

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

JUNE 9, 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
Wesley J. Moreno, Interim County Administrator
Alison Rogers, County Attorney
DeLana Allen-Busbee, Administrative Specialist, Clerk and Comptroller's Office
Elizabeth Kissel, Grants and Special Projects Manager,
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 9:04 a.m.

2. Was the Meeting Properly Advertised?

The Board was advised by Heather Mahoney, Official Records Manager, Clerk and Comptroller's Office, that the meeting was advertised in the *Escambia Sun Press* on June 2, 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 MSBU/MSTU Discussion

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

(1) Was advised by Interim County Administrator Wes Moreno that:

- The window was missed to enact a new Fire MSTU (Municipal Services Taxing Unit) and that staff is not in a position to bring a sales tax increase to fruition this year due to timing.
- The question for the Board is whether Fire Services is supplemented through the General Fund or through an adjustment to the MSBU (Municipal Services Benefit Unit).

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

- The current MSBU assessment is \$125 per dwelling unit for residential, \$0.0526 per square foot of space for commercial, and \$15.03 plus \$0.03 per acre for vacant or unimproved lots.
- A recent change in legislation makes agricultural vacant property and timberland no longer assessable, which has an impact of around \$170,000.
- The scenarios provided for the MSBU are proposed in \$5 increment increases [as provided in the slides presented to the CW] and show the potential revenue increases as well.
- Staff ran better personnel numbers yesterday and saw that personnel costs would be \$19 million and plugged in a \$660,000 increase to personnel because of additional repair and maintenance and fuel costs, which appears to be reasonable.
- Personnel for the current year's adopted budget was approximately \$14.7 million, but there were personnel adjustments that impacted the figure; also skewing the numbers slightly is an additional roughly \$650,000 for overtime built in, and when the increase with the Florida Retirement System, FICA, and workers compensation are considered, it makes \$1.6 million closer to \$2.3 million.
- Volunteer firefighter stipends also had a substantial increase and the budget for that could possibly be reduced.

(Continued on Page 3)

AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

4. Continued...

I. Continued...

A. Continued...

(3) Was advised by Commissioner Bergosh that:

- There is estimated to be a tremendous increase in the tax roll, which is expected to yield an additional \$19 million in additional revenue for Escambia County.
- He proposes reducing the ad valorem millage rate to 6.390 mills and increasing the Fire MSBU by \$40, which would provide the necessary funds for Fire Services, but amount to a wash for costs for citizens.
- A second proposed option is to eliminate 125 of the approximately 400 vacant jobs to net the funds for Fire Services.

(4) Heard comments from Commissioner Underhill suggesting that 200 vacant positions be eliminated as a short-term solution for the next two years, and that long-term, he supports the sales tax being placed on the ballot for the citizens to vote;

(5) Was advised by Interim County Administrator Moreno that he and staff have spent the last few weeks reviewing the departmental budgets for cuts and the next phase is to take a prudent look at vacant positions and take a methodical approach to the budget;

(6) Heard comments from Commissioner May regarding concerns over rolling back the millage rate while there are unmet needs for citizens of Escambia County, as well as his concerns for rolling back the rate but not having support to increase the millage rate in the future when it is needed;

(7) Was advised by Commissioner Bergosh that he pledges to raise the millage rate back to where it was if the sales tax increase passes in two years and the MSBU goes away; and

(8) Agreed to ask staff to put this Discussion Item on the agenda for next week's Regular Board meeting for the Board to discuss and take action; and

B. Board Direction – None.

AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

4. Continued...

II. DOMES Discussion

A. Board Discussion – The C/W viewed and discussed the agenda backup for the Item, and the C/W:

(1) Was advised by Interim County Administrator Moreno that:

- DOMES (District One Medical Examiner Support) is requesting \$500,000 from each county (Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Walton) to go toward the initial stages of the project of building a new Medical Examiner's Office.
- To date, Escambia County is the only county that has put in funds and these funds amount to \$415,000-\$420,000.
- DOMES is also requesting an increase to their operational budget.

(2) Was advised by Commissioner Bender that:

- The Medical Examiner's Office is looking at around an \$800,000 increase year-over-year on their budget due to the increase of deaths, and their current facility does not have adequate space.
- In addition to the year-over-year costs, a new facility is needed.
- Ten percent of the cases the office has are from outside of District 1 and that would probably be split 2.5% for each County.
- Escambia County has likely overpaid its fair share of the cost of these cases.
- A large concession was made in moving the facility to Santa Rosa County and the cost should be shared more.
- Escambia County is trying to be a good partner with its neighboring counties.

(3) Heard comments from Commissioners Barry and Underhill which led to discussion of previous conversations regarding the cost-sharing for DOMES and the Board's understanding that by allowing the facility to move east, there would be some reduced cost or concessions made in the cost-sharing; previous discussion of an even 25% cost split amongst the four counties as well as 30% each for Escambia and Okaloosa and 20% each for Santa Rosa and Walton were mentioned;

(Continued on Page 5)

AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

4. Continued...

II. Continued...

A. Continued...

- (4) Was advised by Commissioner Bergosh that an updated formula to determine operational costs is being used and that Escambia County is now at 47% versus the previous 52%, but that the sticking point is in terms of fixed assets which should be an even four-county split; heard comments from Commissioner Barry concerning the need for there to be some type of language in the MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) stating how operational dollars will be split going forward;
- (5) Discussed the proposed cost of the new facility (approximately \$25-26 million), the change in initial plans of the facility's location within a commerce park in Santa Rosa County, which leaves the need to purchase land in Santa Rosa, and whether there was a possibility of constructing an additional facility here where the County already has assets;
- (6) Discussed the increase in exams and was advised by Eric Gilmore, Public Safety Director, that per Dan Schebler, Director of Operations for DOMES, the increase is due to fentanyl and traffic accidents;
- (7) Heard comments from Commissioner Barry regarding the need for the Board to stay more engaged in the process as the budget does not allow for huge mistakes; also heard the request for information concerning numbers in other districts in the State of Florida for Medical Examiner offices;
- (8) Discussed the lack of desire to agree on buying property today and that the previous discussion for cost sharing of 30%, 30%, 20%, and 20% was the "floor for the construction"; and
- (9) Heard comments from Commissioner Underhill regarding having representatives from the Medical Examiner's office present for the next conversations and agreed to get feedback and add an Item to either the Board's next meeting (June 16th) or the first meeting in July; and

B. Board Direction – None.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE WORKSHOP – JUNE 9, 2022

AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

FOR INFORMATION: Commissioner Bender advised the C/W that he plans to bring an Item to the Regular Board meeting next week concerning the purchase of vehicles for County fleet. Ford will open up orders for government fleet vehicles from July 7-11th and an order can be made with a letter of intent. The Board discussed whether there was a sense of urgency to vehicle purchases and that the limitations on orders were for specific lines and not all vehicles.

5. Adjourn

Chairman Bergosh declared the C/W Workshop adjourned at 10:00 a.m.