

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE WORKSHOP OF
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

MAY 12, 2022

Present: Commissioner Jeffrey W. Bergosh, Chairman, District 1
Commissioner Douglas B. Underhill, Vice Chairman, District 2
Commissioner Steven L. Barry, District 5
Commissioner Robert D. Bender, District 4
Commissioner Lumon J. May, District 3
Honorable Pam Childers, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
Wesley J. Moreno, Interim County Administrator
Alison Rogers, County Attorney
DeLana Allen-Busbee, Administrative Specialist, Clerk and Comptroller's Office
Anthony Bowens, Administrative Assistant, County Administrator's Office
Heather Mahoney, Official Records Manager, Clerk and Comptrollers' Office

Location: Ernie Lee Magaha Government Building, Board Chambers, First Floor
221 Palafox Place, Pensacola, Florida

Report prepared by: DeLana Allen-Busbee

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Call to Order

Chairman Bergosh called the Committee of the Whole (C/W) Workshop to order at 9:01 a.m.

2. Was the Meeting Properly Advertised?

The Board was advised by DeLana Allen-Busbee, Administrative Specialist, Clerk and Comptroller's Office, that the meeting was advertised in the *Escambia Sun Press* on May 5, 2022, in the Board's weekly meeting schedule.

3. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Commissioner Bergosh led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

4. Board Items

I. Fire MSTU

A. Board Discussion – The C/W viewed and discussed slides provided by staff regarding proposed options for the Fire MSTU, and the C/W:

(1) Was advised by Interim County Administrator Wes Moreno that this Item was brought by staff to allow the Board to have a discussion and to make plans related to the budget, as well as any necessary changes;

(2) Was advised by Eric Gilmore, Public Safety Director, that:

- As discussed, last year while going through the budget process to identify funds for Fire Services, staff knew that funds would have to be pulled to cover current costs for personnel and small capital, among other expenses of that nature.
- Currently the Fire system is maintaining at an acceptable level and is not missing calls, but the growth of the County has been exponential with exponential growth in calls and areas served.
- Fire Services responds to a variety of calls that are not related to fires, such as wrecks, extrications, medical calls, and water rescues, and they are projected to go over 18,000 calls this year.
- Emergency Medical Services (EMS) has helped to reduce some of the call load for Fire.
- Staff is asking for consideration for an increase to help with additional staffing and capital equipment to keep up with the growth of the County and sustain the expected level of service for citizens.
- While the EMS fund is healthy, staff is asking for consideration in maintaining funds in EMS to help bolster EMS further and assist with more calls.

(3) Was advised by Stephan Hall, Finance Director, that:

- Staff has identified several options to create additional revenue for Fire Services.
- Option 1 is to make no changes to the MSBU (Municipal Services Benefit Unit) and enact an MSTU (Municipal Services Taxing Unit).
- Option 2 is to reduce the MSBU to \$75 and recover the lost revenue plus an additional \$6 million through an MSTU.
- Option 3 is to raise the MSBU by \$50 and not enact an MSTU.
- Option 4 is for an MSTU only with no mainland MSBU assessment.

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AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

4. Continued...

I. Continued...

A. Continued...

- (4) Upon inquiry from Commissioner Underhill, was advised by Interim County Administrator Moreno that staff did not review other areas of the budget for cuts as part of this process;
- (5) Upon inquiry from Commissioner Bender, was advised by Director Hall that the proposed revenue increase would be for operational expenses and staff support only as well as the cost share for the SAFER Grant, if awarded; was further advised that 45 firefighter positions are being requested as part of the SAFER Grant;
- (6) Upon inquiry from Commissioner May, was advised by Director Hall that the last increase in MSBU was seven years ago;
- (7) Heard comments from Commissioner Bergosh regarding his pledge not to raise taxes and his proposal that an option be considered which would levy a $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ penny sales tax, place the item on the November ballot for a vote by the electorate, and remove the MSBU from the property tax bill;
- (8) Heard further comments from Commissioner Bergosh concerning the sales tax being partly paid by out-of-state visitors rather than solely by local citizens and that property taxes could be reduced if more revenue than is needed is collected;
- (9) Heard support for Commissioner Bergosh's proposal from Commissioner Underhill as it would allow the citizens to make the decision and remove the existing MSBU;
- (10) Heard comments from Commissioner May regarding his concerns that a sales tax would disproportionately affect low income citizens, but advised that he is open to any idea, especially one that also addresses affordable housing;
- (11) Heard comments from Director Hall and County Attorney Rogers regarding their need to do some additional research on the proposal to give firm answers concerning any restrictions on the revenues and whether sufficient funds could be generated via this method;
- (12) Discussed the proposed options, the lack of desire to continue burdening the EMS fund, and creating other efficiencies in the County's budget; and

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AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

4. Continued...

I. Continued...

A. Continued...

(13) Heard majority support for requesting that staff bring back for discussion the four options presented by staff, as well as the options for a ½ penny and ¾ penny sales tax and the revenue that would generate, as well as any other ramifications the Board should be aware of; and

B. Board Direction – None.

5. Adjourn

Chairman Bergosh declared the C/W Workshop adjourned at 9:51 a.m.