

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

July 17, 2025

CALL TO ORDER:

The Marion County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) met in a workshop session in Commission Chambers at 9:01 a.m. on Thursday, July 17, 2025, at the Marion County Governmental Complex located in Ocala, Florida.

INTRODUCTION OF WORKSHOP - CHAIRMAN KATHY BRYANT

Chairman Bryant advised that the workshop was scheduled this morning to discuss the fiscal year (FY) 2025-2026 budget.

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; Commissioner Matthew McClain, District 3; and Commissioner Michelle Stone, District 5. Also present were Clerk Gregory C. Harrell, County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes, Assistant County Administrator (ACA) Angel Roussel, ACA Tracy Straub, ACA Amanda Tart, and Executive Director of Internal Services Mike McCain.

Chairman Bryant commented on an email from July 16, 2025 showing a large increase in the Fine & Forfeiture Fund. She commented on a conversation with Sheriff William "Billy" Woods, noting the increase is not due to his budget. Chairman Bryant advised that she learned the Juvenile Courts are now holding the juveniles committing very serious crimes while they go through the court system, trial and the sentencing is determined. She stated it has caused an increase in costs to the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ); however, there is success relating to the decreased number of violent crimes within our community that are committed by juveniles. Chairman Bryant advised that yesterday going into the budget the County was going to be looking for \$1,200,000.00; however, that number has increased to \$2,200,000.00.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Clerk Gregory C. Harrell stated success in these endeavors sometimes comes with a price tag. He advised that the judge responsible for that docket is very good at what he does and all the powers that be seem to suggest it is working.

OPENING REMARKS – Audrey Fowler, Budget Director

Budget Director Audrey Fowler presented a 6 page handout entitled, "Marion County Board of County Commissioners Budget Adjustments Tentative Budget Fiscal Year 2025-26, Adjustments through July 16, 2025". She referred to the handout and advised that notable changes in the General Fund include a reduction in millage of 0.1000 of a mill (\$3,800,000.00 of revenue), noting the proposed millage is now at 3.3700. Last year's adopted millage was 3.3500. There is approximately \$238,000.00 in Recurring Revenue, which is not quite a hundredth of a mill. Ms. Fowler provided an overview of the cuts

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needed in the General Fund to get back to the 3.3500 mills. She advised that in the Fine & Forfeiture Fund the millage was reduced by 0.0900 to 0.8700 of a mill, leaving \$161,000.00 remaining. Ms. Fowler stated the DJJ bill was at \$2,700,000.00 for the 2025 budget, noting the number DJJ provided yesterday was \$4,300,000.00 or an increase of \$1,600,000.00. She advised that she needs 0.4000 of a mill in Recurring Revenue at a minimum to balance the fund. Ms. Fowler stated there is excess non-recurring revenue of roughly \$900,000.00 that can be used to give the County a year to review the fund, assess where the County is and what is being done to ensure the County is at the appropriate levels. She noted this would be a 1 time option and if the fund balance is not used, it would likely be necessary to add another 0.0200 of a mill.

Chairman Bryant advised that the County is at 0.8700 mills now and questioned if that needs to be 0.8900 mills. Ms. Fowler advised that if the Fund Balance is not used, that is correct. She stated only 95 percent (%) of ad valorem revenues are budgeted; however, the County usually takes in a little more. Ms. Fowler advised that this does retain the Reserve for Cash Carry Forward at 18.5% in that fund, which is enough for the 2 months of recurring operation expenses that had to be transferred to the Constitutional Officers for their expenditure budgets. She stated the County would have an adequate cash flow at that level, but she would not be comfortable going below.

Chairman Bryant questioned what will occur next year if no cuts to the recurring expenditures are identified, noting there are a lot of salaries in the Fine & Forfeiture Fund. Ms. Fowler stated if the cost for the juvenile holding is not reduced next year, then the County would have to make up the difference as far as the revenue or redistribution of how the additional revenue is allocated to those in the fund.

Chairman Bryant questioned if Ms. Fowler can provide some analysis if nothing changes within that fund, based on what has been seen historically with salaries relating to what kind of adjustment the County may have to make next year if the one time revenue is used this year. Ms. Fowler advised that the one time revenue will not be needed for recurring operations. She commented on the Fine & Forfeiture Fund (almost entirely ad valorem tax-based), noting when there is an 8% or 9% increase to the taxable value, usually that equates to roughly 1% less of additional Recurring Revenue. Ms. Fowler advised that if there is 8% to the taxable value, then there will be a 7% increase in Recurring Revenue in the fund, which is how this usually works in this particular fund. She stated if all the entities stay at 6% to 7% increase in their recurring operations, there would be no need for an increase. If the DJJ redistribution of the split is correct and the growth is only 5% to 6% increase in the total budget, there should not be that same issue. Ms. Fowler advised that the split change is what drove the number up, not the DJJ's budget. She stated the DJJ budget only went up 5%; however, the County's share of that budget went up significantly.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Ms. Fowler stated the County went from 13,498 days in the 2024/25 cost share (4.3% of the DJJ budget) to 22,765 days (6.7% of the DJJ budget). She commented on the substantial increase in the utilization percentage, which is how DJJ distributes their budget. Ms. Fowler reiterated that the total DJJ budget increase is realistic.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Ms. Fowler advised that the increase in ad valorem taxable value was 11.9% in the Fine & Forfeiture Fund; however, there was only a 10% increase in Recurring Revenue. She stated the taxable value for the Countywide budget was 11.9%.

Chairman Bryant advised that she foresees those numbers will start to decrease, noting it sounds like there is a chance to cover the recurring next year with just the increase in the taxable value.

Commissioner Zalak questioned what is needed to keep it flat. Ms. Fowler stated between the 2 funds \$1,900,000.00 is required, which includes the additional DJJ costs. She advised that if she does not use the 0.0200 of a mill it would require an additional \$750,000.00 on top of the \$1,900,000.00.

Chairman Bryant requested the Constitutional Officers and others with funding coming out of that fund to review their budget, noting the Board will appreciate anything that can be done. She advised that when the proposed budgets were presented she had a conversation with Sheriff Woods and he committed to bringing his request down in order to ensure there is a balanced budget.

Ms. Fowler advised that Sheriff Woods' increase is 10% over the prior year after the reduction he provided. She stated the Sheriff's budget is found on pages 2 and 3, noting it reflects the reduction of roughly \$9,300,000.00 in revenue to reduce that millage to 3.7200 mills same as the prior year.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Ms. Fowler advised that in the General Fund the Board is looking for \$485,000.00. In the Fine & Forfeiture Fund if the millage is increased by 0.0400 of a mill and uses the \$900,000.00 Fund Balance Carry Forward, the County can be balanced at 0.8700 mills. She stated if the intent is to go the 0.8300 mills an additional \$1,900,000.00 is needed on top of the \$900,000.00 of fund balance. Ms. Fowler advised that if the \$900,000.00 fund balance is not utilized, \$2,700,000.00 will be needed, which is combined with both funds.

Chairman Bryant clarified that to keep the millage rate flat at 0.8500, the County needs an additional \$1,400,000.00 plus the \$900,000 in non-recurring. To remain where the County is now the Board can use just \$900,000.00 of non-recurring and it would be 0.0400 of a mill increase on the Fine & Forfeiture Fund.

Chairman Bryant stated to keep the Fine & Forfeiture rate millage flat at 0.8300 the Board needs \$1,400,000.00 plus the \$900,000.00 in non-recurring. In order to raise that millage by 0.0400 of a mill, which would equal 0.8700 mills the Board only needs the \$900,000.00 in non-recurring. She stated there would be no cuts that need to be made.

Ms. Fowler concurred, noting if the decision was to not use the \$900,000.00 of non-recurring and to not increase the millage by the 0.0400 of a mill it would be \$2,100,000.00 that the County has to find relating to that fund. She clarified that 0.0600 of a mill is the cumulative impact. Ms. Fowler advised that this is why she looked seriously at the level of the Fund Balance reserve and whether it needs to be kept there. She stated using that as a means of balancing it for the purposes of analyzing and looking at what needs to be done next year is a realistic and appropriate means of usage.

Chairman Bryant requested Ms. Fowler identify what the increase will look like to the average tax bill if the Board ends up staying at the 0.8700 of a mill. She clarified that these budgets are not under the Board's purview and are all associated with the courts and public safety. Ms. Fowler stated she will provide the information.

Commissioner Zalak advised that he wants to see what percentages of each budget inside of that are needing to be cut and by whom, so the Board can ask for it and stay flat.

OPENING REMARKS – Jeff Fuller, Court Administrator

Court Administrator Jeff Fuller appeared to review the proposed FY 2025-26 budgets for Cost Center 210, Court Administrator (page 82); Cost Center 211, Court Administration Technology (page 83); Cost Center 213, Circuit Court Judges (page 85); Cost Center 214, Circuit Court Judges Technology (page 87); Cost Center 215, Circuit Court Judges Legal Research (page 89); Cost Center 216, Circuit Court Legal Research Technology (page 90); Cost Center 218, County Court Judges (page 91); Cost Center 219, County Court Judges Technology (page 92); Cost Center 260, Law Library (page 94); Cost Center 264, County Court Summary Claims Mediation (page 98); Cost Center 265, Family Mediation (page 99); Cost Center 266, Pre Trial Release, (page 100); Cost Center 267, Other Circuit Court Juvenile (page 102); Cost Center 280, Teen Court (page 105); Cost Center 282, Drug Court (page 107); Cost Center 283, Drug Court Expansion (page 109); Cost Center 284, Misdemeanor Drug Court (page 111); Cost Center 290, DUI Court (page 114); Cost Center 291, Veterans Court (page 115); Cost Center 292, Mental Health Court (page 117); Cost Center 260, Law Library (page 296); Cost Center 261, Community Legal Services of Mid Florida (page 298); Cost Center 270, Court Innovations Staff Attorney (page 299) and Cost Center 272, Juvenile Alternative Program Drug Court (page 301). Also present were Administrative Circuit Judge Steven Rogers, Circuit Judge Ann Melinda Craggs, General Magistrate Joshua Soileau and Courts Operations Manager Kristina Devaney.

Mr. Fuller expressed appreciation to the Board for their support. He advised that this budget includes a request for a new Family Court Case Manager position to ensure those cases move quickly. He commented on there being so much involved and so many filings relating to these cases, noting a lot of times the filings are pro se. Mr. Fuller advised that without the case managers, at the time of the hearing it is identified that someone was not served, something was not signed the right way, etc., due to individuals filing pro se without understanding what needs to be done.

Mr. Fuller addressed the Law Library, noting there have been nearly 23,000 individuals visiting since opening last April. He opined that it is the best Law Library in the circuit and great to have here in Marion County.

Mr. Fuller stated the Legislature and the Governor have approved at least one new County Judge and it is highly probable there will be a new Circuit Judge in Marion County, noting there are 3 new Circuit Judges for the Circuit. He advised that Chief Judge Gilbert Merritt has not made the final decision yet; however, it is likely one will be in Marion County, resulting in 2 new judges for the County. Mr. Fuller advised that individuals are being moved around in an attempt to find places in the courthouse to put the judges. He stated the next Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) will have a request to build out the shell space on the 3rd floor of the courthouse.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Mr. Fuller provided an overview relating to appointments for the 39 new judges that were approved, noting each appointment takes roughly 90 days once the Judicial Nomination Committee (JNC) is seated by Governor Ron DeSantis. He advised that once the JNC is seated they have 30 days (can be extended to 60 by the Governor) to provide a list of names. The Governor then has 60 days from that date to appoint the judges, which he will do in 7 circuits for 39 different judges.

Mr. Fuller addressed Problem Solving Courts. He introduced Alina Stoothoff, Senior Court Operations Consultant, Problem Solving Courts.

Chairman Bryant commented on the Family Court Case Manager position and questioned if it is located under the Cost Center for Circuit Court Judges, listed as the Court Program Specialist II. Mr. Fuller stated that is correct.

Senior Court Operations Consultant Circuit-Wide Alina Stoothoff, Problem Solving Courts, stated every year Problem Solving Courts perform their cost avoidance. She stated these estimated savings are based on 25% of the costs to house an inmate at the Marion County Jail, noting this is where many of these individuals would end up if not diverted to a treatment program. Ms. Stoothoff advised that the cost avoidance for the last full fiscal year (FY) 2023/24, for an individual that had served 25% of their time (excluding juvenile programs) would have been \$719,651.00; at 50% that figure is \$1,000,439.00. She stated the average success rates for criminal programs are 71%. Ms. Stoothoff advised that Judge Rogers oversees the Prison Diversion Program and extended an invitation to the Board to attend any of their programs and/or graduations to see what they do and to speak with participants. She advised that Teen Courts and juvenile programs have an 88% success rate (not including individuals with violent charges).

Commissioner Curry requested an update relating to the 4th floor renovations.

Circuit Judge Ann Melinda Craggs stated renovations are not complete; however, they are well underway with walls up on the interior and there is a steady flow of work.

Mr. Fuller advised that the majority of that is State Attorney's offices and 1 large courtroom.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Mr. Fuller stated the 3rd floor buildout he spoke of would be utilized for courtrooms and judicial suites. He advised that there is still some empty space that was not budgeted for on the 4th floor that would be used for Court Administration, and then some of Court Administration could be moved from where it is now on the 5th floor, leaving the portion of the 5th floor where Court Administration is outside of the State Attorney's Office for courtrooms in the future.

Mr. Bouyounes advised that staff can provide an update on the 4th floor, noting the 3rd floor is in the 5 Year Plan for year 2027 and subject to appropriation by the Board in the future.

Administrative Circuit Judge Steven Rogers stated the courtroom being built on the 4th floor is designated as reserved for many of the jury trials that will occur. He advised that there are more judges than courtrooms requiring them to share space, which will create more of a need as new judges are added.

Clerk Harrell commented on the good partnership he has with Court Administration, noting he stated he would be their biggest advocate in asking for the Court Program Specialist II position. He advised that it could do things that otherwise may result in individuals in the Clerk's Office having to help the Judiciary even though it probably falls better under the purview of that type of position.

Judge Rogers stated the main emphasis of what is being received from Tallahassee relates to case management and getting cases closed. He advised that they want the State system run like the Federal system; however, there is not adequate staffing to keep up with those standards. Judge Rogers stated they need more individuals to help move the files/cases along.

Clerk Harrell opined that what is being seen in the Judicial system is a direct reflection of the growth in the County, noting they are feeling the effects much the same as County Departments.

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Mr. Fuller advised that the growth between Lake and Marion Counties is close now, but there are almost 5,000 more circuit filings in Marion County than there are in Lake County. Commissioner Zalak questioned whether Court Administration is advocating for the funding to move from the County to the State relating to the General Magistrate position. Mr. Fuller advised that every year it goes to the Legislative Budget Request (LBR) and the positions are requested. He stated this year they requested a lot of Case Managers; however, they gave 39 judges, but no Case Managers or staff to support the judges. Mr. Fuller noted that getting a specific Magistrate in the circuit is very difficult based on how the process is set up now. He stated he will continue to ask, but he does not have any great hope it will happen in the next year or two.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Mr. Fuller stated the request is included in their allocation, noting they are not allowed, as the Circuit, to lobby outside of Tallahassee.

Commissioner Zalak advised that the Board would lobby for the position.

Judge Craggs stated most of the Board was present when she initially came before the Board and requested help, noting the case numbers and case load in Juvenile Dependency had become such that it was problematic that the Circuit was not able to serve that portion of the community. She advised that last year General Magistrate Joshua Soileau handled 1,927 hearings, is on track for 1,714 this year and did 1,811 in 2023. Judge Craggs advised that this is the only way Dependency Judge Stacey Youmans is able to meet her Statutory mandates.

Chairman Bryant requested Judge Craggs provide information relating to the return on investment (ROI) for the General Magistrate, dollar wise.

Commissioner Zalak commented on information that can be provided so staff can compile a package to tell the County's Representatives what is being done. He stated if Judge Craggs is available on Marion County Day, perhaps she can attend along with the Board. Commissioner McClain commented on adding this to the County's Legislative Priorities.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Mr. Fuller advised that Judge Craggs can advise of the things that are happening here in the County. He provided an overview of the process relating to funding General Magistrates throughout the State of Florida, noting the difficulty in securing one of those individuals over other Circuits.

Commissioner Zalak stated that the Board can possibly present the issue in a different way, noting these Courts are helping families reunite and exit the system. He opined that on the cost diversion the Courts must implement every day has to be incredible. Commissioner Zalak advised that the story should be told, noting the County has an effective model that can be repeated across the State.

Mr. Fuller expressed appreciation towards the Board for funding the Magistrate position until they can get one from the State. He stated this is not about moving cases, it is dealing with families and getting kids out of environments that are terrible.

Commissioner Zalak opined that months or even longer is too long to wait in foster care when children could be adopted. He commented on the need to fix what is broken, especially when there are family and people around that are willing to adopt those children instantly.

Commissioner Stone commented on the cost of the General Magistrate being covered by the Board, noting there is no burden to the State. She advised that the only way to make the State recognize the need is to take the funding away.

Mr. Fuller advised that when the State questions the number of Magistrates the Circuit has, they do not report County funded Magistrates.

Chairman Bryant questioned if it would be better to report the Magistrate to the State, but indicate that the County is funding that position. Mr. Fuller advised that it is possibly better to report; however, it may be too nuanced.

Commissioner Stone stated the Board can help tell this story.

Chairman Bryant expressed gratitude for the work performed by Court Administration on a daily basis.

It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to the Court Administration budget.

OPENING REMARKS – Tamara Fleischhaker, Interim CEO Ocala/Marion County Chamber and Economic Partnership

Ocala/Marion County Chamber and Economic Partnership (CEP) Interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Tamara Fleischhaker appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2025-26 budget for Cost Center 150, Ocala Marion County Chamber and Economic Partnership (page 51). Also present was Chief Growth Officer Heather Schubert.

Ms. Fleischhaker commented on the CEP's partnership with the Board over the last 13 years. She stated the CEP is one of 3 finalists for Chamber of the Year again, noting they brought that trophy home just 5 years ago. Ms. Fleischhaker advised that part of the very stringent application process is related to partnerships with entities in the community. She stated a couple of the topics are related to the Sales Tax process and the Catalyst Fund, which is the Community Financial Development Institution (CDFI) that the CEP has started. Ms. Fleischhaker commented on the assistance provided by the Board relating to the CDFI with funding for matching grants, noting they have been able to provide nano loans to businesses. She addressed the Silver Springs Shores (SSS) incubator, which is under the purview of Chief Growth Officer Heather Schubert. Ms. Fleischhaker stated this is an underserved community and the ability to bring programming there is critical. She stated the Chamber has been able to assist over 130 individuals during this year. Ms. Fleischhaker commented on the Catalyst Fund, noting there was a tremendous event (matchmaker lending event) where over 80 businesses/individuals who came to meet with 16 finance institutions. She advised that the goal with the CDFI is to ensure the path is being built for individuals to build their credit and credit history, and to be able to get into traditional banking systems. Ms. Fleischhaker stated this bridges that gap.

Commissioner Zalak questioned how many businesses in SSS are part of the incubator and how that project is working. Ms. Fleischhaker advised that the capacity is 6 businesses, noting there are currently 5 businesses and there is an application for the 6th location so the facility will end up at 100%.

Chief Growth Officer Heather Schubert, CEP, stated there is a staffing company, a certified public accountant (CPA) and a couple of other service related industries as well. She advised that the CEP hosts a lot of programming in that area including a Fast Trac class, Ice House Entrepreneur Mindset Course training and more events are being held at that facility, noting the training room can hold approximately 20 individuals. Ms. Schubert stated County staff is assisting to help get the word out in SSS to be able to make that more of a community environment out there.

Commissioner Zalak questioned if the CEP is working with the Municipal Services Department relating to holding a bigger event there. Ms. Schubert advised that the CEP has not done so yet.

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Commissioner Curry stated he believes the Chamber is the longest continuous operating entity in Marion County. Ms. Fleischhaker advised that the organization was founded in 1887.

Commissioner Curry commented on the way the CEP started, noting a lot of businesses and individuals were members and invested years of their life to perpetuate that program. He requested someone to go down in the basement and get all the pictures and other history and bring it back and celebrate it in conjunction with the CEP's successes.

Ms. Ms. Fleischhaker advised that she has been with the organization for 19 years and is the individual that maintains the file of past Chairs, noting the organization used to do events that included past Chairs to celebrate that history. She commented on the data and documentation that was kept so well by predecessors.

Commissioner Zalak stated he will be reaching out, noting the Board will need the CEP's assistance when celebrating the Country's 250th birthday next year.

It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to the CEP budget.

OPENING REMARKS – Jim Couillard, Parks and Recreation Director

Parks and Recreation Director Jim Couillard appeared to review the proposed FY 2025-26 budget for Cost Center 360, Parks and Recreation (page 157); Cost Center 361, Other Recreation Programs (page 162); Cost Center 363, Belleview Sportsplex (page 164); Cost Center 362, Parks and Recreation Fees (page 325); Cost Center 370, Southeastern Livestock Pavilion (SELP) (page 167); and Cost Center 415, Marion County Airport (page 275).

Chairman Bryant expressed appreciation for the Parks and Recreation Advisory Council (PRAC) members present in the audience today.

Parks & Recreation Director Jim Couillard noted with him today are Assistant Parks and Recreation Director Kelsey Mears; Administrative Services Coordinator (ASC) Laura Cooper; SELP Manager Holly Castell; and Community Engagement Coordinator Sara Lambert.

Mr. Couillard expressed appreciation towards the Board relating to a benefit for Tom Allman. He advised that Wise Guys day is July 30, 2025, and 20% of proceeds that day will go towards the benefit, noting the next day, July 31, 2025, is the big rib sale at the SELP that staff have been pushing online.

Mr. Couillard commented on the PRAC members and their contributions.

Chairman Bryant stated she received a message from Ms. Thorpe who expressed her sincerest apologies for not being here this morning due to a prior commitment.

Mr. Couillard provided an overview of the Department's FY 25 projects and improvements including: 1) Heagy-Burry boat ramp is well under construction and expected to be completed by January, 2026; 2) Rotary Sportsplex synthetic turf project is also well underway and has an expected completion date of October, 2025; 3) Reddick Park is nearly completed with minor aspects being finalized by contractors, which will be followed by the work completed in-house; 4) the southwest gate at Veterans Parks is nearly completed; 5) The Greenville Aviation Monument is in place and ready for site improvements; and 6) getting the grants and funding lined up for the Taxiway Project at the Airport is a huge undertaking and something the team is very proud of. He advised that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has agreed to move their funding allocation for the next taxiway (Bravo) from 90% to 95% and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) match will be 4%, which is a sign of the working relationships the

Department has created and continues to nurture in the effort to make X35 thrive. Mr. Couillard noted the tremendous effort that Assistant Parks and Recreation Director Kelsey Mears put in to secure the grants and develop amazing relationships with those teams. Mr. Couillard appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2024-2025 budget for Cost Center 360, Parks and Recreation (page 157). This is the Department's main Cost Center in the General Fund, noting there is an overall increase in this fund of 5.1% from FY 25. He stated the Department has assessed and identified its current workload and determined the following position, listed in the Operational Plan, is a specific need. Mr. Couillard advised that the Department is requesting the reclassification of the Administrative Services Coordinator to Administrative Manager position, noting over the years the roles and responsibilities assigned to this position have increased. He stated organizational changes, new processes, workflows and approvals have also grown. Mr. Couillard advised that reclassification is also part of the Department's recognition of the performance and the potential of the team member currently in the ASC role. The reclassification has a budget impact of \$4,617.00.

Mr. Couillard stated the Department's Contract Services line item 534101, includes an increase of \$7,460.00 to account for an increase in Marion County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) Details (\$2,950.00) at Carney Island, increased Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) water services (\$2,636.00) and an increase in courier services (\$4,800.00), which is used to transport funds from various locations back to the office and eventually to the Clerk's Office. He advised that line item 534101, Communication Services, increased by \$9,041.00 to align cell phone services and to cover increases in the SMARSH license (\$4,609.00). A significant notable increase the Department is showing is the \$17,380.00 for electrical services provided to the park system by Duke Energy. Mr. Couillard stated line item 546101, Repairs/Maintenance - Buildings and Grounds, has an increase of \$30,368.00, which includes sports field lighting replacements in the amount of \$20,000.00; playground element replacements in the amount of \$6,108.00; court restriping increase in the amount of \$4,095.00; parking lot repairs in the amount of \$8,000.00; and laser grading of baseball fields in the amount of \$5,000.00. He advised that the increase of \$13,824.00 in Computer Software (line item 552106) is to cover Monday.com. Other increases include Software and Operating Supplies (line item 552108), which has an increase of \$17,449.00 to align the Department's budget spending based on FY 25 adjustments and to account for shifting expenses from one line item to another per the Finance Department and also to cover the costs of additional shirts for summer campers.

In response to Commissioner McClain. Mr. Couillard stated line item 582101, Aid to Private Organizations, is all going to Fort King for events, flag replacements and some of their programs.

Mr. Couillard appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2025-2026 budget for Cost Center 361, Other Recreation Programs (page 162). He noted there is an overall increase of 3% in Personnel and a 5.2% reduction relating to Operating Costs. This is funded through the Federal Secure Rural Schools Acts program and there are no significant changes in this budget. Mr. Couillard advised that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is seeing an increase in Secure Rural School funding and have some funding the Department wants to assist them with relating to wayfinding signage and things to help visitors. He stated the requests are for Professional Services that can be handled by the team, noting it is the beginning of a good relationship to assist them in marketing their new recreational programming out in the forest.

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Commissioner Zalak commented on working with the Department on this initiative, noting he is aware that individuals are frustrated with the signage/trail identification.

Mr. Couillard appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2025-2026 budget for Cost Center 363, Belleview Sportsplex (page 164). There is an overall increase in Personnel of 3.7% to account for merit increases and cost of living adjustments (COLA), and an increase in Operating of 11.8% to address continual maintenance needs at this park. In Repairs/Maintenance – Buildings and Grounds (line item 546101) there is an increase of \$12,360.00 to laser grade fields and \$9,420.00 to continue with lighting repairs. He advised that these budget line items were put together in January, 2025, and since then the Department has spent approximately \$60,000.00 on just lighting repairs which include new panels, new conduit and cabling, new ballasts, etc. Mr. Couillard stated the Department can continue to make small repairs at this park for now, noting there is a Parks and Recreation Funding Workshop coming in August and staff will be presenting ideas to address all of the maintenance needs at the park over a number of years.

Mr. Couillard appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2025-2026 budget for Cost Center 715, Parks and Recreation Capital (page 198), which has no changes.

Mr. Couillard appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2025-2026 budget for Cost Center 362, Parks and Recreation Fees Fund (page 323). This fund generates approximately \$1,900,000.00 annually; however, staff have not reconciled revenues for this current year as the Department is just getting into the heavier revenue generating months, especially at KP Hole. There is an overall increase to Personnel of 2%, bringing Personnel up to \$860,000.00 in FY 26. He stated Contract Services (534101) has an increase of \$12,185.00 to cover MCSO rise in detail for patrols on the Rainbow River, at KP Hole and along the roadways. The Department's Machinery & Equipment request is \$127,351.00 lower than last year due to fewer pieces of equipment being replaced or purchased, noting within that line item there are 2 replacement pickup trucks and 1 sport utility vehicle (SUV) from Building Safety, 3 replacement trailers, 1 new trailer, 1 replacement mower and 1 replacement side-by-side.

Mr. Couillard appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2025-2026 budget for Cost Center 370, SELP (page 167). He stated overall Personnel increases in the fund are 3%, including merit and COLA adjustments. Operating Supplies (line item 552108) there is a request for \$6,035.00 for a new steel water tank for use manicuring the arena floors. In Machinery & Equipment (line item 546101) there is an increase of \$18,933.00 for the replacement of a 72" side-by-side mower.

Commissioner Curry questioned whether the recreational vehicle (RV) spaces are used on a regular basis or only when there are events. Mr. Couillard stated they are mainly used for events right now; however, staff are seeing an uptick of individuals using it generally.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Mr. Couillard advised that making it into more of a revenue positive facility is the plan, noting the Department has been working on major marketing plans with the Community Engagement team and Public Relations (PR).

Commissioner McClain questioned what else is planned in relation to the RV spaces. Mr. Couillard stated the Department did not make the cut for funding by Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) this year, but will be reapplying. He advised that the plan was to use the front end of the auditorium for new parking, which has always been an issue at that facility. Mr. Couillard stated staff are looking at a bath/shower house for the RV campground, noting it is a major benefit to help the

campers at that site. He advised that otherwise, the Department is looking to increase the aesthetics and adding shade trees to help replant the wooded area.

Mr. Couillard appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2025-2026 budget for Cost Center 715, Parks and Recreation Capital (page 198), noting there are no major changes. He stated the \$1,000,000.00 grant staff applied for was for the enhancement gateway project to be used to line the entryway and for new parking; however, the County did not receive the grant and will be reapplying.

Mr. Couillard appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2025-2026 budget for Cost Center 415, Marion County Airport (page 275). He advised that the overall budget increases in this fund are 8.6% which includes: 1) Utilities Services (line item 543101) of \$7,990.00 based on Duke Energy increases; 2) while taxiway alpha is underway (kickoff was held on June 24), the next project is Taxiway Bravo and design for the rehabilitation for runway 5/23. Both projects are funded through FAA and FDOT, with FAA giving the County 95% funding for Taxiway Bravo, making the County's match just 1%.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Mr. Couillard stated when planes land on the runway they have to either turn around and back taxi off or continue to taxi down the runway to get off the runway, allowing other planes to safely land. He advised that the new taxi way will allow planes to get off the runway more quickly while opening the infield for more development. Mr. Couillard stated the parameters for the maximum development of the runway and operation of the airport have been set, noting there will not be any more runways built out there; however, everything outside of the safety zones and clearance zones around the taxiway and runways is developable. He commented on the upcoming opportunity to get additional businesses at the airport, noting the Department will be looking at extending infrastructure (water, sewer, data, power) underneath the taxiways to make some of the site build ready. Mr. Couillard advised that right now there are a lot of rotor-powered planes; however, there are a lot of corporate Lear jets coming in to X35 as well. He stated the long term plan is to move the fuel farm, noting it is a heavy lift on the County due to the lack of matching dollars. Mr. Couillard advised that some bigger planes are able to land at X35; however, the runway needs to be extended if planes carrying horses are going to land at the airport. The airport is limited in relation to big planes as there is no tower like the Ocala Airport.

Chairman Bryant questioned the revenue the Department has seen from leases and gas sales. Assistant Parks and Recreation Director Kelsey Mears advised that she does not have the data relating to gas sales; however, so far the Department has \$650,000.00 or 63% based on where the operation normally is prior to the end of the FY. The previous FY was \$906,000.00 for combined leases and rent.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Ms. Mears stated the budget transfer to Parks and Recreation Fees Fund in the amount of \$35,000.00 is to repay for the t-hangars the Department did in 2022. She advised that she could provide figures relating to how much longer the airport will be paying that back.

In response to Commissioner McClain, Ms. Mears advised that the Department takes in the funds from developers who agree to pay into the tree mitigation fund, noting when the budget gets adopted the remaining funds will be moved forward to the next year. She clarified that the Department does not budget dollars in that fund due to it being revenue based.

Mr. Couillard advised that there is no calculation performed relating to the tree mitigation fund due to a lack of consistency.

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Ms. Mears advised that there is a Budget Amendment Resolution (BAR) on the next Agenda, noting \$444,000.00 will be moved into the tree mitigation fund since it has been paid by the developer(s).

Commissioner Curry expressed appreciation towards the PRAC members, noting they spend a lot of time on behalf of the County. He commented on serving on that Board during the COVID-19 pandemic, noting the Board did not get the opportunity to make their feeling known or provide a recommendation to the Board in regard to important topics/decisions.

Chairman Bryant stated when there is adequate time to do those things, the Board does accommodate that. She advised that their decisions were being made very fast due to the information the Board was receiving. Chairman Bryant stated the decision was made in coordination with Parks and Recreation Director Couillard and his team, the County Administrator and Emergency Management. She advised that in the interest of public safety, there is not time to wait and get the PRAC Board together to gain their input.

It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to the Parks and Recreation budget.

OPENING REMARKS – Crystal McCazzio, Cooperative Extension Director

Cooperative Extension Director Crystal McCazzio appeared to review the proposed FY 2025-26 budget for Cost Center 372, Cooperative Extension Services (Page 170).

Ms. McCazzio advised that the Florida Cooperative Extension Service's mission is to partner with local communities to provide research-based education to foster healthy people, a resilient environment and a strong economy. She stated the Department is here to support residents with trusted education and resources in areas such as agriculture, horticulture, natural resources, youth development, healthy living, financial management and community development. Ms. McCazzio stated the partnership with the University of Florida (UF) empowers individuals, families and communities to improve their quality of life while creating a better tomorrow for Marion County residents. She provided an overview of the Department's 7 initiatives and major achievements. Ms. McCazzio advised that over the past year Marion County volunteers donated 33,890 hours valued at \$1,071,626.47, which is critical in extending the reach and impact of the Departments' programs.

Ms. McCazzio stated the Department is requesting a salary adjustment for FY 2026 to support agent growth through the Extension promotion process, which is only awarded if agents are successful in areas such as program impact, contributions to the field, and professional competence. She advised that Operating expenses are essential for maintaining daily operations and ensuring the effective delivery of services. They cover costs such as utilities, office supplies, software, and professional development, providing staff with the tools and resources needed to serve the community efficiently. These expenses also support maintenance, enable adaptability to community needs, and help sustain high levels of productivity and impact. Overall, the proposed operating costs have decreased slightly with minor increases in the following areas: 1) Travel and Per Diem (line item 540101) due to rising travel costs associated with agents being expected to present their work as part of the promotion process; 2) Rentals and Leases (line item 544101) due to an increase per the copier lease agreement based on the annual average amount of copies made; and 3) Repairs and Maintenance (line item 546101) which is affected because of the need for: a) tree work at the 4-H farm and demonstration garden to remove dead, damaged, and overhanging limbs to reduce the risk of injury or property

damage; b) fence and gate replacement at the 4-H farm for the remaining sections of fence that are not structurally sound due to deterioration, but are critical to the safety and security of the property; and c) flooring replacement in two offices where the existing floors have become worn and odor-affected, and new flooring would improve functionality and appearance. Ms. McCazzio advised that a capital expense for Machinery and Equipment (line item 564101) is requested to replace an unreliable 2007 truck with a newer, high-mileage model being transferred from another Department. For Extension faculty and staff, dependable vehicles are essential for reaching rural areas, attending outreach events, transporting materials, and responding to time-sensitive needs. She addressed Grants and Aid, noting the aid to private organizations (line item 582101) provides assistance to the Southeastern Youth Fair and the Marion County 4-H Youth Development Program. These programs are critical because they play a vital role in building stronger, healthier communities. These youth development organizations equip young people with essential life skills, leadership abilities, and opportunities for civic engagement, all of which contribute to their long-term success. Supporting these programs helps reduce risky behaviors, improves academic outcomes, and prepares a future workforce that is responsible and community minded. Additionally, investing in youth today leads to lower public costs in the future by promoting positive development, reducing crime, and fostering economic stability. Marion County's support demonstrates a commitment to the well-being and growth of its next generation. In conclusion, Extension Services contributes to the overall health of the County's people, environment, and economy with the work being done to address industries such as agriculture, horticulture, and natural resources while meeting the needs of youth, families, and communities. The impacts of Marion County's agricultural industry on the economy are great, with a market value of products sold of \$220,000,000.00 according to the 2022 Census of Agriculture. Additionally, Extension agents secure valuable resources to support County programs through grants, research partnerships, and financial contributions from local businesses, organizations, and individuals who recognize and value the impact of the Department's work.

Commissioner McClain commented on leasing a copier at a cost of \$1,000.00 per month and questioned if it would be better to purchase. Mr. Bouyounes stated all the Departments are leasing, noting he can have Procurement Services Director Susan Olsen provide an update on the program and why it is the best way.

Procurement Services Director Susan Olsen advised that the County began leasing a long time ago.

Chairman Bryant passed the gavel to Commissioner Zalak who assumed the Chair.

Commissioner Bryant out at 10:31 a.m.

Ms. Olsen stated Document Technologies is a local company that provides a very good price and free service on the machines. She advised that in the past the service on the machines was overwhelming due to the frequency with which they breakdown, especially the high use ones. Ms. Olsen stated there is a lot of maintenance work in addition to the repairs. She commented on performing a cost comparison relating to leasing vs. purchasing.

Commissioner McClain advised that if it has not been done in the last few years, he would like to see a comparison.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Ms. Olsen stated in the past there was a separate maintenance agreement with another company and they were being paid something comparable to a retainer to come in when needed.

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Chairman Zalak requested Ms. Olsen see if it is better to have a full-time equivalent (FTE). It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to the Cooperative Extension Services budget.

Commissioner Bryant returned at 10:34 a.m.

Chairman Zalak returned the gavel to Commissioner Bryant who resumed the Chair.

OPENING REMARKS – Tony Cunningham, Utilities Department Director

Utilities Department Director Tony Cunningham appeared to review the proposed FY 2025-26 budgets for Cost Center 440, Utilities Management (page 653); Cost Center 442, Utilities Water System (page 659); Cost Center 445, Utilities Wastewater System (page 665); and Cost Center 448, Utilities Capital Construction (page 670). Also present were Utilities Deputy Director Joshua Kramer and Utilities Fiscal Manager John Corneilson.

Utilities Director Tony Cunningham stated the Department is proposing a budget that meets the mission of the County and the mission of the utility. He advised that the primary elements of that mission are: 1) provide safe reliable service to the community for water and wastewater services; 2) meet or exceed regulatory requirements; 3) maintain adequate system capacity to serve current and future customer needs; 4) integrating with development and ensuring systems are built in a way the County can maintain in perpetuity; 5) executing the five-year Utility CIP to support the infrastructure; and 6) promote operational efficiency, fiscal responsibility and excellent customer service. Mr. Cunningham commented on growth in the community, noting the need to have infrastructure in place to serve individuals. He advised that to get ahead of the growth the Department is looking to upgrade plants and things of that nature. Mr. Cunningham stated over the next 5 to 10 years, the Department will be building a few large plants that will serve that growth as it comes. He advised that the Department has a good business model and is in a good place financially. Mr. Cunningham stated there are revenues that meet all of the Department's operational expenses on a regular basis. Every year the Department performs a Rate Sufficiency Analysis. The analysis showed the rates do not need to change for next year in order to meet all of the submitted budget. He advised that the Department has to build capacity while maintaining the existing infrastructure, noting much of the Capital CIP budget is to replace infrastructure or extend the life of that infrastructure going forward. Mr. Cunningham stated the Department is seeing a significant rise in costs in the utility industry including materials, chemicals, labor, bids, etc. He advised of staffing adjustments to accommodate the growth and change in the County's systems. Mr. Cunningham stated the budget for FY 2026 has an overall increase of approximately \$2,000,000.00 from the previous budget, which is a 5.8% increase. The drivers of that include regular salaries and adjustments, as well as a request from the Department for 7 additional FTEs and operating expenses. The Department uses a lot of electricity to treat water and Duke Energy received a significant increase earlier this year through the Public Safety Commission (PSC) primarily to recover funds from the hurricanes in the fall. He advised that the increase is impacting the Department's budget by roughly \$500,000.00, noting Utilities is reallocating funds in this year's budget as the change has already been implemented. Mr. Cunningham commented on increases relating to the renewal of the County's consumptive use permit (CUP) and water use permit (WUP), noting they are critical. He advised that the Department obtains a permit through the State of Florida to withdraw water from the ground to provide to its customers. Mr. Cunningham stated it has become significantly more challenging when looking at water resources, specifically in northern Florida. He advised that this requires the

Department to demonstrate that the withdrawals of that water are not significantly impacting natural systems. Mr. Cunningham stated the County is attempting to secure a 20 year permit, noting it is setting up the Department for the future. He addressed water tank maintenance, noting there are a lot of water plants in the County's system that have storage tanks. The Department is always evaluating those to determine which can potentially be taken offline to achieve a more centralized system. Mr. Cunningham stated in addition to that the Department is maintaining those systems and has received some feedback from regulators regarding some of the conditions of those allowing the Department to focus on additional efforts. He commented on the increase in the cost of chemicals used to treat water, noting there are not many other options. There are additional efforts relating to odor control and the chemicals used for that are an additional cost from the previous year. Mr. Cunningham commented on personnel expenses including salary adjustments, COLA, merit and benefits for the Department's approximately 130 employees. In addition, the Department is proposing to add 2 Meter Reader positions that will be more of an entry level that will free up the field technicians that are currently performing this function. Another addition is an Environmental Compliance Officer. He advised that as the utility has grown so have the number of permits the County has, the number of requirements in those permits and environmental regulation in general. The Department has struggled with some aspects of keeping on top of all of those and this position would focus on working with plants and permits ensuring consistency with those requirements. Mr. Cunningham stated there are 2 individuals that work on the billing system and customer service and as the Department has grown, they have tracked the staff-to-customer ratios, call volumes, wait times to establish the proper customer service interaction needed and what is the expectational level of service (LOS). He advised that the Department is at a point where it needs to take the next step in that direction. One of the positions is a combination looking at permitting as well. Mr. Cunningham stated customer service includes those parties that utilize the Department's service and also the private/public partnership with development. He commented on ensuring the Department can process those permits in a timely manner and get the system built properly. The next positions are the Construction Inspector and Construction Coordinator. He advised that as the Department works to shift more work internally making sure the pipes and structures being built are being inspected efficiently, the Department has seen higher and higher demand and need in the construction area. Mr. Cunningham commented on the advantages associated with an internal inspector, noting there is a cost savings, they know the system and there is an employee within the utility learning the system. The last position is a Business Technologist position that has historically been a 0.6 FTE position due to that individual that was doing the role wanting to work part-time. That individual has retired, and the Department is proposing the position be full-time.

Mr. Cunningham requested a revision to the Department's submitted budget relating to the Construction Technician position. He advised that this is a newer position that did not have historical turnover data. Mr. Cunningham stated there is now data; however, there are no Construction Technicians within the Department. He advised that the position is very similar to that of a Field Technician and he is recommending an adjustment of the pay grades to be near the Field Technician positions.

Mr. Cunningham commented on a very detailed analysis of the Department's CIP presented on April 28, 2025, noting it supports the overall mission of the utility. He stated the Stantec Rate Sufficiency Analysis came back with a no base rate increase

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recommended for customers. The report did state as the Department moves forward implementing the CIP there will come a time in the future when there will be a need to make rate adjustments.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Mr. Cunningham advised that the report indicates the adjustment would need to occur next year. He stated it is predicated on several things including the backlog in CIP projects. He opined that he anticipates the projects being pushed out to future years. Mr. Cunningham advised that the Department is conservative relating to several factors including growth dropping off rapidly and there being no capital charge revenue. If that happens it may drive up that base rate increase; however, staff does not foresee that in the next year. He clarified that FY 2027 is when the rate increase would occur, but it is predicated on the conservative assumptions all lining up.

Fiscal Manager John Corneilson, Utilities, commented on growth, noting it has been greater over the last 5 years than the conservative 2% the Department had forecasted.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Mr. Corneilson stated the Department is still forecasting 2%.

In response to Commissioner Stone, Mr. Cunningham confirmed that this is an Enterprise Fund and no dollars are coming out of the General Fund.

Commissioner Zalak stated the new positions are roughly \$220,000.00 and the personnel increase is approximately \$1,300,000.00. He expressed concern relating to the level of expenditure. Commissioner Zalak commented on the personnel costs leading to a rate increase, noting the capital is decreasing significantly.

Mr. Cunningham advised that relating to the positions the Department is recommending, several of them are to reduce costs. These are internal costs, but some offset other costs. The Meter Reader position is an example of a higher skilled individual with a higher salary performing this function. The new position provides an entry level position that is more accurately priced to the labor they are providing.

Commissioner Zalak commented on the increases to existing personnel, noting if there are multiple years like that it will drive the Department and the County into significant decisions.

Mr. Cunningham stated the COLA and merit increases are a contributing factor as are the pay grade salary adjustments made in April of last year, which is reflected.

Mr. Corneilson advised that it represents approximately \$450,000.00 of the increase for next year.

Commissioner Stone expressed concern relating to the turnover the Department has experienced. She opined that there is a public safety issue associated with Utilities and the work they do, noting she supports the proposed budget. Commissioner Stone stated she hopes the Department reaches a level that allows them to retain staff.

It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to the Utilities budget.

OPENING REMARKS – Mark Johnson, Solid Waste Director

Solid Waste Director Mark Johnson appeared to review the Department's proposed budgets for FY 2025-26 for Cost Center 423, Solid Waste Disposal (page 639); Cost Center 425, Solid Waste Collection (page 644); Cost Center 427, Solid Waste Recycling (page 648). Also present was Solid Waste Fiscal Manager Kassi Pederson.

Fiscal Manager Kassi Pederson, Solid Waste, advised that there are 2 major changes relating to revenue for the upcoming fiscal year. The first change is the Solid Waste Assessment for residential units, currently set at \$87.00 that will be adjusted to \$215.00

per unit. This increase is anticipated to generate \$20,000,000.00 in additional annual revenue, contributing to the long-term financial stability of the Solid Waste Fund. Ms. Pederson stated the next major change in revenue is related to landfill gate rates and fees. To maintain cost recovery and market competitiveness, the Solid Waste Department's recent financial analysis has called for a three-phase increase in landfill gate rates and fees. The second phase of these increases will be implemented on October 1, 2025. Based on tonnage and trends from FY24 and FY25, the anticipated budget impact for FY 26 is an increase of approximately \$2,000,000.00.

Mr. Johnson appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2025-2025 budget for Cost Center 423, Solid Waste Disposal (page 639). He advised that among the Department's 3 budgets they are personnel neutral and are moving positions between budgets; however, for totality Solid Waste is neutral as it relates to the number of positions. Mr. Johnson stated for the Disposal budget the Department is proposing to reclassify an Accounting Specialist to a Solid Waste Technician, noting the Accounting Specialist position has been vacant for some time. It is the Department's goal to phase out a maintenance contract valued at approximately \$156,000.00 and start performing some of those functions with that technician, resulting in a fiscal impact of roughly \$5,600.00. He advised that the next item relates to reclassifying and reallocating some of the Department's Solid Waste Collection drivers out of Cost Center 423 to Solid Waste Equipment Operators, noting the change has an economic impact of approximately \$4,000.00. Mr. Johnson stated taking truck driving positions that are not currently filled, moving them into Heavy Equipment Operators aligns the Department with the next phase of operations and provides flexibility moving forward. The next change transitions a Solid Waste Supervisor to a Solid Waste Project Manager, which will assist with managing all of the upcoming CIP and other various projects within the Department. That has an economic impact of roughly \$3,500.00. The next change reclassifies the Solid Waste Operations Manager to the Solid Waste Assistant Director. Mr. Johnson advised that the Department has repeatedly posted, interviewed and failed to fill the Solid Waste Operations Manager role, noting the last round made it clear compensation was the driving factor. He stated by adjusting up some of the standards, but also adjusting up the compensation he is hoping the Department can fill that role with a quality candidate. Mr. Johnson advised that the final reclassification for Solid Waste Disposal relates to the Solid Waste Fiscal Manager position, noting the position would change from a pay grade of 112 to 114 aligning that position with other like Departments. That has an economic impact of approximately \$5,400.00.

Ms. Pederson addressed the Operating portion of the budget for Cost Center 423, Solid Waste Disposal, noting there is a decrease in the proposed compared to the previous adopted budget. There are several specific account lines that did increase including line item 534140, Contract Serv Out of County Disposal, relating to the hauling service to Heart of Florida (HOF). She stated for next year the Department is projecting a 3.5% volume increase (215,159 tons). The contracted rate is good until October, 2027. Ms. Pederson advised that there is an increase in line item 543102, Utility Services Waste Disposal, which is tied to the projected 3.5% volume increase in tonnage. This is the County's prepaid airspace for HOF and although it is prepaid, the Department still has to recognize this as an expense in its budget, which will result in an approximate \$65,000.00 increase. She advised of 2 attachments included in the Departments presentation that contain graphs relating to consumption and airspace forecasting at HOF.

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In response to Chairman Bryant, Ms. Pederson stated the Department does not necessarily recapture that cost on its balance sheet for assets and liabilities. She advised that the asset of prepaid airspace will go down the same amount as the total expenses for the County's usage for the year.

Ms. Fowler stated in the fund there is a draw-down balance for this on page 640 under line item 599306, Reserve for Prepaid Landfill, noting she tracks the actuals from the prior year and what Ms. Pederson has budgeted in the following year, which allows Ms. Fowler to maintain a declining balance on a sheet that is adjusted every year once she has the real actuals and negates it to prevent it from hitting the fund balance expenses anywhere else. Ms. Fowler clarified that this is neutralized in the budget.

In response to Commissioner McClain, Ms. Fowler stated the figure in the Reserve for Prepaid Landfill are actual dollars that were already paid, noting it reflects what remains of the prepaid landfill. She advised that she recognizes both the revenues and the expenses, so it is negated and otherwise does not impact the rate, revenues or the remainder of the expenses in the Solid Waste Fund.

Commissioner Zalak commented on the way the landfill closure is recalculated every 5 years. He questioned if there can be a change relating to how the closure is recalculated once the expansion is completed. Ms. Fowler stated Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) performs that calculation.

Ms. Pederson advised that it was recalculated this past year due to the additional capacity the Department found on the property for the landfill, noting the County's costs went down. Mr. Johnson clarified that there is a cost estimate for closure that is divided among the number of tons available to get the cost per ton. He advised of a survey that was carried out, which identified additional air space that existed giving the Department approximately 3 years. Mr. Johnson stated this reduced how quickly the Department had to accrue the total balance for closure.

Commissioner Zalak advised that the Department is still having to absorb a significant amount of funds.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Mr. Johnson stated the Department has begun budgeting off of a 5-year average rather than individual years, so the Department is more consistent in its budgeting.

Ms. Pederson advised of an increase in line item 552106, Computer Software, due to a software project for the scale house that was originally going to be a CIP project. She stated recent changes to the CIP threshold now require it to be budgeted as an operating expense instead.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Mr. Bouyounes advised that the new threshold is \$250,000.00 to qualify to be included in the CIP.

Ms. Fowler stated it was realized that the cost of a lot of the projects was just over \$100,000.00 and the number of projects in the CIP was becoming unmanageable for things that were crossing the threshold, but were not long duration projects.

Ms. Pederson addressed line item 564101, Machinery and Equipment, noting the Department is proposing an increase for a wheel loader to replace an aged asset. Currently the machine has roughly 9,500 hours and best practice is to replace it at 10,000 hours of usage, which the Department anticipates reaching at the beginning of the next FY. The total estimated cost is \$650,000.00. She advised that the Department is requesting a telehandler, noting it is like a more versatile forklift. Ms. Pederson stated standard forklifts are beneficial in confined spaces and on smooth surfaces; however, the telehandler will provide additional functionality in landfill operations and can be utilized on

rough terrain. This is a replacement of an aging asset (forklift) with a total estimated cost of \$282,000.00. There is a request for a tire derimmer, which is new innovative equipment with a total cost of \$30,000.00. She advised that the Department currently receives tires on rims, which makes them heavier and more expensive to dispose of due to disposal costs being based on weight. Investing in a tire derimmer will allow Solid Waste to remove the rims, recycle the metal for revenue, and reduce tire disposal costs due to the lower outbound weight. Ms. Pederson stated the Department performed a financial analysis and determined the equipment will pay for itself within 12 months. The final item related to switches and licenses for wireless access points upgrade, which was a project from IT that the Department was advised to include in its budget.

Mr. Johnson provided a brief overview of the Departments CIP, noting what the Board is seeing for FY 26 is the planning dollars to relocate Solid Waste's administrative building, maintenance facility and drivers' breakroom. This includes all the infrastructure that is in place and must be moved for landfill expansion. He advised that additional funds were added to the current project for transfer station push wall & floor repairs in anticipation of other costs that may come in with that project. Mr. Johnson commented on the Phase 1 and 2 engineering expansion where the Department is doing Carry Forward plus \$1,500,000.00, which gives the permitting and design functionality to actually have the project constructed. He stated the next item relates to site preparation for expansion, noting this project involves moving the dirt and getting the Department ready to relocate the infrastructure, putting the pipes in the ground, etc. Mr. Johnson advised that beyond this point he will discuss projects not in the Board's book due to their ties to future funding or projects that have already been funded, but the Department is just doing carry forward. One of those projects is the Baseline Landfill closure that is still on the books for roughly \$2,000,000.00, the Department anticipates closing the project moving forward, which will free up those funds. He stated Solid Waste anticipates closing the Davis Waterline Expansion project as all the projects appropriated for that have since sunset and are complete. Mr. Johnson addressed the Newton Groundwater Mitigation project, noting the Department anticipates carrying this year's funds forward. He stated the Department expects the need for those funds moving forward, even though the project has not begun. Mr. Johnson advised that in outer years (beginning FY 27 and FY 28) the Department anticipates relocating and expanding its leachate collection and treatment system, and lastly there is Phase 1 construction expected to begin in FY 28 with an economic impact of roughly \$13,000,000.00.

Mr. Johnson appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2025-2026 budget for Cost Center 425, Solid Waste Collection (page 644). He stated there are decreased costs in personnel due to the reclassification/reallocation of some of the Solid Waste Collection drivers to the Solid Waste Disposal budget. Mr. Johnson advised that a Solid Waste Supervisor was reallocated from this budget to the Solid Waste Recycling budget, which is the driving cost for the reduction in personnel.

Ms. Pederson addressed Operating costs within this budget noting there is a decrease of roughly \$239,000.00 that mostly stems from line item 534101, Contract Serv Other Misc. She advised that when reviewing last year's budget and the Department's actuals, staff noticed a significant difference in what the Department had budgeted vs. what was actually spent. Ms. Pederson stated Solid Waste is adjusting the upcoming budget to better reflect their needs and to make the budget tighter. She advised of an overall decrease relating to line item 564101, Machinery and Equipment, compared to this current year's budget. The Department is requesting a grapple truck to replace an aged

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asset with an approximate cost of \$380,000.00. There is a request for a new roll off truck to replace an aged asset with a total estimated cost of \$285,000.00. Ms. Pederson stated there is an additional request for a roll off trailer in the amount of \$110,000.00, which will give the Department the ability to haul 2 boxes at a time. There is a request for three F-350 trucks to replace all ageing assets, costing approximately \$60,000.00 each. She stated the Department is requesting 2 grapple trailers to replace aged assets, noting those trailers are roughly \$75,000.00 each. Ms. Pederson commented on the benefit of having a combination of an F-350 and a grapple trailer, which is less costly than a grapple truck for \$380,000.00. These F-350 and grapple trailer combos will be utilized by Solid Waste's litter crews when they are in the field and need to remove large items. Currently grapple trucks are being pulled off the road to assist with this work. The combination of these two items also eliminates the need for a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) requirement and allows the Department to have 1 individual in the truck rather than 2. She stated there is a request for an F-150 with an estimated cost of \$55,000.00 as well as three 18 foot trailers for aged asset replacements. Ms. Pederson advised that these trailers are lighter and easier to tow, allowing for portable toilets on the trailers that will reduce the number of crew stops for restroom breaks. She addressed the request for 2 Kubota's, noting all of the Department's Kubota's were purchased in 2017. Ms. Pederson commented on purchasing 2 this year to initiate a staggered replacement plan. Each of the Kubota's cost roughly \$32,000.00. She addressed the Department's request for a litter vacuum, which will allow crews to cover more ground in less time, pick up smaller pieces of litter that can be missed with manual methods, and provide greater safety. The cost of the equipment is approximately \$25,000.00.

In response to Commissioner Stone, Mr. Johnson advised that the Department has not had a litter vacuum previously. He stated the equipment will be piloted theoretically in the field with the litter crews; however, the technology has been used at landfills consistently. Mr. Johnson advised that the plan is to use it in the community in an effort to be more efficient, noting if it is not then the vacuum would be utilized on property at the transfer station or landfill.

Mr. Johnson appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2025-2026 budget for Cost Center 427, Solid Waste Recycling (page 648). He advised of an increase relating to personnel costs due mostly to the reallocation of the Supervisor position from the Solid Waste Collection budget. Mr. Johnson stated there are 2 Supervisors who oversee approximately 46 employees, noting by transitioning that, it gets the Department more in line with a reasonable ratio of Supervisors to employees.

Ms. Pederson advised of an increase in the Operating budget due mostly to line item 534101, Contract Services Other Miscellaneous, relating to the contract staffing at the recycling centers. She stated the Department is working with Administration and Human Resources (HR) on evaluating other options to potentially lower that cost. Ms. Pederson addressed line item 564101, Machinery and Equipment, which has a decrease compared to this current year's budget. The Department is proposing to replace 10% of stationary compactors per year (8 Compactors at roughly \$20,000.00 each). Staff are also proposing to replace 10% of roll off boxes and containers per year (21 containers at approximately \$12,000.00 each).

Mr. Johnson commented on the CIP program for the recycling centers, noting moving forward the goal is to budget roughly \$1,500,000.00 per year, year over year (YOY) to be able to make continuous improvements, refurbishments or enhancements to those

recycling centers. There is currently a backlog of projects including electrical system upgrades, rebuilding some of the bunkers that contain yard waste, etc.

Commissioner Stone commented on a decrease relating to the Department's promotional items. Mr. Johnson advised that advertising is included in promotional items and a lot of the litter campaign costs are included.

Commissioner Zalak stated the magnets with the recycling center are still needed.

Chairman Bryant questioned if the magnets are the best method, noting they will not stick on a stainless steel refrigerator.

Commissioner Stone opined that if more are being printed they should include language relating to operations/hours relating to holidays.

Ms. Pederson advised that although the promotional activities line decreased there are other things being done for the litter awareness initiative, including contracting with the MCSO to have a Deputy provide additional support for the litter enforcement. That does not come out of promotional activities, it comes out of Contract Services due to the type of service.

Commissioner Curry out at 11:25 a.m.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Ms. Pederson stated the \$246,600.00 in Solid Waste Collection, Promotional Activities, is all the litter campaign television and radio commercials, digital billboards, and promotional items used in schools and events.

It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to the Solid Waste budget.

OPENING REMARKS – Loretta Shaffer, Tourist Development Director

Tourist Development Executive Director Loretta Shaffer appeared to review the Department's proposed FY 2025-26 budget for Cost Center 155, Visitors and Convention Bureau (page 320). Also present was Tourist Development Manager Sky Wheeler. Ms. Shaffer provided an overview of the Department's recent accomplishments.

Commissioner Curry returned at 11:28 a.m.

Ms. Shaffer commented on funded projects including the south gateway flyover and \$500,000.00 for the Rotary Sportsplex turf conversion. She advised that the Tourist Development Department along with the World Equestrian Center (WEC) hosted Visit Florida's premier trade shows Florida Huddle and Florida Encounter, showcasing Ocala/Marion County globally to meeting planners and international tour operators and travel trade media. In June, the team secured the Florida Sports Foundation award for Florida Aquatics Swimming Training (FAST) as the sports tourism venue of the year for mid-sized markets in Florida. This award is well deserved, as this month alone the Department is funding 4 meets, with 16 and a half days of swimming, which contributes to nearly \$9,000,000.00 in estimated economic impact. With an investment from Tourist Development Tax (TDT) of \$108,000.00 this indicates that every dollar spent from TDT is generating \$83.00 back into the local economy. The Department also started the process of figuring out "what's next" for tourism economic development through its placemaking and feasibility study. With all of this in mind, the Department has been very strategic with the planning and budgeting for FY 2026.

Ms. Shaffer addressed the Department's personnel portion of the budget, noting an effort to remain competitive and ensure consistency in supervisory position structure within the Department staff are proposing a paygrade adjustment for the Department's Marketing and Communications Supervisor position from a paygrade 111 to a paygrade 112. There is no salary increase. This paygrade aligns with the Group Sales Supervisor paygrade.

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The Department is proposing to reclassify the Tourism Development Manager position, which is currently a paygrade 115, to a Tourism Development Assistant Director which will be a paygrade 116. This will be a title and pay grade change only. There will be no salary increase. This paygrade aligns with other Assistant Director paygrades in the organization. Ms. Shaffer commented on the Operating portion of the budget, noting line item 531109, Professional Services, increased in relation to the next phase of the Feasibility and Tourism Placemaking Study and future deliverables for that project. Research related to funding opportunities for that project, as well as location specific economic impact reports, are included in this part of the budget. In line item 548101, Promotional Activities, there is a decrease; however, it is important to note that funds are re-appropriated annually to move unexpended funds for unfinished projects to the following FY. Typically, this will be related to items that have been committed, but will not be expended prior to October 1, such as contracted event funding for future years, most specifically multi-year bid fee events. Some of the specific items outlined within this portion of the budget include: 1) Tradeshow Activations; 2) the Marion Insider's Guide; 3) Familiarization Tours (FAMs)/Site Visits; and 4) Tourism Photography and Videography Services. Additionally, the 5 funding programs that the Board approved on July 1, 2025, are also funded from this line item. As a note, in FY 2023-2024, funded events totaled an estimated economic impact of \$68,348,892.00, with \$652,730.00 in event funding approved. That means that for every dollar approved in funding, there was an economic impact to Marion County of approximately \$103.00. This year, the Tourist Development Council (TDC) and team worked diligently to refine the programs and ensure maximum ROI for Ocala/Marion County and create a more streamlined application process to advance excellence in customer service. These funding programs include: 1) Bid Fee Event Funding; 2) Room Night Generating Event Funding; 3) Meeting Rewards Funding (new program, funds came from Room Night Generating); 4) Marketing Assistance Funding; and 5) Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding (new program, new funds).

Ms. Shaffer addressed the non-operating portion of the budget, noting line item 599417, Reserve for Tourism Initiatives, will be budgeted at \$2,872,941.00. This is where funds are held for future projects that enhance tourism. Funds from this line were used in FY 25 to fund the Tourist Development portion of the turf conversion project and the initial North Gateway payment to FDOT to begin construction solicitation. As future plans evolve for the construction of the interchange and community aesthetic feature, future payments will also be funded from Reserve for Tourism Initiatives. As a reminder, any excess remaining funds from FY 2024-25 will be put in Reserve for Tourism Initiatives for use with future approved projects.

It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to the Tourist Development budget.

OPENING REMARKS – Steven Cohoon, County Engineer

County Engineer Steven Cohoon appeared to review the Office of the County Engineer (OCE) Department's proposed FY 2025-26 budgets for Cost Center 412, Property Engineering Services (page 186); Cost Center 433, Water Resources (page 188); Cost Center 400, Transportation (page 235); Cost Center 403, Road Construction 20% Gas Tax (page 257) and Cost Center 430, Stormwater Program (page 357). Also present were Assistant County Engineer for Roads Jared Peltz, Deputy County Engineer Doug Hinton and Fiscal Manager Zach Roundtree. He addressed Cost Center 412, Property

Engineering Services (Property Management). Mr. Cohoon advised that Property Management as a whole manages a lot of things, noting for this particular Cost Center this is the General Fund Property Management Agent comprised of one position. The proposed budget is \$80,002.00, which is a decrease of 17% (\$16,644.00) from the current FY. The decrease is attributed to an individual leaving the organization and rehiring another individual who will work their way up in tenure.

Mr. Cohoon addressed Cost Center 433, Water Resources (page 188), noting this program funds long-term water supply planning and aquifer protection Countywide. This is a General Fund budget and the one position that it has, the Water Resources Liaison, coordinates with the Utilities Department to meet their public education and water conservation requirements Countywide, as well as working with the Stormwater program in OCE on public education regarding water resource protection. He stated some of the educational outreach items include educational materials, low-flow toilet rebates, water conservation kits and rain sensors, utility bill inserts on water use efficiency, water conservation billboards, and water conservation digital/social media advertisements. Mr. Cohoon advised that this proposed budget is \$198,458.00, which is a decrease of 29% (\$81,031.00). He stated the reason for the decrease relates to line item 531109, Professional Services, that has historically been intended for use for the study of ground water, how it moves around and chemical properties. Currently, the Department does not have anything programmed; however, Utilities Director Cunningham is working to get his Engineering Department where it needs to be positioned. Mr. Cohoon advised that it was decided to remove that from the budget this year and possibly reevaluate the matter next year or the following year.

Chairman Bryant questioned why the Water Resources Liaison position is not included in the Utilities budget. Mr. Bouyounes stated the position performs functions Countywide beyond just rate payers for the County's utilities (water planning for the entire County, be involved in future water plans).

Mr. Cohoon advised that the individual in this position will also get some educational benefits to the County so staff can begin performing different environmental evaluations relating to road projects. He stated this will provide a cost savings to OCE in the future. Mr. Cohoon advised that the position performs a lot of public outreaches with customers relating to water quality and quantity.

Mr. Cohoon addressed Cost Center 400, Transportation Maintenance (page 235), noting historically this fund has been used towards some projects. He stated best practices and the Department's intent going forward is unless a project has grant funding allocated with it, OCE would not allocate a construction project in the Transportation Maintenance (TM) Fund. Mr. Cohoon advised of a previous conversation relating to the leveling off of the TM Fund and decreasing revenues, noting the Department is very conscience of how it uses this fund. He stated the Department has almost 2,800 miles of paved roads, nearly 400 miles of unpaved roads the County maintains, nearly 23,000 acres of right-of-way (ROW), over 90,000 traffic signs, 133 traffic signals, almost 2,500 drainage retention areas (DRAs) and more than 22,300 drainage conveyance areas. Mr. Cohoon advised that the Department has a lot of assets in the County. Based on the 2024 Marion County Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) the Department had \$1,457,254,768.00 worth of assets in the County as it relates to the TM fund. He stated currently the Department has proposed 184.29 positions, which is up from last year's 179.04 positions. Mr. Cohoon advised that previous staffing changes made during FY 25 are already reflected in the FY 26 projection, including a new Permit Manager, Permit Technician,

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Survey Manager, and Property Agent. In addition to that, this budget proposes a new Engineer and new Engineering Construction Inspector positions. He stated there are a lot of Sales Tax projects coming up and this will help fund and obtain some design and inspect the construction projects to the level needed. There is a request for reclassification of the Assistant County Engineer for Road Maintenance and the County Surveyor to OCE Assistant Directors (for Road Maintenance and for Surveying, ROW, and Asset Management). Mr. Cohoon advised that over the past 18 months he has given additional assignments to some of these managers in an effort to provide consistency across the board. The proposed budget is \$20,545,664.00, which is a decrease of 8% (\$1,818,102.00) below the current year. He stated the Department received approval to remove cost allocation and staff have reduced some equipment purchases from the previous year, noting there has been a lot of good work done to balance the budget especially in the TM fund.

Commissioner Zalak commented on the FTE and the individuals that will be supervising the Sales Tax road projects and questioned how they will be funded. Mr. Cohoon advised that OCE worked directly with the Clerk of Courts' Budget Department, noting OCE would have an audit/proof tracking mechanism for the design teams that can be billed directly back to the Sales Tax if it is a Sales Tax project. He commented on the cost savings relating to performing the work in-house rather than utilizing a consultant.

Commissioner Zalak stated he hoped that the County would be able to do that, noting if the County can leverage its team to increase the productivity and efficiency of the Sales Tax dollar, it leaves more funds for the next project.

Mr. Cohoon addressed Cost Center 403, Road Construction 20% Gas Tax (page 257), noting this account is utilized by the Department to buy materials for road crews.

Mr. Cohoon addressed Cost Center 430, Stormwater Program (page 357), noting this Fund was developed in 2002 in response to Federal and State requirements to address water quality associated with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits (NPDES), Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), and Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs). This is funded by the stormwater assessment, which is an approximate \$15.00 charge across the board, a little less in some areas. He advised that there is no proposed increase to the assessment this year.

Mr. Cohoon stated there are 13.27 positions in the FY 26 budget. He advised that the Department is requesting a new part-time Project Manager III position and the reclassification of the Stormwater Engineer to OCE Assistant Director for Stormwater due to the additional duties that he has been assigned. The proposed budget is consistent with the 2025/26 – 2029/30 Stormwater Implementation Program (SIP). Ongoing projects include the retrofits of water retention areas in response to TMDLs and BMAPS, as well as updating the watershed management studies throughout the County. The proposed budget is \$4,234,736.00. This is an increase of less than 1% or \$17,517.00 above the current year (excluding CF and CIP).

Commissioner Zalak questioned how the Department is tracking progress on the BMAPs and TMDLs mandates and related compliance. Mr. Cohoon stated much of that goes back to FDEP's definition of progress, noting they have laid out some guidelines that the Department has communicated to FDEP it does not believe are achievable. He advised that the Department has been required to achieve something neither he nor his team think is feasible short of some directive coming back from the State level on how the County can achieve those items. Mr. Cohoon stated the County is farm friendly, noting there is a

Statute that allows farmers to do certain things and there has been no real direction relating to how some of the goals are to be achieved.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Mr. Cohoon advised that the Department has provided that feedback to FDEP.

Commissioner McClain expressed appreciation towards OCE staff.

Commissioner Zalak questioned whether OCE has the staff to put more pavement down in 2026 than the County has ever done to keep up with the Sales Tax expectations from the citizens when they voted for the Sales Tax. Mr. Cohoon stated the short answer is yes; however, as more revenue potentially comes in things may change.

Commissioner Zalak questioned whether there is a way to show the progress the Department is making so individuals can see the product that is being done.

Chairman Bryant advised that the information can be distributed via the Public Information Office (PIO).

It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to the OCE budget.

OPENING REMARKS – Robert Balmes, TPO Director

Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) Director Robert Balmes appeared to review the proposed FY 2025–26 budgets for Cost Center 407, TPO Federal Highway Administration (page 264); Cost Center 408, TPO Federal Transit Administration (page 266); and Cost Center 409, TPO Transportation Disadvantaged (page 267).

TPO Director Robert Balmes advised that this budget is tied to the TPO Board adopted Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) 2-year budgetary document approved by the Federal Highway Administration as well. He addressed the 2 main grants the TPO receives. Mr. Balmes referred to Cost Center 407, noting the Federal Highway Administration Consolidate Planning Grant is the primary source of funding for the TPO, noting this year is proposed at \$773,912.00. He addressed Cost Center 409, TPO Transportation Disadvantaged. Mr. Balmes stated the Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) State Grant for the County's TD Local Coordinating Board work is proposed at \$32,484.00. He advised that the reason for the substantial decrease for this FY compared to last is related to the County's 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). All of the consultant support services the County has been receiving for the LRTP will wrap up pending TPO Board adoption in November. Mr. Balmes stated there are a number of activities coming up including the completion of the LRTP, congestion management work, and freight economic development assessment work.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Mr. Balmes advised that the changes that were discussed relating to the 2050 plan will be made. He stated a meeting is scheduled with County Administration and Commissioner Zalak on July 28, 2025, noting the results of that meeting will be shared with the TPO Board in August. There will also be a Local partner Steering Committee in August as well.

It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to the TPO budget.

There was a recess at 11:54 a.m.

The meeting reconvened at 1:30 p.m. with all members present.

OPENING REMARKS – Lisa Cahill, Public Safety Communications Director

Public Safety Communications (PSC) Director Lisa Cahill appeared to review the

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proposed FY 2025-26 budgets for Cost Center 310, Public Safety Radio (page 130) and Cost Center 311, Public Safety Communications (page 132). Also present was Administrative Staff Assistant Brady Angiulli. Ms. Cahill addressed Cost Center 310, Public Safety Radio Fund, which can be found on page 130. She stated the Department is requesting an increase in the amount of \$914,556.00. This includes the increase in line item 546301, Repairs and Maintenance Equipment for the cost of radio maintenance of the new radios for the Marion County Sheriff's Office (MCSO), Marion County Fire Rescue (MCFR), Marion County Public Schools (MCPS) and includes all Marion County users (General Government, Office of the County Engineer (OCE), Solid Waste, Animal Services, Code Enforcement, Utilities and Facilities) in the amount of \$809,638.00. Ms. Cahill advised of an increase in line item 552106, Computer Software, in the amount of \$90,505.00 for the Motorola software.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Ms. Cahill advised that the MCPS buses do have communication throughout the County, noting any emergency they experience will ring directly into the Communications Center. She stated the Department provided radio training to MCPS last year and will be doing so again this year.

Commissioner Stone out at 1:34 p.m.

Chairman Bryant questioned if MCPS is providing funding towards the radios. Ms. Cahill advised that cost allocation is being applied.

Commissioner Stone returned at 1:35 p.m.

Cost Center 311, Public Safety Communications Fund, can be found on page 132. Ms. Cahill advised of an increase to this Cost Center in the amount of \$44,967.00. The increase is relating to line item 534101, Contract Services Other Miscellaneous, for Central Square Technologies, which is the Computer-aided design (CAD) system in the amount of \$19,365.00; line item 546301, Repairs and Maintenance Equipment, the addition of the maintenance contract for the Communications Center dispatch consols in the amount of \$13,558.00; line item 552106, Computer Software, for various software programs in the amount \$73,424.00; and line item 552116, Operating Supplies Computer Hardware, for the replacement of CAD equipment and work stations in the amount of \$59,973.00.

Chairman Bryant questioned if all positions are filled. Ms. Cahill advised that the Public Safety Technologist position and the Administrative Manager position are in the hiring process.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Ms. Cahill provided a brief overview of a recent incident where all 9-1-1 and administrative lines were down and the steps taken by staff to resolve the issue while still providing services to those in need. She advised that staff were relocated to Alachua County where calls were directed during the down time. Ms. Cahill advised that the outage lasted approximately 9 hours and only 3 calls rang over, but were not missed. She stated there was a total of 430 calls, of those calls 2 were abandoned and 3 were over flow, noting the abandoned calls can be attributed to a dropped cellular call. There were also 55 text messages for service received.

Chairman Bryant expressed appreciation to staff for their hard work.

Commissioner Zalak questioned how the texts worked, but the calls did not. Ms. Cahill advised that the texts are received through a different line/carrier than the calls themselves.

In response to Commissioner Stone, Ms. Cahill advised that reports are run on a weekly basis, but they have not been received for this week to determine if the number of texts have increased since the incident. She commented on the amount of texts received on

the days prior to the incident.

County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes advised that approximately 3 weeks ago the County activated the backup Public Service Commission (PSC) and it worked without any glitches.

It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to Public Safety Communications.

OPENING REMARKS – James Banta, Fire Chief

Fire Chief James Banta, MCFR, appeared to review the proposed FY 2025–26 budgets for Cost Center 132, Medical Examiner (page 330); Cost Center 305, Emergency Medical Services (page 119); and Cost Center 300, Fire Rescue Services (page 339). Also present were Deputy Chief of Operations Robert Graff, MCFR; Deputy Chief of Professional Standards Drew Rogers, MCFR; Deputy Chief Robert Kruger, Emergency Medical Services (EMS); and Administrative Financial Services Manager Cassandra Li. Chief Banta presented a 18 slide handout entitled, “Marion County Fire Rescue Proposed Budget July 2025” to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation.

Chief Banta commented on the 9-1-1 outage, noting the redundancy did not work. The only reason the County was successful was because staff found a way to utilize programs in place that were not intended for that use. He stated this will have to be reviewed to ensure it does not happen again.

Commissioner Stone advised that the County has purchased some upgrades.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Chief Banta advised that the redundancy has worked in the past.

Cost Center 132, Medical Examiner, can be found on pages 328 through 331. Deputy Chief Robert Kruger, EMS, provided a brief overview of the services provided by the Medical Examiner’s Office. He stated Marion County serves as the Administrative Coordinator for the Florida Medical Examiner District 5 and 24 office. Marion County oversees the operation for 6 Counties (Citrus, Hernando, Lake, Marion, Sumter and Seminole). In this role Marion County provides administrative, legal and financial services to support the contract provider, manages the current Medical Examiner’s facility located in Leesburg, and handles all maintenance and budgeting for the facility through a cost share model based on population. Chief Kruger commented on autopsies, external examinations, remote external examinations, and cremation authorizations performed by the Medical Examiner.

Chief Kruger advised that there is an increase in the amount of \$425,000.00 in line item 534403, Contract Services Medical Examiner, primarily due to the acquisition of a special unit to transport the deceased and two new vehicles for the responding Medical Examiners. He stated operational costs have increased and there is a 5% increase budgeted for staff salary adjustments and overtime needs. As a result the Medical Examiner’s administration fee also rose by approximately \$23,000.00. Chief Kruger advised that contractual costs among participating Counties are calculated based on population. He advised of an increase in line item 546101, Repairs and Maintenance – Buildings and Grounds, in the amount of \$12,000.00 relating to Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) maintenance and sprinkler costs to the building. There is also an increase in line item 546301, Repairs and Maintenance – Equipment, in the amount of \$13,000.00 to allow for refurbishment for bone saws or other damaged equipment (x-ray, cassette holders, tables etc.). The Department has requested an increase of \$47,000.00 to allow for three autopsy carts with grid plates to be purchased and cubicles

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for the area.

Chief Kruger advised that the Capital Improvement Fund is tentatively budgeted at just over \$2,000,000.00.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Chief Kruger advised that Marion County's cost share is approximately \$1,500,000.00.

Chairman Bryant advised that next year the Board can discuss the future capital construction contingency that has been set aside.

Commissioner Zalak questioned what the \$425,000.00 increase will be going towards. Chief Kruger stated those funds are part of the Medicus Forensics contract, but he does not have a specific break down.

Commissioner Stone advised that she has not received any of the information requested, noting it was provided to Chief Kruger and she has not reviewed the information.

Chairman Bryant stated the 5% salary adjustment is included in the increase.

Chief Kruger clarified that the increase includes the special transport, 5% salary adjustment, overtime, 2 vehicles for the examiners, and the increase in operational costs.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Chief Kruger stated he did not have the specific number for the operational costs, but will bring that information back to the Board.

It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to the Medical Examiner's Budget.

Chief Banta thanked the BCC on behalf of MCFR for all their support over the past year, noting their unwavering support has enabled the Department to address first responder's workload, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. He stated MCFR is in the process of finalizing both the Master Plan and the Strategic Plan projects that are being completed entirely in house.

Chief Banta commented on the critical partnerships within County government and with outside agencies. Among these partnerships is the collaboration with the local health care system, which has significantly bolstered the Community Paramedicine Program. MCFR has expanded to nine community paramedics and is now better equipped to identify and assist high system utilizers in underserved populations across Marion County. He stated Facilities Management also deserves special recognition for their hard work on numerous construction projects including the successful grand opening of EMS Central (the state of the art hub for EMS) and the new Citra fire station.

Chief Banta advised that the Board's continued support has enabled the Department to strengthen the behavioral health services available to first responders. MCFR's behavioral health access program, peer support team and chaplaincy program are now recognized as the gold standard across the Florida Fire Service. In addition MarionStrong.org provides 24 hour, 7 day a week access to peer support, clinical resources, and personnel throughout the County.

Chief Banta advised that in addition to the Ambulance Fees for the EMS Fund, approximately \$125,000.00 in revenues are anticipated from the Public Emergency Medical Transport Program (PEMT), with \$5,700,000.00 from the Medicaid Managed Care Organization (MCO) Supplemental Payment program. In total, the EMS fund is anticipating to have total revenues of roughly \$34,500,000.00. He stated the estimated revenues for the ad valorem are approximately \$32,400,000.00, while the special assessment is estimated at \$57,600,000.00. Interim assessments are budgeted at \$1,500,000.00 for predictions on next year's market.

Chief Banta advised that year to date (YTD), there have been 72,792 total calls, which is a 1.82% increase over last year's period to date (same timeframe was 71,467 total),

noting this number would be much higher had the local hospitals not taken over their own interfacility transports. He stated the graph shown on the overhead screen illustrates the regular salaries and wages for both Fire and EMS funds combined. The blue line shows the budgeted amounts for the past fiscal years. The orange line represents the actuals spent for salaries only. The next graph shows the combined overtime. The blue line shows the budgeted expenditures for past fiscal years. The yellow diamond is the annualized overtime for both the Fire and EMS Fund estimated for this fiscal year. The last graph depicts the combined personnel costs (which includes salaries, overtime and benefits) over the past fiscal years and indicates that the Department normally spends within the total budgeted amounts. The blue line shows the budgeted amounts for previous years. The orange line indicates the actuals that were expended for all of the loaded costs for personnel.

Deputy Chief Graff advised that MCFR staffing and budget recommendations are developed using established industry best practices. These include workload-based staffing models, Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) compliance benchmarks, National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1710 standards, and Relief Staffing Factor (RSF) calculations. The Department incorporates historical call volume, unit hour utilization, leave trends, and service area demographics to determine minimum staffing levels and project future needs. This data driven approach ensures that the recommendations are operationally sound, fiscally responsible, and aligned with nationally recognized fire service methodologies. He stated MCFR has adopted a 1.25 relief factor based on historical trends to include attrition rates. The national average and widely cited relief factor for a 56-hour work week is 1.25 to 1.33. The current listed FTE's in red highlight mostly attrition-based needs. Currently, attrition is around 9%.

Deputy Chief Graff advised of the open positions within the Department as of July 1, 2025. Deputy Chief Rogers referred to the chart shown on the overhead screens, which breaks down the total number of new hires that went through the Training Division to obtain employment with the Department. He stated as of Monday, July 14, 2025, the Department had the largest testing process ever held with MCFR through the mentorship and noncertification program. Tentative job offers were provided to 40 non-certs who will be joining the ranks on August 26, 2025 and attending the Florida State Fire College for certification on September 29, 2025. Deputy Chief Rogers advised of the new partnership with the Florida State Fire College where MCFR will be utilizing their training grounds and classroom space to provide the County's first Fire 1 and Fire 2, along with an EMT combination class to certify those non cert personnel with internal instructors.

Chairman Bryant questioned how long will it take for the new hires to be out in the field. Deputy Chief Rogers advised that Fire 1 and Fire 2 will be the standard program, which will go through December. Then a 9 week accelerated program will begin in January 2026. He stated the personnel will join the actual workforce as full certified firefighters/EMTs roughly the first or second week of April 2026. Deputy Chief Rogers advised that MCFR is starting the First Responder Academy, noting 7 candidates qualified in high school. They will certify Fire 1 in high school then will go through Fire 2 and EMT.

Cost Center 305, Emergency Medical Services, can be found on pages 119. Deputy Chief Kruger advised that Unit Hour Utilization (UHU) is a key metric used to assess how often EMS units are actively engaged on calls and unavailable for response. Best practices suggest maintaining UHU below 30% to ensure unit reliability and reduce crew fatigue. Thanks to the continued support of the Board of County Commissioners, the Department has been able to level out the majority of the units, maintaining UHU within recommended

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thresholds across most of the system. This marks a significant improvement compared to years past; however, MCFR still have a few areas where UHU remains elevated, likely due to rapid County growth and increasing call volume in those regions. The Department is actively monitoring these zones and exploring solutions to maintain system balance as demand continues to rise. He provided a brief over view of the UHU charts shown on the overhead screens.

Deputy Chief Kruger commented on the EMS revenue payments received, noting as of June 30, 2025 approximately \$16,000,000.00 has been collected. This is almost \$700,000.00 more than this period last year. He advised there was a slight decrease in EMS revenue for transports, which can be attributed to the community hospital partners and the decrease in interfacility transfers.

Deputy Chief Kruger advised that the total recommended budget is up 9.26% from last year's adopted budget. Overtime costs in the amount of \$4,600,000.00 is being requested, which is a 10% increase from last year. Personnel services have increased by 8.85%, mostly in part to contractual obligations to the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). He stated the Department is also requesting the following additional personnel: 12 new firefighters and 1 quality improvement technician. The Department is also requesting to reclassify 3 EMS captains to EMS Battalion Chiefs to enhance MCFR operational efficiency and align with national standards. The reason for the reclassification is to optimize senior command resources, reduce overtime costs and address staffing gaps caused by expansion and absences. The total loaded cost to reclassify these 3 positions would be \$63,000.00. Deputy Chief Kruger advised that the total loaded cost for all the proposed requests is \$1,033,008.00.

Deputy Chief Kruger advised that operating costs increased by \$745,359.00 or 11.56% over last year's budget. Line item 549990, Other Current Charges Miscellaneous Expenses increased to accommodate credit card fees for Tyler payments. He stated the County cannot collect credit card fees for Medicare/Medicaid patients. Line item 552116, Operating Supplies – Computer Hardware, has an increase in the amount of almost \$200,000.00 for bulk order computers and Information Technology's (IT) replacement plan, as well as replacing onboard mobile gateways on apparatus due to end of life. Line item 555501, Training and Education, increased by approximately \$200,000.00 due to continued education/training, as well as the cost of the College of Central Florida (CF) contract and non-cert programs.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Deputy Chief Kruger advised that the Department has no way of telling if someone is a Medicare/Medicaid customer when they are paying online; therefore, those customers are reimbursed for those fees after the fact. He stated the Department is working on obtaining new software to address this issue, noting the current system does not allow the credit card fees to be turned off for one Department.

General discussion ensued.

Commissioner Zalak questioned the reclassification requests from Captain to Battalion Chief. Chief Banta advised that these positions are specific to EMS High Performance units, which do not function the same as every other Captain in MCFR. The standard model throughout the Department is 1 Captain per shift and 2 Lieutenants on the other shift. The Captains under the High Performance Unit are functioning at a Battalion Chief level.

Deputy Chief Graff provided a brief history of how the ranks have evolved over time.

It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to the Emergency Medical Services Budget.

Cost Center 300, Fire Rescue Services, can be found on pages 339. Deputy Chief Graff advised that the total recommended budget is 5.45% higher than last fiscal year (with Personnel Costs) and the Overtime costs are requested at \$4,808,225.00. He stated the Department is requesting the following new personnel: 1 Quality Improvement Technician; 1 Staff Assistant III (for logistics); and 1 Lieutenant, noting the total loaded costs for the new positions is \$240,617.00.

Deputy Chief Graff advised that line item 541101, Communications Services, increased by \$173,600.00; line item 546257, Repairs/Maintenance Fleet Management, increased by \$312,137.00; line item 546301, Repairs and Maintenance Equipment, increased by \$169,320.00; line item 552106, Computer Software, increased by \$190,000.00; line item 552107, Clothing and Wearing Apparel, increased by \$405,530.00; line item 552108, Operating Supplies, increased by \$186,590.00; line item 552116, Operating Supplies Computer Hardware, increased by \$138,100.00; line item 555501, Training and Education, increase by \$360,017.00; and line item 581120, Aid to City of Ocala – Fire Rescue, increased by \$33,600.00.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Deputy Chief Graff advised that the Automatic Aid Agreement with the City of Ocala is based on the number of calls provided, noting the County pays the City if they run more calls within the County.

Chairman Bryant stated based on the line item budget book the requested increase is \$75,000.00.

ACA Amanda Tart clarified that the 33,600 is the increased number of calls and the monetary increase is \$75,000.00.

General discussion ensued.

Commissioner McClain questioned why the Department was requesting additional positions when they have so many vacancies that are not filled. Deputy Chief Graff advised that as of July 1, 2025 the Department had 51 vacancies. There were 40 job offers extended, which leaves only 11 vacancies. He stated the positions have to be available in the budget in order to hire, noting it takes time to get the personnel in place. In response to Commissioner McClain, Deputy Chief Graff advised that last year at this time there were 73 vacancies. He provided a brief overview of the relief factor calculations and the staffing needs.

Chairman Bryant advised that the Department is preparing for additional needed capacity within the County.

General discussion resumed relating to vacant positions.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Deputy Chief Graff advised that the Quality Improvement Technician will review reports to ensure all the reports meet criteria required for billing and the standard of care is being met.

Chief Banta stated the position also identifies any areas where there are deficiencies, which enables the Department to correct them in a timely manner.

It was the general consensus of the Board that there are no further questions in regard to the Fire Rescue Services Budget.

BOARD DISCUSSION AND CLOSING COMMENTS:

Mr. Bouyounes requested direction from the Board on whether or not to move the Capital items from Fire Rescue to the Sales Tax. It was the general consensus of the Board to agree to move those expenses to the Sales Tax.

July 17, 2025

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting thereupon adjourned at 2:39 p.m.

Kathy Bryant, Chairman

Attest:

Gregory C. Harrell, Clerk

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