

5:30 p.m.

The Suwannee County Board of County Commissioners met on the above date and time for the FY 2017-2018 final budget hearing and the following were present: Chairman Ricky Gamble; Commissioner Don Hale; Commissioner Clyde Fleming; Commissioner Larry Sessions; and Commissioner Ronnie Richardson. Clerk of Court Barry A. Baker; Neena Funicelli, Eric Musgrove, and Logan Woods, Deputy Clerks; Randy Harris, County Administrator; and Mr. James W. Prevatt, Jr., County Attorney, were also present.

Chairman Gamble called the hearing to order at 5:30 p.m. and asked Commissioner Richardson to lead the invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the final budget for Fiscal Year 2017-2018.

Chairman Gamble opened the public hearing.

Clerk Baker announced the proposed final millage rate of 9.000 mils and proposed final budget of \$81,532,467. He stated that the proposed millage rate would be a 0.51% increase over the rolled back rate of 8.9540 mils.

Chairman Gamble opened the floor to public comments, beginning with the Constitutional Officers.

There were no Constitutional Officers who wished to speak.

Chairman Gamble asked for outside agencies to speak.

There were no outside agencies who wished to speak.

Chairman Gamble asked for department heads to speak.

Public Safety Director James Sommers noted the several discussions regarding fire engines and tankers. He presented a recap of the issues and expenses, and recommended that the County proceed with the purchase of fire engines for the upcoming fiscal year. Chief Sommers added that he had withdrawn five tankers from the proposal to save costs.

County Administrator Harris discussed differing definitions of “buy back” between the County and the fire engine financing company. He discussed the financing available for purchasing or leasing fire engines for five or ten years, as well as the current funding available. County Administrator Harris stated that financing the purchase of five engines for ten years would allow Fire Rescue to use excess funds generated each year instead of eating into contingency or operating funds.

Commissioner Fleming asked when the fire engines would arrive. County Administrator Harris replied that they would not be received until nearly a year after ordering, since they were built to order.

Commissioner Sessions asked how much each fire engine would cost. Chief Sommers replied that they cost \$459,000 each if purchased individually, or \$439,000 each as part of a group discount. He added that there would also be a 3% price increase on October 1.

Discussion ensued on prepaying, discounts, and other aspects of a group purchase.

Chairman Gamble stated that what was being requested tonight was approval to purchase the five fire engines before prices rose 3% on October 1.

Chief Sommers noted that there had already been a 3% increase in fire engines and ambulances, but the company was honoring their earlier quote without the price increase. However, on October 1, an additional 3% increase would go into effect.

Discussion ensued on interest rates and total payments for the fire engines, as well as purchasing used vehicles instead.

Chairman Gamble was concerned with purchasing so many new fire engines on the current Fire Rescue budget, even including contingency and excess revenues. He did not wish to increase the fire assessment to make up the difference.

Much discussion ensued on balancing salaries and new equipment within the County's budget.

Commissioner Richardson believed that there would be a need for additional services in the north part of the County and around the two interstates in the near future. He did not wish to encumber Fire Rescue's contingency or excess funds for ten years with new fire engines. Commissioner Richardson understood that purchasing new fire engines would allow better response and reliability, but he was unwilling to dedicate so much annual funding to the purchase of five vehicles.

Commissioner Hale asked about the Fire Rescue's contingency fund five years ago. Chief Sommers submitted a handout showing the increase in contingency funds for Fire Rescue over the last five years.

Chairman Gamble noted that five years ago, the fire assessment was \$45, and had gradually increased to its current assessment of \$100.

Chief Sommers added that Columbia County's fire assessment was \$227, and they only provided fire service, not the combined fire rescue service of Suwannee County. He added that a station would be required on the north end of the County and that it should be financed instead of purchased with contingency funds. He discussed his concerns from an emergency standpoint.

Commissioner Fleming agreed with Chief Sommers that new fire engines were needed, and the proposal under discussion would not touch the current contingency funds.

Commissioner Sessions discussed excess funds and an option to purchase one fire engine per year for five years instead five engines financed over ten years, which would save the taxpayers money.

Discussion ensued on the age of the current vehicle fleet.

Mr. Bo Hancock stated that Fire Rescue was dealing with an aging vehicle fleet and he was concerned that the Board was not listening to their expert. Unlike other jobs, Fire Rescue was in the business of saving lives and property and could not be neglected. He discussed his thirty-eight years of experience as a fireman with the City of Jacksonville and the options available to Suwannee County. Mr. Hancock suggested raising fire assessments to bring them in line with surrounding counties that offered less emergency services.

Chairman Gamble stated that the proposal was for purchases of well over \$2 million, and the Board had not received the information until a few hours before. He was not comfortable making a decision without further study and research.

Commissioner Hale stated that he was open to moving forward with helping Fire Rescue in some form or fashion.

Commissioner Richardson stated that waiting until after October 1 would raise the final price by nearly \$70,000. He noted that purchasing one fire engine each year would drain the contingency fund within five years. Commissioner Richardson suggested the purchase of three fire engines under the proposed agreement as a compromise.

Commissioner Fleming believed that the purchase of one new fire engine per year was not the right answer, and recommended financing all five engines at once.

Chief Sommers discussed the constant maintenance costs for the older fire engines that were currently the frontline units. Purchasing five new fire engines would allow the current frontline vehicles to become backup units and he could then surplus the oldest engines that were well over twenty years old.

Discussion ensued on how to handle the request and that a line item must be established before an order could be placed for the engines.

County Administrator Harris stated that due to the contentious nature of the issue, the fire engine proposal would be withdrawn in order to proceed with the final budget hearing. He would wait until a commissioner brought the issue back before the rest of the Board to discuss it any further.

Mrs. Carolee Howe urged the Board to create the proposed expense line item in order to purchase the fire engines at a lower rate, as the matter dealt with life and death.

County Administrator Harris asked for authorization to place an order for two ambulances that had already been approved at a previous meeting.

Discussion ensued on the purchase of two ambulances for the next three years.

The Board's consensus was to authorize the purchase of the two ambulances as requested.

County Administrator Harris asked to transfer approximately \$10,000 from the County Administration budget to the Economic Development Office for a new Marketing Director. The

net gain was \$0, as the new Marketing Director was an employee that currently worked for County Administration and would be moving to the new position.

The Board's consensus was to approve the transfer of \$10,000 in funds from the County Administration budget to the Economic Development Office for a Marketing Director.

Chairman Gamble discussed the Sheriff's purchase of the SmartCop software system and if the funding could come directly from the Board.

Sheriff Sam St. John stated that the software company needed a signed contract in the near future.

Discussion ensued on transferring funds from the Sheriff's Office for the SmartCop software.

Commissioner Sessions asked for a line item of \$5,000 to be added to the Extension Office based upon a partially defunded position.

The Board by consensus agreed to move \$5,000 to the Extension Office.

Discussion ensued on the specifics of the funding request.

Ms. Katherine Allen, Extension Office Director, stated that the University of Florida had agreed that the position in question would be paid by UF 100% instead of split between Suwannee County and UF, and the individual's salary would not actually change.

Commissioner Richardson stated that Town of Branford had purchased additional property around Hatch Park for recreational facilities. He suggested moving \$50,000 from the Board's contingency to the Town of Branford for park improvements.

Mr. Charlie Daniel, Mayor of Branford, stated that the property expansion was for women's softball and other recreational facilities.

The Board agreed by consensus to move \$50,000 to the Town of Branford for recreational improvements to Hatch Park.

Commissioner Richardson discussed the condition of Ranchettes Community Center and suggested \$5,000 for new chairs, flooring, and other related items.

The Board agreed to discuss the issue of the Ranchettes Community Center at a later date.

County Administrator Harris stated that it appeared that the Board would be forced to repair the bridge on 164th Street, and simply mentioned it for discussion at a later date.

Chairman Gamble asked for comments from the public. There were none.

There being no further comments, Chairman Gamble closed the floor to public comments.

Chairman Gamble noted that there would be some upcoming reductions in revenue due to the homestead exemption.

At 6:43 p.m., Commissioner Fleming moved to adopt a resolution levying the final millage rate of 9.000 mils for ad valorem taxes for Suwannee County for Fiscal Year 2017-2018. Commissioner Sessions seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. (Resolution No. 2017-64)

September 26, 2017
Final Budget Hearing
Judicial Annex Building
Live Oak, Florida

At 6:44 p.m., Commissioner Richardson moved to adopt a resolution setting the final budget for Fiscal Year 2017-2018 at \$81,532,467. Commissioner Hale seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. (Resolution No. 2017-65)

Chairman Gamble closed the public hearing.

There being no further business to discuss, Chairman Gamble adjourned the final budget hearing at 6:45 p.m.

ATTEST:

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

RICKY GAMBLE, CHAIRMAN
SUWANNEE COUNTY BOARD OF
OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS