

MINUTES
FIFTH BUDGET MEETING OF THE
COLQUITT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
FISCAL YEAR 2015 - 2016
TUESDAY, MAY 26, 2015
5:00 o'clock p.m.

CALL TO ORDER: The fifth budget meeting for Fiscal Year 2015 - 2016 was called to order at 5:00 o'clock p.m. by Chairman Terry R. Clark. The meeting was duly called and advertised.

PRESENT: Those present were Commissioners Luke Strong, Winfred Giddens, Marc DeMott, Donna Herndon, Paul Nagy, Johnny Hardin, Chairman Terry R. Clark, County Administrator Chas Cannon, Finance Director Wayne Putnal, and County Clerk Melissa Lawson.

ALSO PRESENT: Justin H. Cox, Chief Compliance Officer and Alan Mauldin, Reporter with The Moultrie Observer.

FISCAL YEAR 2015 - 2016 BUDGET CONTINUED: Mr. Cannon declared that the meeting would be heavy on commissioner input, and would offer the board the opportunity to discuss pertinent topics and voice any concerns regarding the proposed budget.

Mr. Cannon reviewed a list of commissioner options, stating that a 1.5 millage rate increase in the Unincorporated areas was still included in the proposed budget. Mr. Cannon stated other options were still available to the board in order to balance the budget, including raising the millage by an undetermined amount in combination with the cell tower easement sale, utilization of more reserves, and the possible elimination of the COLA and merit increases.

In addition, Mr. Cannon stated that more capital purchases could be shifted to proceeds resulting from the sale of county property, further stating that he met with department heads and deferred some of the capital requests until the following year.

Commissioner Hardin inquired as to the overall requested budget number.

Mr. Cannon presented a list of capital purchases over \$5,000.00, designated by funding source.

Commissioner Hardin questioned if recent trucks purchased by the Sheriff's Department could be inherited by another division. Commissioner Strong questioned the mileage of the vehicles.

Mr. Cannon stated that he would obtain this information as soon as possible.

Discussion ensued regarding the list of capital purchases, and the possibility of rotating vehicles in lieu of purchasing new ones.

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Mr. Cannon reviewed additional capital purchases that could be deferred until the next fiscal year.

Mr. Cannon urged the board to consider the proposed capital equipment necessary in order to facilitate the transition away from inmate labor at the Roads and Bridges department.

A requested vehicle for the county agent was reviewed, with the possibility of rotating the current vehicle in use being discussed thoroughly.

Mr. Cannon stated that existing Crown Victoria model vehicles in the Sheriff's Department fleet would be transported to auction, with the revenue recognized as a result being allocated back to the General Fund.

A requested vehicle for the Compliance Office was discussed, as well as another vehicle requested by the county shop.

Commissioner Strong questioned if a new vehicle was necessary for the Compliance Office, stating that the existing truck was still efficient, and citing a savings of \$27,000.00 if the purchase was eliminated.

Commissioner Giddens questioned if older vehicles were transferred to the Roads and Bridges department, stating that speed was not a necessity when following work details.

Mr. Cannon stated that older, high mileage vehicles were transferred to the Roads and Bridges department.

Mr. Cannon cited this as another reason for the proposed transition away from inmate labor at the Roads and Bridges department, stating that employees could go directly to the work site, while the transportation of inmates resulted in a major loss of productivity.

Commissioner Hardin stated that the board knew they would be faced with issues such as loss of time and productivity when the prison relocated to its current site.

Commissioner Hardin voiced his concerns regarding the increase in equipment and labor costs if inmate labor was eliminated, and questioned if there was a method in which the Warden could transport inmates to job sites.

Mr. Cannon explained that the county faced many restrictions when utilizing inmate labor, stating that increased reimbursement from the state was necessary in order to maintain the prison as a productive asset.

Commissioner Giddens questioned the annual costs to operate the prison. Mr. Cannon replied that the costs were \$1,900,000.00 annually, with the county only receiving reimbursement for \$1,300,000.00 of these costs.

Mr. Cannon explained that he instructed Stan Kirksey, Road Superintendent, to develop work plans based on both the utilization of inmate labor, and the elimination of inmate labor. Mr. Cannon further explained that currently, inmates were utilized in almost every

aspect of the Roads and Bridges operation. Mr. Cannon stated that this resulted in inmates operating expensive equipment, and often causing damage, both intentional and unintentional, to this equipment.

Commissioner Nagy stated that approximately \$500,000.00 - \$600,000.00 was utilized annually to operate the prison.

Chairman Clark stated that a value must be obtained regarding the utilization of inmate labor. Commissioner Nagy agreed, stating that lost time and damage to equipment must also be considered.

Mr. Cannon declared that six hours was lost per day via the utilization of inmate labor on mowing crews.

Commissioner Giddens noted that at his former place of employment, Colquitt EMC, duties such as this were often outsourced.

Commissioner DeMott questioned if the mowing operation in question pertained to regular landscape mowing. Mr. Cannon explained that this particular mowing included rights of way, reminding the board of the recent accident involving an inmate operating a mowing tractor.

Mr. Cannon urged commissioners to communicate with department heads regarding budget needs and requests.

Commissioner DeMott questioned how much inmate labor was utilized to operate heavy equipment, and further questioned the number of mowing crews in operation.

Mr. Cannon explained that inmate labor was currently utilized whenever possible, and that mowing operations were seasonal, maintaining approximately 3,700 acres annually.

Commissioner Giddens questioned the feasibility of utilizing state inmate labor when the state itself did not take advantage of inmate labor.

Mr. Cannon declared his belief that the prison was still an asset, but emphasized the importance of utilizing inmate labor where it was most feasible.

Discussion ensued regarding further capital purchase items that were either eliminated, or designated for possible elimination.

Mr. Cannon emphasized that substantial cuts were made thus far, especially in comparison to original budget requests.

The agreement regarding ambulance services was discussed thoroughly.

Commissioner Giddens voiced his concerns regarding ambulances parked at various restaurant locations at various times during the day, citing fuel as a major expense.

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Commissioner Herndon questioned the overall expenses regarding the transition away from inmate labor at the Roads and Bridges department.

Discussion ensued regarding the equipment necessary to facilitate this transition.

Commissioner Giddens suggested that the board visit the Roads and Bridges department in order to view daily work logs.

(Alan Mauldin entered the meeting at 5:40 p.m.)

At this time, Commissioner Nagy mentioned the proposed Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for county employees.

Commissioner Nagy suggested implementing the COLA at a higher percentage for line workers and at a reduced percentage for department heads and supervisors.

Commissioner Hardin stated that the high rate of turnover was in regards to line workers, not supervisory staff.

Commissioner Giddens remarked that the average worker was suffering the most, and suggested a salary cap on department head positions.

Mr. Cannon stated that salary caps could be enforced as a result of the implementation of a pay matrix system.

Commissioner Nagy declared that he would like to see a pay matrix system implemented in the future.

Commissioner Giddens stated that if the board established base pay for positions, then the board should raise the pay of the average worker.

Mr. Cannon stated that a COLA, in some form, could be implemented yearly. He further stated this would reduce costs while increasing recruitment and retention of quality employees.

Commissioner Giddens voiced his support of merit increases, stating that the best performing employees should be compensated adequately.

Commissioner Herndon questioned if lower level employees were included in former merit pay increases. Mr. Cannon replied that they were, based on department head recommendation.

Commissioner Giddens briefly discussed retirement benefits in Worth County.

Commissioner Nagy stated that he would like to see figures on implementing the COLA at various percentages, based on position classification. He further stated his reason for this was to send a message to the employees that their employment was valued, as well as to reduce employee turnover. Commissioner Giddens agreed.

Mr. Cannon requested the board's opinion regarding the COLA and capital purchases.

Commissioner DeMott stated that he agreed with Commissioner Nagy, but stated it was extremely difficult to draw a line to establish which percentage of COLA would be applied to what classification of employee. He further stated that a COLA was not performance based, so you would be rewarding low performing employees as well.

Commissioner Nagy stated that bottom line employees deserved to earn more.

Commissioner Giddens suggested that an individual take into consideration exactly what a job entails before accepting it.

Mr. Cannon stated that it was in the best interest of the community to maintain the best possible workforce in order to efficiently service the needs of the citizens of Colquitt County.

Commissioner Hardin stated this was the main reason for past salary adjustments, stating that the county did not possess the fiscal resources to grant merit or COLA increases, but desired to reward their employees in some way.

Commissioner Herndon stated that employees appreciated the salary adjustment.

Commissioner Giddens questioned the number of department heads that received an increase within the past year. Mr. Cannon replied that two department heads received increases.

Mr. Cannon stated that quality department heads were essential in order to ensure the efficient generation of services within county departments.

County departments and salaries were discussed, as well as the possible outsourcing of certain services in order to significantly reduce operating costs.

Mr. Cannon stated that the county possessed quality, competent department heads.

Commissioner Giddens commended Mr. Cannon on his excellent performance thus far as County Administrator.

Commissioner Giddens voiced his displeasure regarding the decision to allow Charles Weathers, Projects Manager and former Road Superintendent, to remain in employment for an additional year at a higher rate of pay, stating that Stanley Kirksey, Road Superintendent, was doing a fine job.

Mr. Cannon explained the reason for doing so was in order for Mr. Kirksey to take advantage of Mr. Weathers' more than forty years worth of institutionalized knowledge of the county road infrastructure and network.

Mr. Cannon stated that Mr. Weathers would remain in employment no later than February 2016.

Commissioner Hardin questioned the substantial increase in the office repairs line item within the Information Systems budget. Mr. Putnal explained this was done to facilitate Information Systems related repairs for all departments.

Mr. Cannon stated this was a control mechanism, further stating that the IS department possessed the most knowledge in relation to these expenditures.

Budgeted funds for Unemployment Insurance were discussed.

Commissioner Hardin questioned the significant increase regarding compensation for court reporters. Mr. Putnal replied that this was in response to a request from all judges within the Southern Judicial Circuit, stating that it was their desire to set the salary of court reporters at a certain level.

Mr. Cannon noted the figure budgeted was less than the originally requested amount, citing costs savings from the original proposal. Mr. Putnal further explained that formerly, court reporters were paid through payroll, with this process changing in the near future.

Commissioner Strong remarked on a salary increase in the Substance Abuse Court budget.

Mr. Putnal explained that although this amount increased, the state reimbursed the county via grant funds. However, Mr. Putnal stated that he communicated to the court the county's hesitancy to increase additional funding, further stating that currently, the county's total cost for this budget was approximately \$15,000.00.

Mr. Cannon stated that it was imperative that the commission continue to communicate with state representatives regarding state mandated costs.

Discussion ensued regarding an employee salary increase in the State Court budget and additional state mandated costs.

Commissioner Hardin questioned budgeted funds intended for the provision of cell phones for investigators.

Mr. Putnal explained that these individuals were currently utilizing their personal cell phones, and in order to avoid subpoena of their personal phones, county issued phones were being proposed.

Discussion ensued regarding the equitable funding of School Resource Officers and the most efficient utilization of these individuals.

Again, Mr. Cannon stated that this was a board member to board member discussion, and encouraged continued communications regarding this matter.

Commissioner Hardin stated that the safety of students was of the utmost importance, but also stated that other entities needed to understand the county's fiscal situation.

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Commissioner Herndon agreed, stating that it was unfair to absorb such costs when the county had been unable to grant their employees raises in several years.

Associated costs regarding the provision of School Resource Officers were thoroughly discussed.

Commissioner Nagy encouraged unified, continued communications regarding this issue.

Commissioner Giddens voiced his concern regarding a SRO being allowed to drive his county vehicle home to Lowndes County.

Commissioner Nagy stated that most employees, his assistant, for example, were responsible for their own transportation to and from work.

Commissioner Hardin requested that Mr. Cannon perform a survey of all vehicles being driven out of county.

Additional capital requests were discussed at length.

Commissioner Strong asked if a maintenance account for the Agricultural Complex had been established. Mr. Putnal replied that it had not, that rental proceeds were deposited directly into the General Fund.

Commissioner Strong mentioned \$2,000.00 included in the budget for replacement of tables and chairs at the Agricultural Complex, stating that the purpose of establishing a maintenance fund was to fund such purchases.

Mr. Putnal stated that establishing this particular type of fund would incur more strain on the General Fund.

Discussion ensued regarding an additional position for the Drug Enforcement division, and the recent merge of the Drug Enforcement and Criminal Investigations divisions.

Commissioner Hardin stated that he would like to see continued negotiations with the City of Moultrie regarding funding for the Drug Enforcement team, stating that when this was initially formed, it was a joint effort.

Commissioner Nagy questioned utilization of the allotted \$75,000.00 for the Economic Development Authority.

Mr. Cannon stated that it was mainly used to fund salaries and operating costs, further stating that the City of Moultrie funds an equal amount. However, Mr. Cannon noted that the county owned and maintained the building that houses the Economic Development Authority.

Mr. Cannon stressed the importance of requesting financial statements from outside entities receiving funding from the county, stating that this was imperative in order to justify current levels of funding.

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Commissioner Giddens questioned the purchase of a new door lock and camera system at the county jail.

Commissioner Hardin discussed potential areas in which to reduce the overall size of the proposed budget and potentially decrease the proposed increase in the millage rate.

Mr. Cannon reminded the board that any deferred requests would more than likely return the next fiscal year.

Commissioner Nagy also mentioned upcoming revaluations of property within the county.

Commissioner Hardin stated that there was more than likely a substantial amount of property that was not on the tax digest.

Mr. Cannon agreed, stating that almost every week tracts are discovered that are not listed on the tax digest, which results in lost revenue for the county.

Mr. Cannon stressed the importance of educating the public about the upcoming Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST).

Commissioner Hardin stated that it would more than likely be difficult for this particular referendum to pass.

Mr. Cannon agreed, but stated that voter approval of this referendum was imperative in order to maintain the current level of services provided to the citizens of the county.

Mr. Cannon discussed the significant impact that agricultural exemptions have on the county budget.

Commissioner Giddens questioned future healthcare savings, fearing what would happen if these savings were not realized.

Mr. Cannon stated that he was confident that they would be, and stated that Jim Matney, CEO with Colquitt Regional Medical Center, will present these potential savings to the board at a later date.

Commissioner Nagy questioned if the school board expressed any interest in contracting with CRMC regarding healthcare.

Commissioner Hardin questioned the amount of capital purchases shifted to the sale of county property.

Mr. Cannon stated that it decreased from \$421,000.00 to \$370,000.00, and further stated that he recommended shifting no more than \$750,000.00 to this funding source.

Mr. Cannon presented a list of key, upcoming dates with the board.

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At this time, Commissioner Nagy mentioned a conference call between himself, Mr. Cannon, Glen Darbyshire, Tony Lasseter, John Carlton, Larry Franklin, and Daniel Dunn regarding construction of the road to the new high school.

Commissioner Nagy stated that the Economic Development Authority had admitted that the land acquisition deal with Mr. Glen Darbyshire could have been handled in a more efficient manner. As a result, Commissioner Nagy explained that the EDA was requesting that the location of the proposed road to the new high school be changed once again.

Commissioner Nagy stated that himself and Mr. Cannon agreed to allow communications with the Department of Transportation and state representatives, but made no commitment to change the location of the road.

Commissioner DeMott inquired as to additional costs that might be incurred as a result of moving the road. Mr. Cannon stated that there would be additional surveying, engineering, and recording costs.

Commissioner DeMott mentioned the time factor, with the project already being behind schedule.

Commissioner Hardin voiced his fear that the state would rescind funding for construction of the new road if the location of the road were to be changed once again.

Commissioner Nagy declared the need for timely communication between public entities in regards to a project of this magnitude.

Chairman Clark questioned the timing of the request by the EDA.

Commissioner Hardin declared that it was not logical to move the location of the road.

Commissioner DeMott requested clarification that the county only granted permission to contact the Department of Transportation.

Mr. Cannon stated that the county communicated their position clearly – that relocation of the road was not recommended.

Commissioner Nagy informed the board that Tony Lasseter was in the process of deeding .09 acres in order to facilitate construction of the road.

Commissioner DeMott questioned if the project was currently at a standstill, and further questioned what would be required to move forward with the project.

It was the consensus of the board to move along with the project as it existed, and to not alter or change the location of the road to the new high school.

Commissioner Hardin stated that main concern was the safety of the people that would travel upon the new road.

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At this time, Commissioner DeMott also recommended that the county assist the parties involved in any way possible.

There being no further business to come before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 7:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry R. Clark
Chairman

Melissa Lawson
County Clerk

Approved:
