

EMERGENCY BUDGET MEETING

Commission Board Room
Dixie County Courthouse
214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628
September 02, 2026 – 4:30 PM

The Board meetings are audio recorded. The public can hear and participate in the meeting via conference call by dialing 1 469-551-3616 and enter code 908825494#

COMMISSIONERS

Mark Hatch, District 3, Chairman
Jody Stephenson, District 1
Daniel Wood, District 2
Jamie Storey, District 4, Vice Chairman
David Osteen, District 5

STAFF

John Jenkins, County Manager
Roy Bass, Assistant County Manager
Martha McCaskill, Administrative Asst/Grant Coordinator – Not present
Chana Watson, County Attorney
Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court
Brenda Royal, Chief Financial Officer
Christie Zander, Deputy Clerk

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Mark Hatch called the workshop to order and welcomed all attendees, thanking everyone for coming.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE AMERICAN FLAG

Vice Chairman Storey led the Invocation and Commissioner Wood led the Pledge to the American Flag.

DISCUSSION

Budget Status Overview – Clerk/Finance (Brenda Royal)

- **EMS and Transportation:**
 - Reported that after the prior workshop “the other night,” staff used feedback from the Board to adjust budgets.
 - EMS is now balanced.
 - Transportation is also balanced:
 - All available state revenues were applied, though they are slightly lower going into the new year (estimated \$80,000–\$90,000 less than current year).
 - Significant work was done to make transportation self-sufficient.
- **Use of General Fund in Prior Years:**

- General Fund has historically subsidized other funds whose expenditures exceeded their revenues.
- Over at least the last five years, substantial amounts have been transferred out of General Fund to support other funds (e.g., transportation, solid waste, fire).
- As a result, General Fund now faces its own shortfall and has a very limited cash balance.
- **Current-Year Strategy:**
 - Departments were directed to not fill many open positions in the next year rather than lay off current employees:
 - Budgeted vacant positions were removed, reducing expenditures.
 - Departments will “pull together” to cover the workload without those new hires.
 - Ms. Royal emphasized that no current employees are being laid off; the cuts are entirely open, unfilled positions.
 - For the upcoming year, she has structured the budgets so that General Fund will not transfer out to other funds, except for a required EMS transfer.
- **General Fund Status:**
 - General Fund remains the largest and most problematic fund.
 - Expenditures have exceeded revenues for many years, preventing the county from building reserves.
 - Royal stressed that expenditures must be less than revenues if the county is to operate in the black and create any reserve.
- **Next Steps:**
 - Ms. Royal proposed returning later in the meeting to General Fund details.
 - Noted that all constitutional officers were present and suggested the Board hear from them after her overview.

Commissioner Discussion – Solid Waste, Assessments, and Historical Context

- **Commissioner Jody Stephenson:**
 - Provided historical perspective:
 - When he joined the Board seven years ago, the county was “upside down every year” and frequently under states of emergency (floods, hurricanes), making financial recovery difficult.
 - Stated that historically, the county had substantial funds in accounts, stocks, bonds, and reserves, which were depleted over the years to keep the county afloat.
 - Discussed solid waste assessment history:
 - About 33 years ago, the garbage assessment was \$100; current rate is only \$180, despite significant increases in operating costs and fuel.
 - Noted that past reserves and investments have been consumed, contributing to the financial difficulties he and the current Board inherited.
- **Solid Waste Sites and Dump Operations:**
 - Commissioners compared Dixie County’s solid waste system to neighboring counties:

- **Gilchrist County:**
 - Fewer sites (about six vs. Dixie’s nine).
 - Charges for limb debris, scrap metal, and other items at the transfer station (e.g., per-100-lb fees).
 - **Levy County:**
 - Only three sites for approximately 48,000 residents.
- Vice-chairman Storey:
 - Stated Dixie County has “spoiled” residents by offering free disposal at more sites, with more generous hours and no debris charges.
 - Emphasized that to save money, the county may need to reduce the number of sites and tighten operations, which will require residents to adjust.
- Discussion included:
 - Examples of out-of-county waste being brought into Dixie (e.g., loads from Levy County), which the county then pays to dispose of.
 - Accounts of staff confronting and turning away non-resident dumpers.
- **First District Site / Site Closures:**
 - Prior Board decision:
 - Close one site (First District) permanently.
 - Reduce hours at the remaining sites.
 - Commissioner Stephenson clarified:
 - His earlier public comments about closing First District were intended to motivate cuts across all departments, not to permanently deprive his district.
 - Now proposes First District be re-opened as an “unmanned” limited-access site for bagged household garbage only, with cameras and fencing, and all metal and debris routed to the main facility.
 - Other commissioners and staff responded:
 - Chairman Hatch and Commissioner Osteen recalled previous experiences with unmanned sites (Futchville and Hudson) that led to large-scale illegal dumping, cut fences, and expensive cleanups.
 - Hatch stated unmanned sites are unworkable and create more costs than they save.
 - Royal confirmed the current budget is built on the Board’s previous vote: one site closed; hours reduced at other sites.
- **Board Direction:**
 - Ms. Royal asked whether any change in direction was desired on solid waste, since changing that decision would affect the budget.
 - Consensus at this point in the meeting:
 - Stay with the prior vote:
 - First District site remains closed as planned.
 - Other sites operate with reduced hours.
 - Focus efforts on resolving the remaining General Fund shortfall.

Longer-Term Budget and Assessment Comments

- Commissioners noted:
 - The county previously set a practice of reviewing solid waste and fire assessments every five years, but in practice they have sometimes been revisited more frequently due to circumstances.
 - Suggestion that smaller, more frequent assessment adjustments may be easier for taxpayers to absorb than large increases after long intervals.
 - Realized that even with current proposed assessment increases, Fire and Solid Waste assessments are not yet at their statutory maximums and have been kept comparatively low compared to neighboring counties.

Transition to Constitutional Officers

- After extensive discussion of:
 - EMS and transportation balancing,
 - Historic reliance on General Fund transfers,
 - Solid waste sites and assessments,
 - And the need to keep expenditures under revenues,

Ms. Royal concluded this segment by stating:

- They had made “headway” in EMS and transportation and had eliminated General Fund transfers out (except a required EMS amount).
- The General Fund remains the principal focus, with a remaining shortfall to solve.
- She recommended the Board now hear from constitutional officers, starting with those present in the room.

Chairman Hatch agreed and invited constitutional officers to address the Board, noting:

- After hearing from them, the Board would return to General Fund details and continue working toward a balanced budget.

Supervisor of Elections Budget Presentation

Speaker: Darbi Chaires, Supervisor of Elections

Mrs. Chaires addressed the Board regarding her FY 2025–2026 budget request. She stated that:

- Florida has become a national “platinum standard” for elections, and other states and countries look to Florida as a model.
- Running secure, accurate, and successful elections requires dedicated staff and adequate funding.
- During the recent primary, one staff member worked at least 120 hours in 11 consecutive days, demonstrating the workload on a very small staff.
- The Supervisor of Elections Office accounts for approximately 2.6% of Dixie County’s entire budget.

Ms. Chaires explained:

- She did not submit a flat budget for the upcoming year, but she did not request a new building or new voting equipment.
- Her request is for enough funding to run elections efficiently.

- She reduced her original submission by a little over \$58,000, by:
 - Fitting the state-recommended security upgrade into this year's budget.
 - Purchasing some General Election supplies out of the current year.
 - Cutting each line item where possible.
- The resulting 7.8% increase she requested is, in her view, the bare minimum necessary.

Ms. Chaires further clarified:

- Most of the requested increase is in the contract line item, which now includes the annual voting equipment maintenance fee (approximately \$40,000) that in past years was paid from the Board's budget, not her office.
- Because of this change, when the Board asked constitutional officers to submit flat budgets, her office was effectively asked to reduce its prior-year funding by \$40,000 to absorb that fee.
- She asked the Board to consider this context before denying the requested increase, emphasizing that the office must still conduct secure elections that count and protect every vote, including those electing the Board.

Commissioner/Chair Response:

Chairman Hatch stated that he had missed part of her remarks due to a phone call, but reiterated that:

- The Board's policy is to hold constitutional officers to last year's budget level, and that is the position he is "sticking with."
- Other departments/offices have made significant cuts and staffing reductions (e.g., Road Department, Fire, Sheriff, and others).
- The county must "make last year's budget work" given taxpayer fatigue with assessments and taxes.
- **Exchange on Service Levels:**
 - In response, Ms. Chaires noted she has only two people to run elections in Dixie County and asked which polling locations the Board might want her to close if required to absorb the reductions:
 - Suggested closing Precinct 7 (in Chairman Hatch's district) and possibly Precinct 10 (in Commissioner Osteen's district) and consolidating voters at City Hall.
 - Indicated that sample ballots for voters might need to be eliminated as well.
 - Chairman Hatch replied that she should manage her operations within last year's budget and reiterated taxpayer concerns, stating that "we have got to make the cuts" and that the decision is "nothing personal; it's business."
 - Ms. Chaires summarized that the effect of the Board's position is asking her office to cut its budget by approximately \$40,000 (the amount of the voting equipment fee now placed in her budget), and confirmed this understanding with Commissioner Stephenson, who answered "Yes."

- This segment concluded with Ms. Chaires indicating she would comply with the Board’s direction and the Chair confirming his expectation that her office would operate within the prior-year budget parameters.

Board Direction/Consensus

Following discussion, and after clarification by Joey Lander that the line item had been carried on the county's budget the prior year and not the Supervisor's, the Board reached consensus that the county would retain responsibility for the voting-equipment annual fee of approximately \$40,000, consistent with the Board's direction that all constitutional officers operate from the current-year (FY 2025-26) budget. The Finance Officer was directed to reflect the item in the county's general fund budget. No motion was made.

Sheriff’s Office – Budget, Operations, Inmate Medical, and FLOCK Cameras

Opening Remarks and Budget Context

Speaker: Sheriff Butler

- Asked everyone to pause and take a deep breath, recognizing:
 - All present—elected officials, staff, and citizens—are part of Dixie County.
 - Each person has duties and responsibilities; the intensity in the room reflects passion for those responsibilities.
- **Confirmed his understanding that:**
 - All constitutional officers were asked to see how to operate at a FY 2025–2026 budget level equivalent to the current year (flat funding, no increase).
- **Original Sheriff’s Office budget request:**
 - Included an approximate 7.9% increase.
 - The increase was driven in part by:
 - A proposed \$1/hour raise for all Sheriff’s Office employees.
- **Response to Board direction:**
 - Sheriff removed the \$1/hour raise from the request.
 - Worked with internal staff (notably Rhonda and Danny) and the County Manager to rebuild the budget using current-year levels.
- **Resulting shortfall:**
 - After these reductions, the Sheriff’s Office still faces a shortfall of \$250,970.07 when compared to what is needed for operations at current service levels.

Jail Revenue and Remaining Gap

Speaker: Sheriff Butler

- **Projected jail revenue:**
 - The jail is expected to generate approximately \$220,000 in revenue for the upcoming year from housing inmates (primarily through federal contracts).
- **Application to shortfall:**
 - If that \$220,000 is applied to the \$250,970.07 shortfall:
 - An estimated \$30,000–\$35,000 remains unfunded.
- **Sheriff’s commitment:**

- Stated he is willing to absorb the remaining shortfall internally within the Sheriff's Office.
- Emphasized that:
 - This will leave no built-in contingency for major unforeseen events ("the what-if call").
 - The office will be operating on a bare-bones, baseline operational budget.

Workload, Staffing, and Fleet Condition

Speaker: Sheriff Butler

- **Workload (prior year):**
 - Approximately 18,095 calls for service were entered into the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system.
 - Dispatch and administrative staff handled around 53,000 administrative calls.
 - Dispatchers keyed the microphone about 305,000 times.
- **Current year:**
 - The office is on track to surpass last year's numbers in calls and radio traffic.
- **Staffing:**
 - Sheriff Butler noted:
 - The office carries a large share of the county's overall workload.
 - They are already down at least one deputy and are not filling that vacancy as part of budget reductions.
- **Fleet condition:**
 - Many patrol vehicles are high-mileage and in worsening mechanical shape.
 - Several units (approximately nine) are currently inoperable or not cost-effective to repair.
 - A modern transmission replacement can cost around \$10,000 per vehicle.
 - Sheriff explained:
 - Last year, budget cuts came largely out of fleet replacement, relying on:
 - Rebuilding engines and transmissions, and
 - "Patchwork" repairs to stretch the life of older vehicles.
 - As a result, the Sheriff's Office is now in even worse fleet condition.

Speaker: Commissioner Osteen

- **Expressed concern about:**
 - The safety implications of operating high-mileage, marginal vehicles for law enforcement.
 - The fact that the Sheriff's Office is short a deputy and not refilling that post even as workloads rise.

Speaker: Sheriff Butler

- **Confirmed:**
 - They are holding positions vacant to help meet budgetary targets.
 - Some new or newer vehicles will likely need to be purchased with jail revenue, further tightening that funding source.

“What-If” Events, Emergency Costs, and Risk

Speaker: Sheriff Butler

- **Large planned events:**
 - Coastal and holiday events that last 3–4 days cost roughly \$15,000 each in overtime and additional staffing (including command staff).
- **Unplanned disasters:**
 - Hurricanes and other major incidents require:
 - Moving personnel and equipment,
 - Sustained operations over multiple days,
 - Significant overtime and logistical support.
- **Historical practice – jail revenue reserve:**
 - Approximately 66% of jail revenue has historically been preserved as a Sheriff’s emergency fund, used for:
 - Storm response,
 - Major enforcement operations,
 - Other significant “what-if” events.
 - This has enabled the Sheriff’s Office to manage multiple hurricanes in recent years without requesting mid-year budget amendments.
- **Risk going forward:**
 - If the Sheriff must use that 66% of jail revenue to cover normal operations (to fill the \$250,970 shortfall):
 - There will be no dedicated emergency reserve.
 - When (not if) a major storm or event occurs, the Sheriff’s Office will:
 - Still respond fully,
 - But will need the Board to identify funding (e.g., by loan, line of credit, or budget amendments) to pay personnel and related expenses.

Inmate Medical Costs and Possible Insurance

Speakers: Sheriff Butler; Brenda Royal; Roy Bass; Citizen Joey Lander; Attorney Watson

- **Inmate Medical budget lines:**
 - The General Fund includes several lines for:
 - Inmate medical/hospitalization,
 - Inmate doctor,
 - Inmate hospital premium.
 - Combined, these lines total approximately \$210,000 in the proposed budget.

Speaker: Roy Bass

- **Explained:**
 - It is not unusual for the county to receive individual hospital bills for inmates in the \$150,000–\$250,000 range.
 - After verifying jail custody dates and working with providers, those bills are often negotiated down to about \$800–\$1,000.
 - Even with such negotiations, the budget must allow for catastrophic medical cases that might not be negotiable or might be only partially reduced.

Speaker: Brenda Royal

- **Confirmed:**
 - The \$210,000 total is intended to cover:
 - Routine inmate medical needs,
 - Occasional high-cost hospitalizations,
 - A policy or “premium” component to mitigate the largest risks.
 - Noted that actual spending in the most recent year was far below the budgeted maximum, but the line is sized for worst-case exposure.

Speaker: Citizen Joey Lander

- Cited Florida Statute 951.032, regarding financial responsibility for inmate medical expenses.
- Suggested that the county should examine:
 - Collecting health insurance information at booking, to bill private insurers when possible.
 - Implementing a copay system for inmates, debited from commissary accounts, similar to practices in state correctional facilities.
 - Exploring whether the county can purchase some form of inmate medical insurance to:
 - Cap catastrophic risk,
 - Provide more predictable annual costs.

Speaker: Attorney Watson

- **Noted:**
 - In state prisons, inmates commonly pay small copays (e.g., \$3–\$5) for routine medical visits, charged against their commissary accounts when funds are available.

Speaker: Sheriff Butler

- **Recommended:**
 - That inmate medical not be resolved “on the fly” in this budget workshop.
 - Instead, proposed a separate workshop or dedicated study to:
 - Research available inmate medical insurance products,
 - Determine how they would interact with Florida law,
 - Assess operational and administrative impacts.

Direction (Consensus):

- **Sheriff’s Office and finance staff (including Roy Bass) were directed to:**
 - Research inmate medical insurance options,
 - Examine statutory and practical avenues for cost recovery (insurance billing, copays, etc.),
 - Return with specific recommendations at a future meeting to reduce net inmate medical costs.

FLOCK License Plate Reader (LPR) Cameras

Speaker: Sheriff Butler

- **Background:**
 - Sheriff Butler reported that Dixie County deployed FLOCK license plate reader (LPR) cameras under an FDLE grant.

- Described these cameras as:
 - Among the most valuable investigative tools available in his 30+ year career.
 - Particularly effective in:
 - Locating abducted children,
 - Finding elderly individuals who wander from home,
 - Quickly identifying vehicles involved in serious crimes.
- **Grant status and cost:**
 - The FLOCK system was funded by a state grant.
 - The grant is set to expire on September 30.
 - After expiration:
 - The equipment would be donated to the Sheriff's Office (county ownership),
 - Continued use would require a paid service contract, which is not included in the Sheriff's proposed budget.
- **State directive and removal:**
 - Sheriff Butler noted that Governor DeSantis directed the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to remove all license plate readers from state rights-of-way.
 - In response, and to remain consistent with the directive and public concerns:
 - Sheriff Butler ordered all FLOCK LPR cameras in Dixie County removed, including:
 - Cameras on state rights-of-way,
 - The one camera that had been on a county-maintained road.
 - By the end of that day:
 - All FLOCK cameras had been physically removed.
 - All user accounts and passwords were disabled, and the Sheriff's Office no longer has access to the FLOCK database.
- **Privacy and oversight concerns:**
 - Sheriff Butler acknowledged there is public confusion and concern about:
 - Who has access to LPR data,
 - How long it is retained,
 - How it can be used.
 - Emphasized:
 - Any large database, including FLOCK, is only as reliable as the controls and accountability placed on its use.
 - Law enforcement already operates multiple data systems (not just LPRs) that contain sensitive information.
 - These systems generally have statutory protocols and audit mechanisms; LPRs should have similar safeguards.
- **Sheriff's position on future use:**
 - Stated he is not opposed to LPR technology; in fact, he believes:
 - It is one of the most powerful crime-fighting and life-saving tools available.

- However, he believes:
 - Future use must be governed by clear statutory guardrails, including:
 - Strict limits on who can access the data,
 - A closed loop system where access is limited to the Sheriff's Office (and authorized law enforcement partners),
 - Independent third-party audits of how the system is used.
 - Until such state-level guidelines and oversight are in place, he opted to suspend the system in Dixie County.
- **Legislative advocacy:**
 - Sheriff Butler stated he plans to bring these issues to:
 - The Florida Sheriffs Association,
 - State legislators at upcoming legislative meetings,
 - With the goal of establishing:
 - Transparent, statewide rules for LPR use,
 - Protections for privacy,
 - And mechanisms to ensure proper accountability while maintaining the public safety benefits.

Direction on Sheriff's Revised Budget

Speaker: Sheriff Butler; Board (informal consensus)

- **Sheriff Butler confirmed:**
 - He will submit a revised FY 2025–26 Sheriff's Office budget to Finance the next day, reflecting:
 - Flat funding based on the current-year operating level,
 - Removal of the \$1/hour raise,
 - Application of approximately \$220,000 in jail revenue to close most of the \$250,970.07 gap,
 - An internal plan to manage the remaining \$30,000–\$35,000 shortfall.
- **Board members:**
 - Expressed appreciation for the Sheriff's willingness to tighten his budget.
 - Acknowledged that:
 - With no emergency cushion, future storms or major events will likely require budget amendments or additional funding.

Prison Solid Waste Payments – Historical Comparison

Speakers: Commissioner Stephenson; Tim Johnson (Solid Waste)

- **Commissioner Stephenson:**
 - Asked about solid waste revenue from the prison system.
 - Cited older records indicating that:
 - In 1995, the county received about \$34,000 per year from the prison for garbage.
 - Currently, the county receives about \$9,600 per year (\$800/month).
- **Tim Johnson:**
 - Confirmed:

- Current payments from the prison are about \$800/month (\$9,600/year).
 - Historical minutes from 1995 show \$34,000/year in revenue.
- Stated he does not yet know why or when the revenue declined.
- **Direction:**
 - Tim Johnson will:
 - Review past minutes and agreements, including records from 1995.
 - Work with staff (and, if needed, the Clerk/County Attorney) to:
 - Determine how the original payment structure was established.
 - Identify when and why the amount changed.
 - Explore whether the agreement can be updated or renegotiated to better reflect current usage and costs.

Commissioner Comments – First District Solid Waste Site

Speaker: Commissioner Stephenson

- Stated he had no further items, but reiterated:
 - He represents the largest district in the county, with:
 - The most road miles, and
 - A larger population than other districts.
 - His district already suffers on the road grading side, because equipment time is spread equally despite higher mileage.
 - He does not want his citizens to suffer further from loss of local solid waste service.
- Explained:
 - He is not opposed to cutting costs, but:
 - He wants the Board to consider an unmanned site in First District for bagged household garbage only.
 - He is willing to personally assist with cleanup at that site.
 - Reported that:
 - Residents are already dumping garbage along the roadside near his property because they heard he was pressing the issue about site closure.
- Stephenson suggested:
 - Effective enforcement and prosecution of a few violators would deter further illegal dumping, stating that “if it’s enforced, you can take one or two [cases] and they won’t be doing it no more.”
- After brief acknowledgment and light-hearted remarks from other commissioners, the Chair thanked him and moved on to the next item.

Return to General Fund – Status and Rollback Impact

Speaker: Brenda Royal, Finance

Ms. Royal stated they were “back to General Fund” and had:

- Made headway, but the fund is still not where we would love it to be.

- Explained:
 - Using the rollback rate for General Fund yields only about \$90,000 in additional ad valorem revenue compared to the current year (due to higher property values).
 - Several state revenue lines into General Fund are down over \$100,000, effectively putting General Fund on flat or lower revenue than the current year.
- Noted:
 - At the time of the Monday budget meeting, they had estimated a shortfall of roughly \$700,000 in General Fund to cover:
 - Insurance,
 - Constitutional officers' budgets (kept at current-year levels),
 - Other mandated costs.
 - After subsequent work and cuts, the updated shortfall (before cash carryforward) is approximately \$1.295 million when viewing all departments and funds combined (as shown on the last summary page).
- Emphasized:
 - She is still working on a realistic cash carryforward number, but:
 - It must be based on actual remaining revenues and expenditures.
 - It will not completely resolve the shortfall.
- Ms. Royal stated:
 - A 10.000 mill General Fund rate (instead of rollback) would potentially add about \$497,000 in revenue.
 - However, the Board's prior direction was to use rollback to avoid a tax increase.

Department & Line-Item Review – General Fund

Speakers: Brenda Royal; Chair Mark Hatch; Commissioners; Staff (Roy Bass, Tim Johnson, Chana Watson)

Ms. Royal led a line-by-line review of General Fund pages. Key items:

a. Courthouse & Facilities (Dept. 00227)

- Repairs & Maintenance / Utilities:
 - Recent increases due to air conditioner replacements; several units are now relatively new.
 - Courthouse uses residential A/C units where a commercial system would be ideal but is cost-prohibitive.
- Operating Supplies:
 - Includes janitorial and building supplies.
- **Direction:**
 - Clerk to:
 - Reassess utility services and repairs lines based on actual bills.
 - Reduce these lines where feasible, while still maintaining essential operations.

Adjustment — Supervisor of Elections voting-equipment fee

(Discussed earlier under the Supervisor of Elections section)

- **Voting Equipment Annual Fee.** By consensus, the Board determined that the annual voting equipment fee of approximately \$40,000 — discussed earlier under the Supervisor of Elections' budget request — would remain a General Fund obligation rather than being absorbed by the elections office budget. Ms. Royal adjusted the projected shortfall accordingly. No motion was made.

Travel & Per Diem

- Many departments have Travel & Per Diem lines.
- Board discussion:
 - Reduce nonessential travel and conferences.
 - Use online training for ethics and required courses where available.
 - Consider sending fewer people to required events.
- **Direction:**
 - Departments should minimize travel.
 - Clerk to adjust travel/per diem lines downward where appropriate.

TDC / Parks & Recreation

- Ms. Royal explained:
 - Some Parks & Recreation expenses (repairs, improvements) are TDC-funded (tourist development tax).
 - TDC funds are also used for:
 - Tourism promotion,
 - TDC staff salary,
 - Tourism-related facility improvements.
- No major changes ordered during this segment other than continuing to monitor TDC-related lines.

Indigent Care & Medical Examiner

Speakers: Brenda Royal; Chairman Hatch; Attorney Watson

- **Indigent Care:**
 - Line of \$50,000 administered by Gail Carter.
 - Covers:
 - Indigent/Unclaimed burials,
 - Certain client assistance where individuals cannot pay, subject to application and rules.
 - Chairman Hatch questioned:
 - Why local taxpayers bear these costs, and whether this should be a state responsibility.
 - Ms. Royal:
 - Noted this line has existed for years,
 - Agreed to seek more detail from the indigent care office on use and statutory requirements.
- **Medical Examiner:**
 - Current-year budget \$70,000; actuals already about \$130,000.
 - Monthly invoices around \$12,000.

- Watson explained:
 - Dixie now participates in a regional cost-sharing ME district (Alachua, Bradford, Baker, Gilchrist, Levy, Union).
 - This change has significantly increased Dixie's ME costs.
- Board noted frustration that this is another **state-driven cost** that falls on the county.

Inmate Medical – Statute, Costs, and Future Workshop

Speakers: Roy Bass; Sheriff; Resident Joey Lander; Attorney Watson; Commissioners

- **Budgeted total:**
Around \$210,000 across:
 - Inmate medical,
 - Inmate hospitalization,
 - Inmate hospital premium.
- **Roy Bass:**
 - Bills often arrive in the \$150,000–\$250,000 range per case.
 - After verifying custody dates and negotiating, final payments are frequently \$800–\$1,000.
 - Budget must still cover potential **catastrophic** events.
- **Joey Lander:**
 - Cited F.S. 951.032 (Financial responsibility for inmate medical expenses).
 - Suggested:
 - Collecting insurance information during intake.
 - Using commissary copays for routine visits.
 - Exploring inmate medical insurance to cap risk.
- **Attorney Watson:**
 - Noted state agencies (DOC) charge small copays to inmates for medical visits.
- **Sheriff Butler:**
 - Recommended:
 - Addressing this via a dedicated workshop.
 - Conducting research on insurance options and statutory mechanisms before altering the budget line.
- **Direction:**
 - Sheriff's Office and finance staff to:
 - Research inmate medical insurance and cost-recovery methods.
 - Report back at a future meeting with recommendations.

Discussion of 1.295 Million Shortfall & Use of Millage

Speakers: Brenda Royal; Chairman Mark Hatch; Commissioners

- On the budget summary page, Royal showed:
 - Total projected revenues vs. expenditures yielding about a \$1.295 million deficit before cash carryforward.
- Commissioners discussed:
 - The possibility of keeping General Fund at 10.000 mills versus rollback.

- Risks of “using all the millage” in one year and leaving no flexibility next year (especially if a future recession or disaster hits).
- **Chairman Hatch:**
 - Reiterated that property values have increased; therefore, rollback still produces **similar or slightly greater revenue** as last year.
 - Emphasized that many residents already feel **overtaxed**.

Commissioner Compensation – Motions to Reduce Costs

Speakers: Commissioners Hatch, Stephenson, Storey, Osteen; Clerk Royal; Roy Bass

- **Cost per Commissioner:**
 - Staff estimated total cost (salary + benefits + retirement) at around \$67,000–\$72,000 per commissioner, depending on insurance.
 - Combined, \$346,000 for all five commissioners.

The Board then took a series of actions to **cut its own compensation:**

Motion 1 – Waive Chairman Hatch’s Salary

- **Motion:**
Waive **Commissioner Mark Hatch’s entire commissioner salary** for the next budget year, retaining only his **health insurance coverage**.
- **Motion made by:** Chairman Hatch (Gavel passed to Vice-chairman Storey)
- **Seconded by:** Commissioner Wood
- **Vote: Unanimous**

Motion 2 – Commissioner Stephenson Half Salary & Per Diem

- **Motion:**
Commissioner Stephenson to donate back half of his salary and half of his per diem/travel pay for the next budget year.
- **Motion made by:** Commissioner Stephenson
- **Seconded by:** Chairman Hatch
- **Vote: Unanimous**

Motion 3 – Vice-chairman Storey All Travel/Per Diem

- **Motion:**
Vice-Chairman Storey to donate back all of his travel/per diem payments (gas/travel stipends) for the next budget year (salary retained).
- **Motion made by:** Vice-chairman Storey
- **Seconded by:** Commissioner Wood
- **Vote: Unanimous**

Motion 4 – Commissioner Osteen All Travel/Per Diem

- **Motion:**
Commissioner **David Osteen** to **donate back all of his travel/per diem payments** for the next budget year (salary retained).
- **Motion made by:** Commissioner Osteen
- **Seconded by:** Vice-chairman Storey
- **Vote: Unanimous**

Current-Year Gas/Travel Checks

- All commissioners agreed by consensus to:
 - Forego their current-year monthly gas/travel checks beginning with the check due the following day.
- **Direction:**
Clerk was instructed **not to issue** any remaining gas/travel checks for the rest of the fiscal year.

Sheriff's Audit Surplus – Motion for Cash Carryforward

Speaker: Sheriff Butler; Commissioners

- Sheriff Butler advised:
 - The ongoing FY 24–25 audit is expected to reveal an unspent Sheriff's Office surplus in the range of \$90,000–\$115,000.
- **Motion:**
Allow the Sheriff's Office to **retain/receive back any FY 24–25 operating surplus identified by the audit** and apply it as **cash carryforward** to the FY 25–26 Sheriff's budget.
- **Motion made by:** Vice-chairman Storey
- **Seconded by:** Commissioner Osteen
- **Vote: Unanimous**
- **Direction:**
 - Sheriff to provide a written request/letter documenting this Board action for the record when the audit is complete.

Public Comment

Speaker: Jason Holifield, Citizen

Mr. Holifield wanted to thank The Board, Clerk and finance staff, Constitutional officers, for their efforts throughout the budget process.

Speaker: Clerk of Court Barbie Higginbotham

Commended commissioners for their personal financial sacrifices (reducing/waiving their compensation) to help address the budget crisis.

Mrs. Higginbotham acknowledged commissioners' continued donations back to schools and community events, noting the effect of giving up salary and travel pay.

Final Clarifications & Adjournment

Speakers: Brenda Royal; Chairman Hatch; Commissioners

- Ms. Royal:
 - Thanked the Board for their shared sacrifice and support of staff.
 - Reiterated she would:
 - Continue refining General Fund line items and cash carryforward,

- Aim to present a balanced budget by the statutory deadline.
- Chairman Hatch:
 - Thanked all commissioners, constitutional officers, staff, and citizens for their participation and patience.
 - Emphasized that:
 - The county faces a serious General Fund shortfall,
 - Continued cooperation and prudence will be needed even after this budget is balanced.

ADJOURN

Motion to adjourn made by Vice Chairman Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen.

Meeting adjourned.

PLEASE BE ADVISED *that if a person decides to appeal any decision made by the Board with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearings, he/she will need a record of the proceedings, and for such purpose, he/she will need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.*

“Persons with disabilities requesting reasonable accommodations to participate in this proceeding should contact (352) 486-4931 (Voice & TDD) or via Florida Relay Service at (800) 955-8771.”

The Board meets the first Thursday of each month at 10:00 AM and the third Thursday of each month at 6:00 PM. Individuals that would like to be placed on the agenda should call Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court, by 4:00 PM on the Friday Preceding the Board meeting, at (352) 498-1200.