrator Harris discussed the enforcement of littering by the Sheriff's Office that had all but eliminated the issue within the County. He added that there was already funding available within the budget for the additional hours.

Commissioner Richardson again reiterated that there were certain collection sites that would see use on Sundays as weekend visitors in the area dumped their garbage on their way home.

Public Safety Director James Sommers submitted handouts regarding the possibility of leasing versus purchasing of ambulances, fire engines, and tankers. He noted that after further discussion with manufacturers and lease companies, the current budget would handle the purchase of ambulances. Chief Sommers also discussed an increase in salaries of \$1.50 per hour that could be included in the current budget, with no County contingency funds being used.

Commissioner Richardson was concerned with increasing the salaries of Fire Rescue employees more than other County employees. County Administrator Harris replied that Fire Rescue employees must go through two years of training, using their own funds, before they can work for Suwannee County, and no other County department required such extensive training.

Commissioner Sessions noted that turnover was a problem with Fire Rescue because Suwannee County's salary was lower than other counties. High turnover equated to high overtime as remaining employees had to pick up the slack.

Discussion ensued on Fire Rescue employees, salaries, and that many casual or part-time employees were coming from a one hundred-mile radius, forcing Suwannee County to compete with other counties who paid high salaries.

Commissioner Richardson reminded the Board that there was an impending need for a Fire Rescue station on the north end of the County, and current proposals would not allow sufficient funding for such a station.

County Administrator Harris discussed the possibility of raising fire assessments in the future to provide additional stations, adding that fire and solid waste assessments were instituted by the State because many people did not pay ad valorem taxes due to homestead exemptions.

Discussion continued on Fire Rescue services, standards of service, and raising salaries to improve retention.

Mrs. Carolee Howe recommended that the Board purchase better equipment for Fire Rescue services, as it would save the County money in the long-term. Since there was sufficient funding in the Fire Rescue budget, she recommended that the County support the Chief's request for leasing of vehicles, especially since it dealt with life and death matters.

Discussion ensued on funding for Fire Rescue and the age of the vehicle fleet.

Mr. Bo Hancock addressed some of the concerns of Chairman Gamble and Commissioner Richardson regarding recurring funding of employees and vehicles. He noted that it would cost the taxpayers nothing extra to increase Fire Rescue salaries and lease the new vehicles, allowing

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for a better level of service. Mr. Hancock reminded the Board that Fire Rescue saved lives, while other expenditures such as chip sealing roads did not.

Discussion continued on Fire Rescue budget options.

The Board reached a consensus to increase Fire Rescue salaries by \$1.50 per hour, and waive the one-year delay for salary increases for Fire Rescue employees.

Commissioner Fleming left the meeting at 11:36 a.m.

Commissioner Sessions suggested staggering vehicle leases of two per year to allow a cushion of revenue for future expenses.

Commissioner Fleming returned to the meeting at 11:38 a.m.

The Board continued discussing the possibility of leasing two ambulances per year and that the cost for a new station would be approximately \$385,000, not including vehicles or staff.

Chairman Gamble called a recess at 11:44 a.m.

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Chairman Gamble called the meeting back to order and continued a discussion of the Fire Rescue budget.

The Board reached a consensus to stagger the lease of two ambulances per year up until a total of six was reached in the third year.

Chief Sommers discussed the lease of fire trucks and tankers, with full maintenance coverage for the first five years with the County assuming maintenance liability for the remaining

five years of the proposed ten-year lease; however, most vehicles did not see a drastic increase in maintenance until after ten years. There would then be a buy-back for the ten year-old vehicles.

The Board reached a consensus to allow Chief Sommers to review fire truck and tanker lease information and bring it to the Board at a regular meeting during the budget process.

County Administrator Harris reminded the Board that the contingency fund was currently at \$957,000. He discussed various options available to the Board, including setting aside future funding for high-priced items such as a climate-controlled facility for records and election equipment storage, improvements on the Mizell's Building, or reducing the proposed millage rate.

Commissioner Sessions asked if a climate-controlled building for records and election equipment storage was an immediate need. County Administrator Harris replied that it was immediate, although the equipment was being stored in office space currently.

Commissioner Sessions asked how much it would cost to construct a new jail. County Attorney Prevatt replied that it would take approximately \$14 million.

County Administrator Harris replied that the possibility of a new jail had been discussed, and it would be better to place it in a rural area instead of in the high-price downtown commercial district. The current jail could be modified for records and voter equipment storage, as well as other needs.

Discussion ensued on possibilities for the current jail and setting aside funding for its eventual replacement. Discussion also ensued on some ditch and road improvements at Peacock Lake that had been causes for complaint.

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Mr. Greg Scott, Parks and Recreation Director, stated that he had been in County budget meetings longer than any other person present, and he thanked the Board for their assistance with emergency vehicles and salary increases. He asked for permission from the Board to look into raising some of his employee's salaries to increase retention using savings in overtime expenses.

The Board reached a consensus to allow Mr. Scott to bring budget figures regarding pay raises to the next regular meeting for discussion.

Various Commissioners, staff, and Constitutional Officers thanked everyone for the smooth budget season and assistance.

There being no further business to discuss, Chairman Gamble adjourned the budget workshop at 12:27 p.m.

ATTEST:

_____, DC
BARRY A. BAKER
CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT

RICKY GAMBLE, CHAIRMAN
SUWANNEE COUNTY BOARD OF
OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS