

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

July 24, 2025

CALL TO ORDER:

The Marion County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) met in a special session in Commission Chambers at 1:34 p.m. on Thursday, July 24, 2025 at the Marion County Governmental Complex located in Ocala, Florida.

INTRODUCTION OF PUBLIC HEARING BY CHAIRMAN KATHY BRYANT

Chairman Bryant advised that this Special Board Meeting was scheduled this afternoon to consider the proposed (maximum) millage rates and scheduling of the first public hearings for fiscal year (FY) 2025-26.

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 Attorney Matthew G. Minter, County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes, Assistant County Administrator (ACA) Tracy Straub, ACA Angel Roussel, ACA Amanda Tart, and Executive Director of Internal Service Mike McCain.

PROOF OF PUBLICATION

Deputy Clerk Windberg presented proof of publication of a Sunshine Notice entitled, "Special Board meeting to set the proposed/maximum millage rates and schedule the first public hearings for FY 25/26" released on June 11, 2025 on the Marion County Florida website.

The Deputy Clerk was in receipt of a 4 page Agenda packet.

STAFF PRESENTATION

1. Request Approval of Proposed (Maximum) Millage Rates and Scheduling of First Public Hearings for FY 2025-26

Budget Director Audrey Fowler presented the following recommendation:

Description/Background: On or before August 4 of each year, the Board of County Commissioners shall advise the Property Appraiser of the proposed millage rates, the rolled-back rates, and the date, time, and place at which the public hearings will be held to consider the proposed millage rates and the tentative budget {Florida Statutes Section 200.065(2)(b)}.

Budget/Impact: Ad valorem millage rates to fund the fiscal year 2025-26 tentative budget.

Recommended Action: Consider approval of the proposed millage rates and the date, time, and place for the first public hearings related to the budgets of both the Marion County Board of County Commissioners and the Rainbow Lakes Estates

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Municipal Service District; and authorize the Chairman to execute the related documents.

Budget Director Audrey Fowler presented a 6 page handout entitled, "Marion County Board of County Commissioners Budget Adjustments Tentative Budget Fiscal Year 2025-26" and a 1 page handout entitled, "Marion County Board of County Commissioners Countywide Millage FY 2026 Millage Scenarios". She referred to the 6 page handout entitled, "Marion County Board of County Commissioners Budget Adjustments Tentative Budget Fiscal Year 2025-26", noting there is \$448,484.00 of additional recurring revenue and \$1,570,679.00 in non-recurring revenue in the General Fund with the adjustments that have been made as of this morning. Ms. Fowler advised that this brings the current tentative millage rate to 3.3700 mills, noting there is enough recurring revenue to reduce the millage to 3.3600 mills without any additional cuts needed in the budget. The remaining amount of \$233,344.00 could be taken from some of the recurring and non-recurring revenue to reduce the millage rate to 3.3500 mills. She noted in regard to the Fine & Forfeiture Fund; adjustments were made so that the millage rate is now at 0.8700 of a mill. There are no other adjustments at this time.

Ms. Fowler referred to the 1 page handout entitled, "Marion County Board of County Commissioners Countywide Millage FY 2026 Millage Scenarios", and provided a brief overview of the 2 different scenarios. The first scenario reflects the same millage rates as adopted in FY 2025 (General Fund at 3.3500, Fine and Forfeiture at 0.8300 of a mill, and the Health Unit Trust Fund at 0.1100 of a mill, for a total Countywide millage rate of 4.2900 mills). The FY 2026 budget expenditures proposed for this scenario total \$33,965,180.00 and the recurring revenue is at \$31,593,627.00, which provides for a recurring deficit of \$2,371,553.00. She advised that in order to get to the 0.8300 of a mill for the Fine and Forfeiture Fund, the County already utilized \$901,497.00 of excess non-recurring revenue and would need to transfer in \$1,448,912.00 from the General Fund. Ms. Fowler stated to get to these numbers (recurring revenue of \$33,647,213.00), she utilized a taxable increase of 2.5% Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus \$1,500,000,000.00 in estimated new construction. She advised that the second scenario would shift 0.0200 of a mill from the General Fund to the Fine and Forfeiture Fund, which would amend the General Fund millage to 3.3300 mills, the Fine and Forfeiture Fund to 0.8500 of a mill, and the Health Unit Trust Fund would stay at 0.1100 of a mill, for a total Countywide millage rate of 4.2900 mills. This would provide for a recurring budget of \$33,965,180.00 and \$32,318,083.00 in recurring revenue with a deficit of \$1,647,097.00. Ms. Fowler stated this scenario would require transferring \$724,456.00 of non-recurring turnback in the General Fund to offset the reduced millage. She noted there is a lot more opportunity in the General Fund to have non-recurring revenue/excess revenue from one year to the next.

Ms. Fowler provided a brief comparison of both scenarios for FY 2027, noting scenario one would leave a recurring deficit of 5.307% (\$1,676,575.00) and scenario two would leave a recurring deficit of 2.80% (\$905,030.00).

In response to County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes, Ms. Fowler clarified that those deficits would be in the Fine and Forfeiture Fund. Mr. Bouyounes questioned what the affect would be if the BCC moved the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) into the General Fund. Ms. Fowler advised that one hundredth of a mill generates the same amount of money regardless of which of the Funds it is included.

Chairman Bryant opined that after further thought, reducing the millage rate in the General Fund and then making it up in the Fine and Forfeiture Fund may not be the way to go,

noting there are some Departments in the General Fund that will be needing increases. She commented on upcoming contract negotiations with Emergency Medical Services (EMS), which falls within the General Fund.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Clerk Gregory C. Harrell opined that cutting expenditures (personnel costs, eliminating new positions being requested, delaying high dollar equipment purchases, etc.), are some of the ways to get closer to keeping the millage rates flat.

In response to Commissioner Stone, Ms. Fowler advised that both the General Fund and the Fine and Forfeiture Fund are going to generate the same amount of revenue per one hundredth of a mill. She clarified that for the Fine and Forfeiture Fund, 85% of the funding comes from property taxes and for the General Fund it is about 45% coming from property taxes. Ms. Fowler advised that if the BCC chooses not to increase the Fine and Forfeiture Fund and subsidize it with monies from the General Fund, then she will need to seek the Board's guidance going forward as to whether it wants to continue subsidizing it with monies from the General Fund as there will definitely be a deficit again next year.

General discussion ensued.

Ms. Fowler stated it is a matter of Board policy as to whether it wants the Fine and Forfeiture Fund to be self-sustaining and within its millage rate going forward or if the BCC is okay with that Fund being in a deficit and making it whole with General Fund revenues. She clarified that because of the big increase in the cost for the DJJ, it will take several years before the Fine and Forfeiture Fund can be self-sustaining.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Ms. Fowler stated if the Board were to move the DJJ into the General Fund, it would raise that millage rate by approximately 0.1200 of a mill.

Commissioner Zalak stated his preference would be scenario two and opined that keeping the DJJ in the Fine and Forfeiture Fund is the right place for that cost. He stated the Board needs to direct Departments covered under the Fine and Forfeiture Fund to do what is necessary to keep those budgets within the millage rate.

Chairman Bryant opined that the message needs to be clear to staff that just because the millage rate may be increased it does not mean that the funds generated are going to be distributed to the Departments under this Fund.

Commissioner Zalak stated Ms. Fowler is correct and this is the best way to position this Fund for success next year.

General discussion resumed.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Clerk Harrell stated the Board must pay the entire \$4,363,018.00 to the DJJ unless it finds a discrepancy within their billings.

General discussion resumed.

Mr. Bouyounes opined that the scenarios being presented are only temporary solutions, noting this same issue will occur again next year unless those entities covered under this Fund make the necessary cuts to meet the millage rate. He opined that the Board needs to set an expectation and hold those Departments and entities to it.

Commissioner McClain opined that the General Fund and the Fine and Forfeiture Fund millage rates should stay the same and all Departments should meet these rates by finding \$1,600,000.00 to cut out of those budgets this year.

In response to Commissioner Stone, Ms. Fowler clarified that revenue from the General Fund can be utilized for any public purpose.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Ms. Fowler advised that the increase in DJJ costs equates to 0.0460 of a mill or \$6.00 per property owner.

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Chairman Bryant addressed the increasing costs associated with DJJ, noting the Board has no choice but to pay those costs and questioned if the Board was doing itself a disservice by holding on to the philosophy on not raising the millage rate for this Fund.

Commissioner McClain expressed concern that a \$6.00 increase can turn into larger increases in the future, noting there is going to come a time when the County is going to have to ask when the increase is enough and how much of an increase is acceptable.

Commissioner Zalak opined that all Constitutional Officers and County Departments need to be held to the same standard.

Ms. Fowler commented on the discussion relating to decreasing the Marion County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) requests relating to their portion of this budget, noting the BCC can only do that at the final public hearing unless the MCSO voluntarily reduces their portion of the budget. She advised that the only way to reduce this millage rate now is for BCC to identify how it is going to accomplish that (i.e., transferring revenue from the General Fund (scenario one)). Ms. Fowler clarified that she cannot make a change to the Sheriff's budget until the final hearing.

General discussion ensued.

Ms. Fowler read the proposed millage rates into the record as follows: the actual Countywide millage rate for 2024 was 3.3500, the rolled back millage rate is 3.1516 mills, and the proposed millage rate to be levied is 3.3700 mills. The actual Fine and Forfeiture Fund millage rate for 2024 was 0.8300 of a mill, the rolled back millage rate is 0.7809 of a mill, and the proposed millage rate to be levied is 0.8700 of a mill. The County Transportation Fund millage rate is at zero. The actual Marion County Health Unit Trust Fund for 2024 was 0.1100 of a mill, the rolled back millage rate is 0.1035 of a mill, and the proposed millage rate to be levied is 0.1100 of a mill. She stated the total actual Countywide millage rate for 2024 was 4.2900 mills, rolled back millage rate is 4.0360 and the proposed millage rate to be levied is 4.3500 mills.

A motion was made by Commissioner McClain, seconded by Commissioner Stone, to set the proposed millage rate for the General Fund at 3.3500 mills, to set the proposed millage rate for the Fine and Forfeiture Fund at 0.8300 of a mill, and to set the proposed Marion County Health Unit Trust Fund at 0.1100 of a mill for a combined total Countywide millage rate of 4.2900 mills.

Ms. Fowler advised to get to the 0.8300 of a mill for the Fine and Forfeiture staff would have to make the necessary adjustments and transfer \$1,448,912.00 from the General Fund into the Fine and Forfeiture Fund.

The motion was unanimously approved by the Board (5-0).

Ms. Fowler advised that for the Special Districts, the MSTU for Law Enforcement, the actual millage rate for 2024 was 3.7200, the rolled back millage rate is 3.5015 mills, and the proposed millage rate to be levied is 3.7200 mills. For the MSTU for Fire Protection and Rescue Services, the actual millage rate for 2024 was 1.1100, the rolled back millage rate is 1.0440 mills, and the proposed millage rate to be levied is 1.1100 mills. For the Rainbow Lakes Estates - Comm Res Facility MSTU, the actual millage rate for 2024 was 0.8500 of a mill, the rolled back millage rate is 0.7760 of a mill, and the proposed millage rate to be levied is 0.8500 of a mill. For the Marion Oaks MSTU, the actual millage rate for 2024 was 1.0200 mills, the rolled back millage rate is 0.9534 of a mill, and the proposed millage rate to be levied is 1.0200 mills. For the Silver Springs Shores (SSS) Special Tax District, the actual millage rate for 2024 was 3.0000 mills, the rolled back millage rate is 2.7693 mills, and the proposed millage rate to be levied is 3.0000 mills. For the Hills of Ocala MSTU for Recreation, the actual millage rate for 2024 was 0.1800

of a mill, the rolled back millage rate is 0.1672 of a mill, and the proposed millage rate to be levied is 0.1800 of a mill.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stone, seconded by Commissioner McClain, to approve the Special Districts millage rates at the 2024 actual millage rates. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board (5-0).

Ms. Fowler stated the public hearing is currently scheduled for Thursday, September 4, 2025, 6:00 P.M. in these Commissioner Chambers.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stone, seconded by Commissioner McClain, to schedule and advertise a public hearing to consider the proposed millage rates and tentative budgets for Thursday, September 4, 2025, 6:00 p.m. in these Commissioner Chambers. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board (5-0).

A motion was made by Commissioner Stone, seconded by Commissioner McClain, to authorize Chairman to execute the appropriate documents related to the above actions. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board (5-0).

Ms. Fowler advised that for the Rainbow Lakes Municipal Service District (RLE-MSD), the actual millage rate for 2024 was 1.2500, the rolled back millage rate is 1.1401 mills, and the proposed millage rate to be levied is 1.2500 mills.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stone, seconded by Commissioner McClain, to set the proposed RLE-MSD millage rates at the 2024 actual millage rates. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board (5-0).

A motion was made by Commissioner Stone, seconded by Commissioner McClain, to schedule and advertise a public hearing to consider the RLE-MSD proposed millage rate and tentative budget for Thursday, September 4, 2025, at 5:50 p.m. in these Commissioner Chambers. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board (5-0).

A motion was made by Commissioner Stone, seconded by Commissioner McClain, to authorize Chairman to execute the appropriate documents related to the above action. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board (5-0).

PUBLIC COMMENT: NONE

BOARD DISCUSSION AND CLOSING COMMENTS

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting thereupon adjourned at 2:13 p.m.

Kathy Bryant, Chairman

Attest:

Gregory C. Harrell, Clerk

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