

**Official Minutes of
MARION COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

April 28, 2025

CALL TO ORDER:

The Marion County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) met in a workshop session in Commission Chambers at 10:32 a.m. on Monday, April 28, 2025 at the Marion County Governmental Complex located in Ocala, Florida.

INTRODUCTION OF WORKSHOP BY CHAIRMAN KATHY BRYANT

Chairman Bryant advised that the workshop was scheduled this morning to discuss the Utilities Capital Improvement Program.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of our Country.

ROLL CALL

Upon roll call the following members were present: Chairman Kathy Bryant, District 2; Vice-Chairman Carl Zalak, III, District 4; Commissioner Craig Curry, District 1; and Commissioner Matthew McClain, District 3; Commissioner Michelle Stone, District 5 was absent due to a prior commitment. Also present were County Attorney Matthew G. Minter, Assistant County Administrator (ACA) Tracy Straub and ACA Angel Roussel.

It was noted for the record that the Deputy Clerk was in receipt of a 12 page Agenda packet to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation and a small binder entitled, "Utilities CIP Workshop FY 2026-2030".

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION

1. Present Utilities Capital Improvement Program

Utilities Director Tony Cunningham presented the following recommendation:

Description/Background: This annual workshop provides the Board with an update on the Capital Improvement Program for Utilities.

Budget/Impact: None.

Recommended Action: For discussion.

Utilities Director Tony Cunningham advised that Deputy Director Josh Kramer; Utilities Construction Manager Alejandro Rad; Fiscal Manager John Corneilson, ACA Angel Roussel and Kevin Vickers, Office of the County Engineer (OCE) (previously Utilities Department) were all instrumental in creating the Utilities Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). He commented on the regulatory requirements that have to be considered and the importance of having a reliable system. Also considered is system capacity, growth and costs.

Mr. Cunningham provided a brief overview of the current Utility system, noting over the past year there has been approximately 4 percent (%) to 6% growth. He stated the County will need to expand facilities as they reach capacity. Mr. Cunningham addressed the existing facilities and their permitted flow compared to what is actually being utilized, noting once a facility reaches 70% capacity it is time to begin planning to expand. He stated there are some regulatory triggers that require capacity analysis reports and for the County to begin to develop conceptual plans and preliminary plans for expansion.

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Chairman Bryant questioned if the industry standard has always been 70% or was it previously 80%. Mr. Cunningham advised that 80% is the regulatory trigger to submit an expansion plan to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and 70% triggers a capacity analysis report.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Mr. Cunningham provided a brief overview of the meaning of permitted flow and actual flow.

Chairman Bryant requested the monthly actual flow be provided, noting it would be interesting to see what the flow is when the population is up versus when it is down.

Mr. Cunningham advised that he does not have that information today, but staff could bring that information back to the Board.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Utilities Construction Manager Alejandro Rad advised that the Northwest Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility (NWR WWTF) had the capacity to be extended to 1.2/1.3 million gallons a day (mgd).

Mr. Cunningham stated when building a facility staff is planning for future expansion.

ACA Angel Roussel advised that the structures at the NWR WWTF were built to accommodate 1.2 mgd, noting some minor modifications would be necessary to obtain a permit for the 1.2 mgd.

Deputy Utilities Director Josh Kramer referred to the picture on the overhead screens and commented on the current layout of the facility and how it can expand in the future.

In response to Commissioner McClain, Mr. Cunningham advised that in order to go from 0.800 mgd to 1.2 mgd the Department would have to request a new permit from DEP.

Mr. Cunningham provided a brief overview of the 2025 accomplishments for the Department. He advised that grant funding has been a focus over the last year, noting a significant amount of funding was received through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and other means. Requirements for these funds have driven where resources are invested. Mr. Cunningham advised that the Department received State appropriations in the amount of \$3,500,000.00 for the Lowell water main extension, which will run water to the fire college, the prison, a school and residents in the area. He stated an application was submitted for a forgivable loan for the design of the rest of the system.

Mr. Cunningham commented on the SE Regional Water Treatment Plant (WTP), noting staff is looking at a lower Floridan well in the southeast. He stated this is an alternative water source to the upper Floridan aquifer, which protects the local environment and minimizes the impacts from withdraws of water. Mr. Cunningham advised that staff is developing this well and is currently in the testing phase, noting a plant will be built around that well and water source.

Commissioner Zalak expressed concern with the cost of retrieving water from the lower Floridan.

Mr. Cunningham stated the water quality has a huge impact on the costs. Staff is currently testing to see what treatment is needed to bring the water to drinking standards. He advised that the limit water can be withdrawn in Florida is determined using minimum flows and levels. The State reviews water systems (rivers, creeks, lakes, etc.) to determine how pumping the water from the ground will impact their levels. Mr. Cunningham stated more permitted water will not be allowed unless the impact of water systems can be mitigated. He stated utilizing Lower Floridan wells is a way to mitigate impact to those water systems.

Commissioner Zalak commented on the possibility of bringing water in from the Ocala National Forest where it is a recharge area.

ACA Tracy Straub advised that different options were discussed back when Flip Mellinger was the Utilities Director relating to this matter, which she will share with Mr. Cunningham and ACA Rousell in order for them to vet them as well.

General discussion ensued.

Mr. Cunningham advised that there is grant funding available for the Silver Springs Shores (SSS) Phases 1 and 2 project, noting staff has continued to apply for grant funding for Phases 3 and 4. He stated there are no plans to move forward with those phases unless external funding is received. Mr. Cunningham provided a brief update on the status of Phases 1 & 2, as well as ARPA funded projects.

Chairman Bryant advised that the County's waterline extension program has assisted with making the ARPA funds go further. Mr. Cunningham concurred.

Mr. Cunningham stated through the waterline extension program the County has been able to make water available to over 1,300 additional residents this year and extended almost 23 miles worth of water mains to residents. He referred to a list on the overhead screens showing the status of current construction and design projects, noting there was a scrivener's error on the original Agenda back up documents as it relates to Oak Run. Oak Run is not completed and is currently in the preliminary report stage.

Mr. Cunningham advised that the CIP is a living document updated annually with a 5-year project projection. Staff is continually rebalancing projects based off need. He stated the Department has completed the preliminary step of the rate sufficiency analysis and the consultant determined that there is not a rate increase needed next year to implement the Department's budget in fiscal year (FY) 2026.

Mr. Cunningham stated major construction projects are broken down into the following categories: water mains and fire hydrants; water treatment plant additions/improvements; lift stations and sewer mains; wastewater treatment plant improvements; utility relocations due to construction; and reclaimed water stations and mains.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Mr. Cunningham advised that the regulations on how deep utility lines have to be buried has not changed, noting the County follows the State standard.

Mr. Cunningham stated staff reviews the status of current infrastructure, forecasts growth in the system, coordinates with other departments to figure out where and how much growth is coming, as well as prioritizes projects based on risk, ability to execute and future regulatory requirements. He advised that ultimately the Department is stewards of the revenue that comes in and it is their job to best utilize that revenue to continue to provide the service to customers.

Mr. Cunningham referred to the 5-Year CIP summary shown on the overhead screens and provided a brief overview of the projects.

Mr. Cunningham advised that staff is meeting with citizens relating to the SW Wastewater Treatment Plant (SW WWTP) (Oak Run Plant) to discuss concerns, particularly around nuisances at the plant and in the collection system near the plant. He stated staff have installed fencing and "blankets" to absorb the sound from the blowers over the last several months. Staff also changed operation protocols and optimized odor control units to ensure the right media is being used and it is functioning at the right level. Additional odor control has been added at force main air release valves (ARVs). The Department has done a significant amount of cleaning of the collection system in the neighborhood.

Mr. Cunningham advised that there has been a tremendous amount of focus in that area and staff identified things that could be done immediately and then things that will guide the design process as the plant is expanded.

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Mr. Cunningham commented on the Automated Meter Reading (AMR) project, which consists of replacing the existing meters in the system with smart meters, as well as putting in new meters and replacing aging meters.

Commissioner Curry questioned if staff have to physically read each meter or can they be reviewed by the home office. Mr. Cunningham advised that staff cannot read the meters from the home office, but they also do not have to read each one manually. Staff is able to drive by the meter and the meter reader device can obtain the information. He stated advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) would allow the County to read the meters from the home office, but it would require the installation of towers and other infrastructure to get that information back to the office. Mr. Cunningham opined that Marion County is too spread out for AMI throughout the entire County, but the Department is investigating ways to reduce the need to drive around to get readings every month.

Mr. Cunningham commented on the total annual cost of the CIP projects and the importance of not deferring maintenance. He addressed the ongoing maintenance programs in place to ensure the future of utility infrastructure.

Mr. Cunningham advised that the Department is trying to be more proactive regarding water main extensions; therefore, when possible they are extending lines to loop a system to finish a neighborhood or portions of a neighborhood. When those properties connect, they will reimburse the County for that connection cost.

Mr. Cunningham advised that a CIP 5-Year Plan is basically maintaining, upgrading and planning for the future to make sure that the Department is continually able to provide services in the community. He reiterated that the rate sufficiency analysis showed that this CIP will not require a rate increase next year.

BOARD DISCUSSION AND CLOSING COMMENTS

In response to Commissioner Curry, Mr. Cunningham advised that the Department is continuing to address what happens to treated effluent. There are several ways treated effluent (reclaimed water) is currently handled such as it is provided for irrigation purposes in some places (primarily for golf courses); some are put into rapid infiltration basins (RIBs); and in spray fields. He stated in regard to the long term water supply what happens with the reclaimed water is a huge part of the equation. This is something the Department is cognizant of as it goes through the consumptive use permitting process and plant expansions.

Commissioner Curry questioned if there are any injection wells in the County. Mr. Cunningham advised that there is one that is being evaluated.

Mr. Roussel advised that the original agreement with Golden Ocala required them to handle treated effluent disposal; therefore, to meet their requirement they are under design and construction of a deep well injection.

Commissioner Curry stated when he was on the City of Ocala Council the City had 67 injection wells for stormwater.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Ms. Straub advised that there are no regulated Marion County stormwater runoff injection wells, but staff are aware that there are likely free flowing wells within historical/farm communities. She commented on a system that was directly being discharged into a sinkhole near Highway 441 and SE 32nd Street.

Commissioner Zalak questioned if the buffer will be impacted by the improvements planned at the SW WWTP. Mr. Cunningham advised that the footprint would increase, noting based on the preliminary and conceptual designs everything will be moving away from the neighborhood toward the west. He stated the County owns a 10 acre tract around

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the current footprint, which will be where a lot of that construction will reside. There is another parcel not owned by the County further to the west that is part of the buffer, but since it is not owned by the County it is only a buffer until someone decides to develop the property.

General discussion ensued relating to the future layout, design and mitigation of the SW WWTP.

Chairman Bryant advised that moving as much of the facility to the west as possible is the priority.

Commissioner Zalak opined that if any of the property surrounding the facility becomes available for sale the County should consider acquiring the property.

Mr. Cunningham advised that staff has begun to move forward with getting appraisals on surrounding property.

Mr. Cunningham referred to the small binder, which contains detailed information on the proposed projects.

Commissioner Curry expressed his appreciation to Mr. Cunningham for all his hard work.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting thereupon adjourned at 11:38 a.m.

Kathy Bryant, Chairman

Attest:

Gregory C. Harrell, Clerk