

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

October 10, 2023

CALL TO ORDER:

The Marion County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) met in a workshop session in Commission Chambers at 2:05 p.m. on Tuesday, October 10, 2023 at the Marion County Governmental Complex located in Ocala, Florida.

INTRODUCTION OF WORKSHOP BY CHAIRMAN CRAIG CURRY

Chairman Curry advised that the workshop was scheduled this afternoon to discuss the One Cent Infrastructure Surtax Priority Projects.

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 Craig Curry, District 1; Vice-Chairman Michelle Stone, District 5; Commissioner Kathy Bryant, District 2; Commissioner Matthew McClain, District 3; and Commissioner Carl Zalak, III, District 4. Also present were Chief Assistant County Attorney Dana Olesky; County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes; Assistant County Administrator (ACA) Tracy Straub; ACA Amanda Tart; and Executive Director of Internal Services Mike McCain.

It was noted for the record that the Deputy Clerk was in receipt of a 16 page Agenda packet to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation.

PRESENTATION

1. Mounir Bouyounes, P.E. County Administrator - Priorities List From Departments
 - 1.1. Infrastructure Sales Surtax Timeline

County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes referred to page 4 of the Agenda packet (as shown on the overhead screens), which contains the proposed timeline for the renewal of the One Cent Infrastructure Sales Surtax. The next step, based on Board direction, would be to hold a public hearing (tentatively scheduled for December 13, 2023 at 3:00 p.m.) to adopt the final Ordinance. He provided a brief overview of the overall renewal timeline necessary to move forward in order to place the matter on the General Election ballot. Mr. Bouyounes advised that included in the Agenda packet is a high level list of proposed project expenditures, noting the proposed list would need to be finalized by staff in February 2024 and the information will be presented to the Board at a workshop in March 2024. By May 2024 the County will submit the adopted Ordinance to the State Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability for evaluation and audit review. By August 19, 2024 the adopted Ordinance must be submitted to the Supervisor of Elections Office in order to be placed on the November 5, 2024 General Election ballot.

2. Draft Capital Improvements and Equipment Needs for Public Safety and Roads
 - 2.1. Proposed One Cent Infrastructure Sales Surtax Project Expenditure Schedule

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Mr. Bouyounes provided a brief overview of the One Cent Infrastructure Sales Surtax Project Expenditure Schedule. He advised that he solicited information from the Public Safety personnel, which included the Marion County Sheriff's Office (MCSO), Marion County Fire Rescue (MCFR), Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Public Safety Communications (PSC), Animal Services Department, as well as Transportation projects. Mr. Bouyounes noted Transportation projects are categorized as either capacity, rehabilitation, or traffic management projects. The MCSO provides proposed projects up to 8 years out and MCFR, PSC, EMS, and Transportation contains approximately 10 to 15 years of project information. He advised that the combined total costs for estimated projects is close to \$1,300,000,000.00, noting approximately 70 percent (%) of those cost are related to transportation projects and public safety makes up about 30%. Mr. Bouyounes noted Sales Tax collections equaled approximately \$65,000,000.00 annually over the past 4 years. He advised that based on the rate of collections, the Surtax would be needed for a 20 year period in order to fund all of the proposed projects. He requested Board input and guidance in regard to how to direct the funding in order to finalize the project list.

3. Matthew G. Minter, County Attorney
3.1. Infrastructure Sales Surtax Ordinance Draft

Mr. Bouyounes addressed the proposed Ordinance, noting it reflects the same uses as the current Ordinance (20-07). He stated the term (period of years in effect) has been left blank, noting the ballot language being proposed is very similar to what was contained in the previous Ordinance. Mr. Bouyounes noted he would continue to work with the County Attorney to bring back the final language for Board approval.

Commissioner Bryant opined that the Ordinance should state MCFR, EMS, and Animal Control, in that order.

Mr. Bouyounes referred to Agenda Item 4.7.1., which contains a letter from the Chamber and Economic Partnership (CEP) and includes some recommendations from the organization, as well as the business community.

Commissioner Zalak opined that more discussion is needed relating to how the numbers are going to work (e.g., revenue split among Departments), what projects are going to be put on the final list, etc., noting his preference is to put as much money towards transportation costs as possible due to the rising costs of road construction.

General discussion ensued.

Commissioner Bryant advised that she is comfortable with a 20 year term for the Sales Tax, noting citizens have seen how those funds have been utilized in the past and understand that without the One Cent Sales Tax public safety and transportation needs would not be funded or have to be funded by property owners within the community.

Chairman Curry requested that Agenda Item 4.7. be addressed at this time.

4.7. Chamber & Economic Partnership
4.7.1. Letter from Chamber and Economic Partnership Regarding Renewal
of Infrastructure Surtax - Kevin Sheilley, President/CEO

President/CEO Kevin Sheilley, CEP, stated he concurs with what Commissioner Bryant said. He advised that the Sales Tax has provided great value, especially over the past 7 years, noting the BCC and municipal partners have demonstrated that it is the most efficient, effective, and transparent way to fund infrastructure and first responder needs.

Mr. Sheilly noted the CEP has partnered with the County to support the tax since the beginning of 2015. He stated the Infrastructure Task Force has reviewed this matter and a significant amount of polling was performed to determine what the community thinks about the tax. Mr. Sheilly advised that the information gathered reflects that the community overwhelmingly supports the tax, noting citizens understand that those tax dollars fund the important services everybody wants. He stated the top items that polled over 80% were the fact that those tax dollars are only spent in Marion County and that a significant percentage of those funds are paid by people who do not live in the County. Mr. Sheilly commented on future tax dollars generated by businesses such as the World Equestrian Center (WEC), as well as the future development of the Buc-ee's Travel Center in Marion County. He commented on data recently received from Career Source as it relates to the number of people coming into the community every day to go to work, noting those workers depend on County roads and first responders during their work week. Mr. Sheilly encouraged the Board to consider renewing the tax for a 20 year time period. He advised that MCFR has a 15 year plan and there needs to be a way to fund that plan.

Chairman Curry advised that the County has identified approximately \$900,000,000.00 worth of road projects over the next 10 years, noting there is only \$300,000,000.00 of those costs covered at this time. He stated that Interstate 75 (I-75) closes down on an average of every 9 days due to accidents within County limits, noting it is Marion County first responders that are dispatched to those accidents.

General discussion ensued.

Chairman Curry stated there are significant financial reasons to extend the tax from 4 years to 20 years to better serve the community and the demands being placed on infrastructure.

Mr. Sheilly reiterated that part of the reason the proposal is so well received by the public is due to the incredible job of the Board, municipalities, and their staff in being transparent in how those dollars are spent.

4. Input from Municipalities Priorities and Other Agencies

4.1. Billy Woods, Sheriff

Sheriff William "Billy" Woods, MCSO, encouraged the Board to move forward with the 20 year term, noting the jail is getting old and there are mechanisms there that are too old to be replaced due to the inability to find replacement parts. He commented on growth, noting when the County's population increases so do the inhabitants at the jail. Sheriff Woods addressed the transit population, noting first responders service more than just people who live in the community (visitors, travelers, etc.). He commented on a recent article in the Wall Street Journal regarding how Ocala/Marion County is the safest place to be during a hurricane. Sheriff Woods commented on issues that were able to be resolved utilizing tax funding including purchasing enough vehicles for the Sheriff's Office to replace those that were depleted and worn out, noting the average cost for replacement vehicles is approximately \$7,000,000.00 to \$8,000,000.00 annually. He stated other accomplishments using Sales Tax dollars include a new evidence building and several helicopters, which have been an enormous asset for the County. Sheriff Woods noted the helicopters not only help the Forestry Division with forest fires, but search and rescue endeavors as well. He commented on the effects of new technologies, noting phones, computers, software, etc., that law enforcement count on daily can drain the power in vehicles causing wear and tear.

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Commissioner Zalak stated Sheriff Woods and his team make Marion County a better place to live.

General discussion ensued relating to road infrastructure throughout the County and its effect on first responders' ability to get to citizens in a rapid manner.

4.2. City of Ocala

City Manager Peter Lee, City of Ocala, advised that the City of Ocala supports the One Cent Infrastructure Surtax for the proposed 20 year time line. He noted the surtax will keep ad valorem taxes flat. Mr. Lee provided a brief overview of important road projects within the City that have been supported by this tax. He advised that law enforcement and Fire Rescue are two of the largest parts of the City's General Fund budget, noting with growth there will always be a need for those services. Mr. Lee stated there is a need for at least 3 additional fire stations, as well as a downtown police substation and that the tax would help the City purchase the necessary infrastructure. He noted the tax dollars are very important to the City and opined that it is the fairest way to collect taxes.

Chairman Curry expressed his appreciation to City management for working well with the County.

General discussion ensued.

4.3. City of Belleview

Mayor Christine Dobkowski, City of Belleview, commented on the positive impacts the sales tax has brought to the City of Belleview over the past 7 years. She noted the current anticipated revenue through fiscal year (FY) 2024 is approximately \$6,000,000.00, which is about half of the City's yearly budget. Ms. Dobkowski stated the anticipated expenditure of this revenue is approximately \$4,000,000.00 to \$5,000,000.00, which will leave about \$1,500,000.00 in Reserves. The bulk of the money collected from the Sales Tax has been used for public safety projects, including the construction of an addition to the Belleview Police Department, as well as renovations to the existing building (i.e., new generator, multiple police vehicles, radio system equipment, etc.). She reiterated that all those items would have been difficult to fund without the sales tax revenues. Ms. Dobkowski provided a brief overview of some of the projects budgeted for FY 2024, which include the milling and overlay of a number of roads throughout the City including SE 55th Avenue, as well as road overlays for SE 56th Avenue and SE 57th Avenue. She stated there is also funding being put forward to develop the sidewalk connectivity plan throughout the City focusing on bus stops and areas where children are walking to school. Also budgeted is a drainage plan throughout the City. Ms. Dobkowski noted if continued funding is received going forward, some of those funds will be used to construct sidewalks along SE 55th Avenue, 102nd Street, and 110th Street. Sales Tax funding would also be utilized for a pavement management plan, as well as continuing to provide for public safety needs (i.e., additional needs for the police department, Information Technology (IT) infrastructure security, etc.). She advised that on behalf of the City of Belleview, any extension of the tax placed on the ballot would be greatly appreciated.

4.4. City of Dunnellon

No one appeared to speak on behalf of the City of Dunnellon.

4.5. Town of McIntosh

No one appeared to speak on behalf of the Town of McIntosh

4.6. Town of Reddick

Council President Steven Rogers, Town of Reddick, advised that the sales tax has been a huge assistance to all communities in Marion County, and opined that it is due to the credibility and transparency in how the tax funds would be spent. He opined that a 20 year window could take part of the checks and balances away from the citizens and recommended a 10 year tax as opposed to a 20 year term. Mr. Rogers advised that County Road (CR) 316 is in desperate need of repair due to its location near the second largest park (Wrigley Park) in Marion County. He commented on the minimal staffing for law enforcement for the amount of area the Deputies have to cover. Mr. Rogers stated the Reddick Town Council is in support of the sales tax, noting those funds assist the Town in running its government on a solid basis.

4.7. Chamber & Economic Partnership

4.7.1. Letter from Chamber and Economic Partnership Regarding Renewal of Infrastructure Surtax - Kevin Sheilley, President/CEO

(This Item was addressed earlier in the meeting.)

BOARD DISCUSSION

Mr. Bouyounes referred to the Project Expenditure Schedule and commented on the Emergency Communications Department, noting the Department's list of projects is approximately \$72,000,000.00. He commented on the important work performed by the Public Safety Communications Department in upgrading its system for all first responders across the board.

Fire Chief James Banta opined that a 20 year term on the sales tax would be phenomenal for MCFR to help support the Department's 15 year plan, noting approximately \$90,000,000.00 is needed just to maintain what the Department has now without including expansion or growth. He noted every project listed contributes to first responder public safety.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Chief Banta advised that the proposed projects would add capacity by building infrastructure into areas that need faster responses by providing additional stations, better equipment, and to ensure resources are in the proper locations. He commented on the tremendous amount of service the Department provides to visitors of Marion County.

Commissioner Stone noted the sales tax revenue frees up dollars that can be invested in staff.

Public Safety Communications Director Kyle Drummer commented on the value the sales tax revenue provides for the expansion of the communications tower system by providing capacity necessary to communicate effectively, especially in areas with low coverage.

In response to Chairman Curry, Mr. Drummer advised that the Marion County School Board (MCSB) recently elected to purchase 395 radios that when added on to the Department's system will provide the opportunity for patrol deputies and firefighters/paramedics to respond immediately to school bus issues by geographically tagging that bus's location. He commented on hardened structures on the schools, noting the recent addition of radio equipment that has long term evolution (LTE) and wireless fidelity (Wi-Fi) capabilities allow the Department to operate within those school structures without relying on Land Mobile Radios (LMRs) so the signal will be stronger. Mr. Drummer noted it is also important during hurricanes when schools are utilized as shelters.

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Sheriff Woods reiterated that communications with school buses is extremely vital, especially in outer areas of the County (Fleming, Ft. McCoy, etc.). He advised that communications in those areas are just as vital for law enforcement, noting if a radio is not working in a remote location, it becomes a matter of their life for a deputy.

ACA/Acting County Engineer Tracy Straub advised that there is approximately \$900,000,000.00 worth of road capacity projects that need to be accomplished for the community, and of that, \$660,000,000.00 is unfunded. She stated there are 1,200 miles of major road networks that are maintained by the County and over 2,500 miles of total roadways in Marion County. Ms. Straub noted the 1,200 miles of major road networks need to be resurfaced, milled, and reconstructed.

In response to Chairman Curry, Ms. Straub advised that prior to this sales tax, road funding was solely coming from the gas tax, unless the BCC had some General Fund money to make available to a specific road project. She stated the gas tax is a diminishing source of funding due to the fact that electric vehicles do not contribute to the gas tax. Ms. Straub noted the State has not made a change to the gas tax since the late 1980's and clarified that the rate does not adjust with inflation (price per gallon).

Mr. Bouyounes advised that 25% of the 1,200 miles of major road networks are in poor, deteriorating, or failing conditions.

Commissioner Stone stated she is in favor of the 20 year term for the One Cent Sales Tax based on testimony that has been provided, as well as the extensive polling of residents.

In response to Commissioner McClain, Mr. Bouyounes stated the project list will be finalized based on the information received today; however, it is open to adjustment and changes annually (during budget), as well as every 5 years as established in the 5-Year Plan.

Commissioner McClain opined that the sales tax is the fairest tax the County has; however, he does have concern relating to the 20 year term. He expressed concern that it could bind future Commissioners to what they can do, noting the Statute that gives the County the authority to put this tax in place could change during that time frame. Commissioner McClain noted he would be more comfortable with a term of 8 or 12 years. General discussion ensued in regard to the need to fund long range plans and long term projects.

Commissioner Bryant stated she is in support of the 20 year term, noting citizens could not afford to pay for these projects utilizing ad valorem revenue.

General discussion ensued relating to the proposed term for the Sales Surtax.

Mr. Sheilley opined that the 20 year term is appropriate and allows for greater flexibility, noting the Legislature is making it more and more difficult for local governments to place these type of taxes on a ballot.

General discussion resumed.

In response to Commissioner McClain, Mr. Sheilley advised that Tallahassee has a 30 year term for its sale tax, Clay County has a 20 or 30 year term, noting Marion County currently has the shortest term at 4 years.

In response to Chairman Curry, Mr. Bouyounes clarified that future Boards can change the recommended list of projects based on the needs at that time, as long as it follows the parameters/language as placed on the ballot.

General discussion resumed.

Chairman Curry clarified that today is a workshop only, noting there will be public hearings held to allow for citizen input prior to moving forward.

General discussion ensued in regard to the timeline to adopt the proposed Ordinance. In response to Commissioner Bryant, Chief Assistant County Attorney Dana Olesky advised that the last Sales Tax Ordinance was adopted in February 2020.

Mr. Bouyounes clarified that the direction from the Board is for staff to finalize the list of projects prior to the public hearing for consideration of the proposed Ordinance, prepare a list of projects for terms of 5, 10, 15, and 20 years out, amend the Infrastructure Sales Surtax Renewal Timeline, and bring that information back to the Board for discussion at its next regularly scheduled BCC meeting.

Commissioner Bryant advised that there is a possibility that the Marion County School Board (MCSB) will be developing its own tax Ordinance.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Chairman Curry requested staff hold one-on-ones with Commissioners who reach out to them relating to the list of projects and changing the timeline if necessary.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting thereupon adjourned at 3:27 p.m.

Craig Curry, Chairman

Attest:

Gregory C. Harrell, Clerk

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