

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

December 7, 2023

**CALL TO ORDER:**

The Marion County Board of County Commissioners met in a workshop session in Commission Chambers at 1:31 p.m. on Thursday, December 7, 2023 at the Marion County Governmental Complex located in Ocala, Florida.

**INTRODUCTION OF WORKSHOP:**

Chairman Stone advised that the workshop was scheduled this afternoon to discuss Departmental Operational Plans.

**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 Michelle Stone, District 5; Commissioner Curry, District 1; Commissioner Matt McClain, District 3; and Commissioner Carl Zalak, III, District 4. Vice-Chairman Kathy Bryant, District 2; arrived shortly after the meeting commenced. Also present were County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes, Assistant County Administrator (ACA) Angel Roussel, ACA Tracy Straub, ACA Amanda Tart, and Executive Director of Internal Services Mike McCain.

The Deputy Clerk was in receipt of a 152 page Agenda packet which included copies of today's PowerPoint presentations.

**STAFF PRESENTATION**

1. Program Overview - Mike McCain, Executive Director

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Director of Internal Services, Mike McCain commented on the process relating to Departmental Operational plans, noting this year the final Departments are presenting their plans that look 5 years into the future. He stated the 3 areas of focus for the plans include: 1.) current state of the Department; 2.) future state of the Department; and 3.) implementation program. Mr. McCain advised that 5 Departments will be presenting today, noting the Solid Waste Department will be presenting at a later date after an ongoing financial analysis that includes a rate evaluation is completed.

Commissioner Bryant arrived at 1:34 p.m.

2. Departmental Operational Plan

Facilities Management - Jared Goodspeed, Director

Facilities Management Director Jared Goodspeed presented a 15 page handout to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation. He provided a brief overview of the Department. Mr. Goodspeed commented on the history of the Department, noting in 1982 there was a staff of 11 that maintained all 300,000 square feet (sf) of the McPherson Complex. Today, there is a team of 57 individuals that maintain 3,300,000 feet including all vertical construction. He advised that in 2023 a small project team of 4 technicians was dedicated to in-house renovations (Clerk's Annex security upgrade, BCC auditorium remodel, etc.).

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Mr. Goodspeed stated a 4 person team was dedicated to maintaining all the fire stations. He commented on a 3<sup>rd</sup> party Operational Efficiency Analysis (2023) that recommended the Department hire 17 full-time employees (FTEs) in fiscal year (FY) 2024 to match the service levels of peers. Mr. Goodspeed advised that the Department has added 7 employees and is looking to hire the remaining 10 positions over the next 5 years.

Mr. Goodspeed provided an overview relating to the internal and external customers Facilities Management serves in addition to the external agencies served (Clerk of Court, Public Defender, State Attorney, etc.). He stated last year the Department's level of service (LOS) was 1 technician per 119,246 sf; however, this year it has been reduced to 96,000 sf per technician, since the addition of the 7 new FTEs. Mr. Goodspeed advised that there are still large deficits at the Judicial Center and the Jail.

Mr. Goodspeed provided an overview of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis that was performed. He provided overviews of each area, noting under threats roughly 80% of the Facilities Management staff will retire over the next 7 years. The Department's work orders received and completed have doubled over the past 5 years. Mr. Goodspeed commented on the increase from FY 22 to FY 23, noting there was growth within a lot of Departments and remodeling that impacted the work order volume. He provided a summation of CIP Project Budgets per FY from 2009 through 2028, noting the red line on slide 10 indicates a prediction of a non-linear path of growth that will be exponential as the Department reaches large projects relating to Fleet Maintenance, Marion County Animal Services (MCAS), the Medical Examiner's Office and the long list of Sales Tax projects that are all vertical construction.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Mr. Goodspeed confirmed the time frames are tight for both the Medical Examiner's office and the new facility for MCAS.

Mr. Goodspeed provided a timeline relating to strategic goals for the Department, noting a focus on capacity, development, and retention. He commented on an organizational chart based on the proposed 5 Year Plan, which indicates proposed position transfer/reclass and FY 26/28 proposed new positions.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Mr. Goodspeed advised that many of the leading industry analytics will not provide sf costs because the measurement is so inaccurate. He stated costs have stabilized and the Department has been able to procure items in a more reasonable manner, but with the increase in labor costs the overall cost of projects is not likely to decrease.

Commissioner Curry commented on a previous conversation relating to the maintenance costs of the existing buildings versus (vs.) construction of a new facility, noting the expected reduction in maintenance related workorders for Facilities Management.

Mr. Bouyounes advised that the conversation will come back after Facilities management has an opportunity to perform the campus evaluation of all the buildings. The report should be available early next year and will be presented to the Board with options and cost estimates.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Mr. Goodspeed stated the 5 technicians in 2025 would be for the jail, Judicial Center, and the addition of 2 technicians to the small projects team. He noted the organizational chart in the PowerPoint presentation (slide 14) identifies the FY and where the technicians would be placed in the bottom right corner of the green technician squares. Mr. Goodspeed commented on the staffing requirement for the jail, noting it requires more technicians per sf than the industry standard, resulting in the need to relocate technicians and increasing drive times and related costs.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Mr. Goodspeed advised that the department is

requesting 5 technicians for 2024-25 at a cost of \$369,000.00.

Commissioner Curry commented on the study provided by Facilities Management.

Mr. Goodspeed stated back in October, 7 additional FTEs were approved, and interviews are currently underway. The additional technicians will reduce the average sf per technician from 119,000 to 96,000. He advised that the technicians used for small projects were excluded because they are dedicated to projects and not daily upkeep.

Chairman Stone questioned the use of apprenticeships.

Mr. Goodspeed stated there is a "trainee" position included in the matrix and is not a true apprenticeship because the team is represented and is not part of a union that has apprenticeships for the construction trades. He advised that the Department has entertained (with the State) developing apprenticeship programs for journeyman maintenance technicians, which did not come to fruition and led to the matrix and in-house mentoring. Mr. Goodspeed stated a technician 3 is equal to a journeyman in the field, and a technician 4 is a team leader, noting to move from a technician 3 to a technician 4 requires 80 hours of project time and 40 hours mentoring.

In response to Chairman Stone, Mr. Goodspeed advised that the Department has not pulled individuals from any of the local technical colleges. He stated there are programs where electrical companies can sponsor (pay for) the individuals who go through the program, and then they retain those individuals for their trades/company. The County has not done that yet. Mr. Goodspeed advised that he is unaware if that is an opportunity the Department can implement pending additional information.

Commissioner Zalak commented on the difficulty relating to retention for the Department over the next couple of years. He stated Lake Weir High School has a construction/technical program, noting students can be offered summer jobs in their junior and senior years as a work program. Commissioner Zalak opined that hiring those students straight out of high school is a great option. Mr. Goodspeed advised that the Department has participated in some of the internship programs that Human Resources (HR) have implemented.

ACA Amanda Tart stated some of the schools do offer programs, noting Marion Technical Institute (MTI) and Marion Technical College (MTC) have an electrical, welding, and a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) program. She advised that if the County chooses, they could sponsor a student to go through the electrical program, and that individual could go through the program while working for the County and get their hours that way. The electrician program is 4 years, and the HVAC program is roughly 18 months.

Commissioner Zalak opined that even in the absence of a specialized trade, getting the kids interested in construction straight out of high school as some sort of technician, and then letting them figure out where they want to focus, is a pipeline the County should be creating.

Commissioner Bryant stated a broader conversation with the Marion County School Board (MCSB) about these programs would be appropriate because there are a lot of students that would be interested in that type of program.

Ms. Tart advised that a meeting will be scheduled with the MCSB.

Commissioner Bryant commented on the benefit to the County and all the local trade associations from these programs.

Chairman Stone expressed support for the idea, noting she serves as the BCC liaison to the MCSB.

Commissioner Zalak addressed challenges in the construction industry relating to the

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adaptation for change, especially when it comes to technology. He encouraged Mr. Goodspeed to be that catalyst for his Department.

Mr. Goodspeed advised that the Department went paperless in 2019, noting the team has embraced that and has become accustomed to and embraces change.

In response to Chairman Stone, Mr. Bouyounes stated the general goals are already in the "Empowering Marion for Success 5 Year Operational Plan", but additional details can be provided. He advised that the plan is to bring the Board an update and supplement that will contain additional goals based on the Board discussions throughout the year. The update will occur in the first quarter of each year and goals.

#### Public Relations - Bobbi Perez, Director

Public Relations (PR) Director Bobbi Perez presented a 35 page handout to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation. She stated PR is responsible for highlighting what the County Departments are doing while assisting Departments, officials, leaders, and helping to engage citizens, stakeholders, and the media. Ms. Perez advised that the Department's top priority is to provide consistency amongst messages, campaigns, and the dissemination of information that citizens recognize the organization as the source for Marion County information.

Ms. Perez provided an overview of the components that make up the Department's primary workload. She advised that Marion County Fire Rescue (MCFR) is the largest Department in the County and has a dedicated position that coordinates with the PR team to help distribute accurate messaging at a moment's notice regarding MCFR. The position also serves as a key role in internal communications for MCFR by planning employee retirements, celebrations, and creating content for the Department. Ms. Perez stated the position also distributes information relating to outreach programs such as smoke detector safety, fire safety education and other public awareness campaigns. She referred to a pie chart, as seen on the overhead screens, which provides a breakdown of the Department's current projects. Ms. Perez advised that the majority of projects include graphic design (27%), and social media projects (26.3%), which is consistent with the Department's primary goal to educate the public on Marion County's services and story. She stated the Department has taken in over 1,000 work orders since late July, 2023, including the "No Horsin' Around with Marion" anti-litter initiative and business partnership development, Marion County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) Crime Prevention Campaign, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) awareness month, pets of the week for MCAS and the newly created Project Pawsitivity, and more. The PR Department also communicates important messages to the public during a state of emergency.

Ms. Perez provided an overview relating to the history of the PR Department, noting the growth within the community has driven the need for growth in the Department. This year in addition to adding 2 new positions, the PR team will now include the Fire Life and Safety Educator, also known as the Public Information Officer (PIO). This brings the total number of PR team members to 8.

Ms. Perez advised that the Department is funded out of 3 main buckets: 1) General Fund; 2) MCFR; and 3) Solid Waste. She provided an overview of the Department's pillars for success (what the Department is built on), which include customer service, integrity, communication, and relationships. Ms. Perez commented on the PR team, noting the Operational Plan provides a breakdown of each team member's specialties. She stated there is a comparison showing Marion County's combined Facebook following on the main page and MCFR page is over 100,000 individuals. Although Counties like Collier

have double the FTEs, the Marion County PR Department's reach is far greater. Ms. Perez provided an overview relating to the various parties served by the Department, including: 1) internal customers (County Departments); 2) external customers (Marion County citizens); 3) external agencies; and social media audiences (Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), Threads, LinkedIn, Neighbors, and Nextdoor). She advised of the communication methods utilized by the Department (traditional, online, and in-person participation), noting individuals digest information differently. Ms. Perez commented on the volume of engagement on just 2 social media platforms, allowing the Department to share Marion County's stories with more than 2,000,000 people.

Ms. Perez presented a brief video highlighting the County projects, events, and achievements. She noted the Department has provided a cost savings of \$827,000.00 to \$3,154,000.00 by completing work in-house (videography, photography, graphic design, web design and editing, and event planning and coordination).

Ms. Perez provided an overview of the Department's SWOT Analysis and Action Plan. She advised that the Department is positioning itself as the source of positive customer experiences for all who interact with or desire to learn about Marion County. Ms. Perez shared the Department's future goals: 1) increase citizen engagement; 2) grow County image and reputation through programs and events; 3) enhance online and social media presence; and 4) educate the public on services, objectives, and County initiatives.

Ms. Perez advised that having the MCFR PR position under the umbrella of the overall PR team for the County will create new opportunities to enhance the ability to educate and share the stories of MCFR. She stated the Department will build on the strong relationships that are already created with regional media outlets and seek out all opportunities to expand coverage and increase visibility and recognition.

Ms. Perez advised that the "No Horsin' Around with Marion" anti-litter campaign is the largest campaign the Marion County PR Department has ever taken on, noting the campaign is changing the mindsets of children and adults alike. She provided a brief overview of goals relating to the litter campaign including: 1) partnerships with the public; 2) community engagement; and 3) promote litter and recycling education.

Ms. Perez stated the year 1 goal is the creation of a public engagement platform, noting as individuals continue to choose to consume their news from websites, applications (apps), and social media, having an engagement platform will become essential. The platform will allow staff to further segment audiences and tailor messages that can be distributed more effectively and efficiently via channels preferred by the targeted recipient. The platform will allow direct text messaging, alerts, equity mapping, and the engagement hub that will be designed for individuals that do not wish to utilize social media. The platform will be a helpful tool for many County Departments including Municipal Service Taxing Units (MSTU) assessments (eliminating the need to mail petitions), boil water notifications from Utilities, providing demographic information and equity mapping for grants for Departments such as Community Services, and the platform can even host virtual interactive town halls and community meetings for Commissioners.

Ms. Perez advised that the Department is proposing a review of the current positions to streamline titles to reflect the specific talents within the Department. The Fire Life and Safety Educator title will change to Public Safety Information Officer to include MCFR and Public Safety Communications (PSC). PR is proposing an additional position (Public Safety Information Coordinator), which will report directly to the newly titled Public Safety Information Officer. This position will help to balance the increased workload, be available for on-call emergency situations, and further enhance the online and social media

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presence of MCFR.

Ms. Perez stated in year 2, the Department will continue to focus on citizen engagement through expanded programs, events and unified communication. PR will focus on the professional development of the team to build on the cost savings of performing content creation in-house. She advised that Monday.com (project management system) was launched in the summer of 2023, has proven beneficial, but also cumbersome relating to entering items in the system. To keep up with the number of work orders and tasks and administrative duties, the Department is proposing the addition of a PR Project Coordinator. This position would assist with contract management and help streamline the project management process, provide the necessary follow up with Departments, and gather vital information for the success of the project's completion.

Ms. Perez advised that in year 3 the Department is proposing for a unified County event management to be brought to the PR team. The expansion of events would be designed to appeal to the community and continue to promote positive engagement with citizens while connecting them to their local government. She stated with the expansion of event management the Department is proposing the addition of an entry level Events Specialist position. This position would assist the PR Specialist of Events and Outreach by helping plan and execute events while securing sponsorship. In year 3 the Department is requesting the separation of its budget, noting the PR budget is combined with the Administration Department. Ms. Perez advised that by year 3 there will be enough data from the project management system to be able to allocate costs back to the respective Departments. Allowing for the separation will enable better control and oversight of necessary expenditures. She stated year 3 will also be for enhancing the "Academy" programs. Citizens Academy is a 12 week journey that PR oversees, and helps citizens connect with the County's Departments. Alumni Academy is an 8 week program for citizens that occurs after completion of the first academy. The success of these programs over the past 12 years have led to a clear need to do more for the youth of the County. The addition of a Marion County Youth Academy to the lineup, PR will target high school-aged young adults and give them an in depth look at County Departments. Ms. Perez advised that with the addition of this program, the Department will need to purchase 2 new passenger vans that will assist with the equipment transportation, as well as the transportation of participants. She stated by the end of year 3 the proposed organizational chart will focus more on the talents of the team.

Ms. Perez advised that year 4 is about technology and equipment, noting the rapid changes that occur relating to this area of focus.

Ms. Perez stated by year 5 the Department will have reached maximum capacity of space to continue to work in the current location and may need to consider an alternate site to remain productive. She advised that to accommodate more County events, PR proposes a collaboration with Facilities Management Department to develop a County Venue similar to the Downtown Square to be located on the campus. The events held onsite will help foster community pride, educate the public, and strengthen relationships.

Ms. Perez stated due to the nature of PR and the ever-evolving world of engagement methods and outreach, the plan is meant to be fluid and is in place, as a guide to help move through the next 5 years.

Commissioner Bryant stated there will have to be a lot of discussion related to a County Venue.

Commissioner Zalak expressed appreciation towards Ms. Perez for the assistance she and her team provided to him relating to the State of the County address. He commented

on Ms. Perez's leadership and ability to deliver on hard requests/timelines.

Commissioner Bryant stated the growth the Department has shown over the past couple of years has been astounding.

Commissioner Curry advised that after he delivered the State of the County address at the Ocala Metro Chamber and Economic Partnership (CEP), several people approached him regarding the media aspect, and they could not believe it was done in-house. He questioned if there are other funding opportunities. Ms. Perez stated Lacey Larramore from Solid Waste will be joining the team and she will be housed under PR. She advised that MCAS will need another position to assist with the PR portion of the workload. She commented on a story that was released yesterday relating to microchipping. Ms. Perez stated PR met with MCAS to review which stories the Department wants to tell, noting all those stories are falling by the wayside. She advised that her team is dedicating 3 hours weekly to assist with shooting video and highlighting animals.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Ms. Perez advised that the pie chart she referred to earlier represents current projects that are in progress, noting since July the Department has brought in 957 work orders that PR has entered into the system. The work order system has not yet been released to the Departments at this time but will be in the coming weeks.

Chairman Stone stated when individuals are going through the academies (especially with the youth coming online in the future) that graduates should have a list of County Departments and Advisory Boards and a reminder to put in their application in now, noting it is good for a year. Ms. Perez stated the Citizen Academy applications will go live soon and the class will be selected in January.

In response to Chairman Stone, Ms. Perez advised that there is 1 class per year due to the time involved.

#### Human Resources - Jessica James, Acting Director

Acting Human Resources (HR) Director Jessica James presented a 28 page handout to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation. She provided a brief history of the Department, noting the HR mission is to attract, develop, and retain a highly qualified, diverse workforce, creating a culture of opportunity, health, and safety. Ms. James stated the HR team is comprised of 3 divisions; 1) HR (9 staff members); 2) Risk and Benefits (7 staff members); and 3) Employee Health Clinic (2 staff employees and 2 Concentra employees). She provided an overview of functions performed by HR (recruitment and selection, training and retention, employee relations, policies and procedures, performance evaluations, payroll and labor negotiations); Risk and Benefits (safety awareness and compliance, risk mitigation, workers' compensation, employee/employer insurances, benefits administration, employee assistance program (EAP), wellness, and Florida Retirement System (FRS)); and the Employee Health Clinic (employee physicals, immunizations, health training programs, workplace health injuries, firefighter physicals, COVID pandemic testing).

Ms. James reviewed the Department's SWOT analysis, noting key items in each category. She advised that the goals for year 1 of the 5 Year Plan include the addition of the Talent Specialist Position, which will support the Talent Manager in designing, developing and implementing and administering performance based County specific and mandated trainings. They will assist in the recruitment process, succession planning, oversight of the Vector Solutions training platform, as well as updating Department

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policies, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and standard operating guidelines (SOGs).

Ms. James stated HR is requesting the addition of a Risk Coordinator, noting along with the growth in the County come additional risk exposures and claims. This position will serve as a support function to the Risk Liability Asset Analyst and the Safety Training and Compliance Manager for claims processing, quarterly reports, site inspections, field inspections, and reporting. This individual will also assist with the administrative needs for the Risk Claims Liability Asset Analyst for document preservations, imports, and investigations. She stated additional functions of this position include auditing job descriptions within the organization to ensure the environmental and workplace exposures are sufficiently accounted for through appropriate Worker's Compensation class codes, policies, procedures, and personal protective equipment (PPE). This position can also assist the Safety Training and Compliance Manager with the regulatory training that is offered to employees for development and retention.

Ms. James advised of new policies such as the paid time off (PTO) policy including the transition from current sick and annual accrual to a consolidated PTO bank. The change requires redefining carryover limitations and the handling of current employee bank sick accruals. She stated the Department is working on implementing a remote work policy and electronic leave requests.

Ms. James commented on the Department's desire to complete requests for proposals in the first year relating to dental insurance (limited acceptance from dentists) and the EAP (increased need and focus on mental health and decline in use of current EAP).

Ms. James advised of a desire to create an outdoor memorial site (employee memorial site), on the grounds of the McPherson campus to honor and memorialize lost colleagues. Parks and Recreation will design the memorial and partner with Facilities Management to construct it, and HR will establish a process for inclusion in the memorial.

Ms. James addressed objectives for year 2. She advised that in 2020 the County moved from being fully insured under Florida Blue to being partially self-insured, at the same time, the County entered into a 3 year agreement with the Heart of Florida (HOF), which ended on September 30, 2023. The Department is proposing to open a new Employee Health Clinic that will operate as the employee's primary care physician (PCP) as well as still offer occupational health services. The clinic will provide a health option to employees with no deductible.

Ms. James stated the decision was recently made to evaluate the use of the old tire shop facility that the County owns located near the Visitors Convention Bureau. HR has been working with facilities Management to develop a plan for the construction of the new facility to accommodate the needs of the clinic. There is a completed RFP and staff is currently in negotiations with the top ranked company from the RFP that will potentially be handling the clinic operations. She advised that the next objective focuses on whole life long-term care benefit and mental health first aid. Marion County has an extensive number of benefits available to employees; however, one benefit that is currently unavailable is long-term care. Ms. James stated there are a variety of options relating to long-term care, noting they all help to cover the cost of long-term care services such as nursing homes and home health care costs. She commented on an increase in the number of individuals facing mental health challenges. Ms. James advised that by adding a mental health first aid training to the wellness program, the Department will be able to increase education, reduce the stigma attached to mental health and engage others to

step forward and learn the skills to identify and assist someone that may be struggling with a mental health challenge.

Ms. James commented on the Rape, Aggression, Defense (RAD) Simulation, noting it is a comprehensive, women only course that is designed to help create awareness and teach important tools for personal safety and prevention. She stated the basic RAD training is currently offered, and the Wellness Program plans to expand the training to include the advanced portion of the training which will give participants real-time, hands-on experience through simulation exercises.

Ms. James stated the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) entitles employees to take unpaid job protected leave for up to 12 weeks for specified family and medical reasons, noting the Department receives numerous requests for FMLA approvals for anything from the birth of a child to illnesses. She advised that meetings will be set up with Tyler Technologies to see if their tracking module will be a viable option; however, if it is not, the Department will issue an RFP for an additional option for these services.

Ms. James addressed year 3 goals. She stated the Department currently has 2 vehicles that are utilized by the risk team and are required to be available for emergency response to safety situations and inspections. A new vehicle would be utilized for attending Countywide training sessions and open enrollment functions, as well as career fairs. Career fairs and training have been increasing yearly and with continued growth the Department anticipates even more training and recruitment in the years to follow. Ms. James advised that another objective for year 3 is to evaluate the County's property insurance, noting insurance premiums have been on the rise resulting in an increase of over \$1,000,000.00 in premiums to the County this past year alone. She commented on the success the Department has seen with self-insurance on the benefits side, and noted staff would like to utilize an actuarial to evaluate whether going self-insured for property insurance would be a viable option. Ms. James stated the Department's third objective is a new and improved outdoor wellness center. HR is looking for ways to further improve the actions available to employees and citizen, noting the revitalization of the current outdoor exercise area will provide employees and citizens with a one-of-a-kind fitness experience with updated equipment designed to meet the needs of employees and dependents. The Department is currently looking at a grant to fund the outdoor facility. Ms. James commented on year 4 objectives including a partnership with University of Florida (UF) Extension Services, the Wellness Program will be able to offer potential classes or courses on dietary changes, cooking classes, wellness courses, financial wellness and more to encourage more options that promote mental and physical well-being for employees. She stated succession planning is another objective that has consistently been a topic of interest, noting a thorough succession plan identifies and nurtures potential successors by facilitating the transfer of knowledge, skill, and institutional memory from seasoned staff to newer employees. Ms. James advised that the process preserves the County's accumulated knowledge but maintains continuity in decision making and the strategic direction. A robust succession plan will help to build a talent pipeline and foster culture of leadership development within the County. The Department will develop a plan over the next few years that will be ready to implement in year 4. This could potentially involve hiring an outside firm and the collection of information from other organizations on their processes.

Ms. James stated the Department's sole year 5 objective is the addition of an HR Generalist position, noting this individual will be responsible for covering most HR functions including talent attraction, hiring, employee engagement and performance

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management, as well as compensation and benefits. This position will assist with special projects that occur throughout the year. She advised that this plan encompasses the goals of HR over the next 5 years.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Ms. James clarified that under “threats” in the Department’s SWOT analysis the term “risk exposure” relates to growth driving an increase in risks to the County (hitting a limb or pothole in the road, or the more employees the County has the more opportunity for accidents to happen if the County is not more proactive with safety). She stated “outdated policies” could just be having the time to review policies to ensure there is nothing missing, noting the Departments have their own policies. Ms. James advised she can provide figures relating to turnover percentage.

Chairman Stone requested the percentage of turnover be provided by Department over a 3 to 5 year period.

Utilities - Jody Kirkman, P.E., Director

Utilities Director Jody Kirkman introduced Deputy Director Joshua Kramer, Fiscal Manager John Corneilson, and the new Utilities Operational Manager, Sean McFarland. He presented a 17 page handout to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation. Mr. Kirkman advised that the Department is comprised of the following four Divisions: 1) Business/Administration; 2) Operations; 3) Maintenance; and 4) Engineering and Construction. He provided an overview of customers served by the Department including: 1) external customers (Marion County Utilities customers, residents, retirees, businesses, visitors, developers, realtors, vendors, and consultants); 2) External Agencies (St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), Department of Health (DOH), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), etc. and 3) Internal Customers (26 departments and offices under the Board of County Commissioners and approximately 1,800 employees).

Mr. Kirkman provided a brief overview of key personnel within the Department, noting there are currently 2 vacant positions. The Department currently has 126.6 positions (FTEs supporting day-to-day activities). He addressed the history of the Department from December 1993 to the present. Mr. Kirkman stated the Department continues to grow by approximately 2,000 to 2,500 accounts per year. He provided a breakdown relating to current conditions of the Department including: 1) water customers (47,528); 2) wastewater customers (24,812); 3) water treatment facilities (61); 4) wastewater treatment facilities (7); 5) lift stations (186); 6) Five-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget anticipates nearly \$220,000,000.00 in capital outlay; and 7) CIP budget includes \$75,000,000.00 for water main extensions and septic to sewer project utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and FDEP funds and an additional \$145,000,000.00 in defined CIP projects.

Mr. Kirkman advised that the overall vision of Marion County Utilities is to provide superior customer service while protecting public health, safety, and the environment. The Department’s mission is to establish Marion County Utilities as a prominent supplier of water and wastewater throughout the County by upgrading existing systems through the use of automation, new technology, natural resources, and improving infrastructure. He provided an overview relating to the goals of the Department, including: 1) Ensure safe and reliable operation and maintenance of all Marion County facilities associated with water supply and wastewater collection infrastructure; 2) Meet or exceed permitted

treatment regulations and provide environmentally safe disposal of treated effluent; 3) Ensure that Marion County Utilities has adequate capacity to meet present and future customer water, sewer, and reclaim water needs; 4) Promote safe and effective use of reclaim water and bio-solid residuals in order to protect public health and safety and the environment; 5) Assist development by providing engineering data and construction supervision, while ensuring compliance with Marion County Land Development Code; and 6) Develop, implement, and execute the five-year Utility CIP. Mr. Kirkman referred to a chart (as seen on the overhead screens) providing a breakdown of CIP projects and their related time frames for implementation. He commented on a slide showing projects and the Carry Forward funds associated with each. Mr. Kirkman noted ARPA funding makes up the majority of the Carry forward, noting there are 6 different phases within the ARPA project. He advised that the first phase (The Centers project) will be negotiated next week, and staff hopes to bring it back to the Board in early January for award, which will be followed by the second phase (Marion Oaks water system). Mr. Kirkman stated the Department is basically at 90 percent (%) in 4 of the 6 projects, so they will begin to come to fruition very quickly to get into construction.

Mr. Kirkman commented on the future of the Department, noting it is necessary to establish alternative water supplies including the possibility of establishing a viable Lower Floridan Aquifer. He advised that all of the County's water currently comes from the upper Floridan Aquifer. Mr. Kirkman stated there is a project for a test well currently being advertised, noting drilling of the test well should begin hopefully within the next 60 days in SE Marion County. He advised that the Department is partnering with the SJRWMD and will continue that partnership moving forward to develop the alternative water supply. Mr. Kirkman noted a State Grant was received relating to the test well in the amount of \$1,000,000.00.

Mr. Kirkman addressed Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) Remediation efforts. He stated the Department continues to seek grant funding to bring water to the Lowell area. The Department will continue to work with regional partners to identify and implement operational strategies that minimize potential for PFAS spreading. Mr. Kirkman advised that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is looking to establish Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs) for what is allowed PFAS in the water supply, noting the measurement is parts per trillion. He commented on concerns relating to PFAS being treated and filtered and how to get rid of the filtered material.

In response to Chairman Stone, Mr. Kirkman stated PFAS is used for many things including Teflon coating, firefighting agents, and more.

Mr. Kirkman addressed the Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) issues including wastewater treatment plants (WWTP) and the Septic to Sewer in and around the springs. He advised that the Department would continue to utilize its recent septic to sewer feasibility study to identify cost-effective projects, obtain grant funding to support septic to sewer conversion projects, and community outreach to develop and maintain support for septic to sewer projects. Mr. Kirkman commented on objectives relating to 5 year projects including the expansion of the Oak Run Wastewater Reclamation Facility (WWRF), new regional water plants in the northwest and southeast portions of the County, and continued water main extension projects.

Commissioner Zalak out at 3:13 p.m.

In response to Chairman Stone, Mr. Kirkman stated the northwest regional water plant will utilize the upper Floridan aquifer, noting three, 20 inch production wells have been drilled and are ready to go.

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Mr. Kirkman advised that the Department is currently working on its succession planning. He stated the extension of the Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP) to 8 years has been a Godsend and provides an incentive for employees to stay longer. He provided an overview of keys to success relating to succession planning. Mr. Kirkman advised that the Department will continue to evaluate future acquisitions, noting the Department has looked at different utilities over the past year but was not able to strike any deals with them. He stated the Department is moving forward with developing a staffing plan to determine current and projected levels of service (LOS) and develop a model denoting the FTEs to meet the current/projected LOS. The model will be presented to the Board for approval prior to implementation. Mr. Kirkman commented on a rate stabilization/control plan, noting the Department will continue utilizing Stantec Consulting Services to complete the Revenue Sufficiency Analysis (RSA) on an annual basis while monitoring expenditures and adjusting as needed. He expressed appreciation towards the Board for allowing the Department to look at other locations (vacant property/building availability) for a central location.

Commissioner Zalak returned at 3:18 p.m.

Mr. Kirkman advised that Utilities would like to participate in making contributions to make that happen if able to reside in that location. He stated Utilities will continue to pursue all grant funding opportunities. Mr. Kirkman commented on a slide (as seen on the overhead screens) providing a financial management plan summary.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Mr. Kirkman advised that the annual study relating to the RSA with Stantec Consulting Services is what the Department considers rate stabilization. He stated the Department is not developing independent funds or reserves for that because they felt it was not needed, noting the current rates can be maintained with the Department's current revenue and expenses. Mr. Kirkman advised that the County does not have any injection wells right now; however, there is an agreement with the World Equestrian Center (WEC) that basically stated the WEC is required to accept up to 2,000,000 gallons of flow, treated effluent, from the County's facility at Golden Ocala. The WEC is currently taking the flow at the temporary Rapid Infiltration Basin Systems (RIBS) they built right off NW 80<sup>th</sup> Avenue. He stated they have permitted a deep injection well on the County's site and are moving forward to the design phase and then will move into construction. Once built, the well will be turned over to the County. Mr. Kirkman advised that DEP has a well program. He stated the lower Floridan aquifer is roughly 1,200 ft., but this type of well will likely be in the 2,800 ft. range and puts water back (treated effluent at advanced wastewater treatment (AWT) standards) into the system.

Commissioner Zalak stated the water that is put back is not recharge for drinking water. Mr. Kirkman concurred.

In response to Chairman Stone, Mr. Kirkman advised that in the northwest portion of the County the upper Floridan is where individuals normally drill, noting there is a lot of very good water there.

Commissioner Curry commented on efforts to save Lake Weir. He questioned why the grant funding was not secured prior to the MSTU Department sending out letters relating to assessments, noting approximately 50% up to possibly 70% of that cost would come from grant funding but individuals were not advised that was the case. Mr. Kirkman stated the project is a private initiative, noting staff followed the lead of those parties relating to the schedule and what they wanted done. The Department began seeking grants; however, they were asked if there was public "buy-in", which occurred midway through

the survey. He advised that through working with Legislative Manager Matt Cretul, it was decided to go forward and seek the funds for the design portion of the project, noting if the design is complete, staff can put actual costs to the project and look at the possibility of additional funding to offset some of the costs.

Commissioner Curry commented on the map that was used in the original study that contained many lower income parcels. He opined that if there is going to be another effort, there needs to be a purging of the map and impacted parcels should be reestablished, noting it is not realistic to place a \$50,000.00 assessment on a parcel that is not worth \$20,000.00. Commissioner Curry advised that if new letters are sent to impacted property owners, he wants to see the letter before it is sent.

Chairman Stone noted this is not part of the 5 Year Operational Plan.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Commissioner McClain advised that he has been somewhat briefed on the matter in addition to conversations and taking a tour.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Mr. Kirkman stated the goal is to look for alternative supplies and not over tax the upper Floridan aquifer. He advised that the Withlacoochee Regional Water Supply Authority (WRWSA) will be playing a bigger role moving forward as it relates to developing alternative water supplies, noting that when they do, they can split the costs between all members associated with that authority and make water a little more affordable.

Commissioner Curry out at 3:31 p.m.

Commissioner Zalak commented on the impact to the aquifer from cities like Tampa or Jacksonville, noting Marion County citizens should not bear the brunt of those costs. Mr. Kirkman stated there will be an interconnect between SJRWMD and SWFWMD coming soon (within the next 5 years).

Chairman Stone questioned if it is worthwhile to look to the Legislature to give the County 1 water management district.

Commissioner Bryant stated the split provides 3 different agencies for grant applications.

#### Growth Services - Chuck Varadin, Director

Growth Services Director Chuck Varadin introduced Deputy Director Ken Weyrauch and presented a 13 page handout to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation. He advised that the Department's mission is to guide existing and future development to continually improve the quality of life for Marion County residents, which will strengthen the County's position as a highly desirable community to live, work, and play. Mr. Varadin commented on values the Department wanted to utilize to guide decisions and interactions, noting they opted for humble, hungry, and smart both individually and collectively as a team.

Commissioner Curry returned at 3:36 p.m.

Mr. Varadin referred to a slide showing the Growth Services organizational chart. He commented on the matrices the Department has implemented in the last few months providing employees with a path for growth, development, and the ability to move into other positions within the Department if they so choose. Mr. Varadin stated there are currently 12 Code Enforcement Officers (CEO), noting Supervisor Robin Hough who also performs IT work for the Enterprise Permitting and Licensing (EP&L) system for Code Enforcement will be retiring in August 2028. He referred to a chart showing a comparison of the number of interactions that Growth Services has with the community (electronic mails (emails), walk-ins, phone calls). Mr. Varadin noted the chart shows a consistent increase in the number of interactions over the last few years (since COVID).

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Mr. Varadin provided an overview of the Department's SWOT analysis. He addressed artificial intelligence (AI), noting the University of Florida (UF) has hired 500 new staff that will focus on AI, in an effort to become a hub for AI throughout the Country. Mr. Varadin stated the Department's vision for the future includes providing quality customer service, utilization of the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code (LDC) to improve the quality of life, and continuously improve the Department's LOS. He addressed goals and strategies relating to improving customer service.

Deputy Director Ken Weyrauch provided a timeframe for goals and strategies relating to the Comprehensive Plan and LDC, noting the importance of executing in a manner that results in one cohesive plan with many elements. He stated the Area Study (i.e., the corridor study) should be pushed out toward the summer or possibly the beginning of the new fiscal year. Staff are working on the planned service areas (PSAs), noting there are areas that are urbanizing; however, commercial, and residential areas are treated the same regardless of where they are located. Some areas are developing in a way that is a little more than what they were projected to be, so the PSAs will help staff define those areas, and develop policies and standards on how they should develop. Mr. Weyrauch stated if this is successful, it will aid in alleviating stress on rural and other less developed areas. He noted infrastructure and capacities will also be reviewed to ensure growth is not put in areas without adequate facilities. Mr. Weyrauch stated every 7 years the Department must complete the evaluation and appraisal report (EAR) for the Comprehensive Plan. The Department's letter to the State is due February 2025, with a year from that for adoption. He advised that the Department requests to take the "Empowering Marion Strategic Plan" and the visioning workshop that was held and combine them with other plans in the works, resulting in a cohesive study that will include an evaluation of the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) and the Farmland Preservation Area (FPA). Mr. Weyrauch stated once the EAR analysis is completed, staff will work on policies for adoption, noting that will require updates to the Comprehensive Plan and the LDC (which must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan). He advised that the Department is scoring requests for qualifications (RFQs) relating to the EAR and is looking for a consultant for that work. Staff will continue to work on and evaluate the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program and have ideas on how this can be incorporated as a very effective tool for PSAs. Mr. Weyrauch stated there will be workshops relating to specific topics within the LDC, noting once the EAR has been updated, a complete revision of the LDC will be required and can sometimes take years. He advised that the Department plans to simplify the LDC, so it is easier for individuals to understand, and development becomes more predictable.

Commissioner Curry out at 3:52 p.m.

Mr. Weyrauch stated the Department is working on the Master Plan relating to the Silver Springs Community Redevelopment Area (CRA), noting there are currently community meetings being held and another with the Board will occur soon.

Commissioner Curry returned at 3:54 p.m.

Mr. Varadin provided a brief overview of the elements that contribute to improvements in the Department's LOS. He commented on succession planning, noting key staff members that will be retiring by 2029. Mr. Varadin advised that the Department has considered adding a time-limited Principal Planner position for Senior Planner Chris Rison, so he will be coaching/mentoring other employees rather than taking on new cases. The position would go away after Mr. Rison retires.

Mr. Varadin addressed the addition of 2 Assistant Code Enforcement Supervisors to take

some of the burden off of Supervisor Robin Hough, noting 1 of these individuals should be able to rise to the Supervisor position in the future. He commented on working with UF and local schools relating to an intern/mentorship initiative, noting the benefit to all parties. Mr. Varadin referred to a slide containing the proposed 2029 Growth Services Organizational Chart.

Commissioner Zalak commented on the use of software to reduce repetitive work allowing individuals to focus on the work that requires human intervention.

Mr. Bouyounes advised that there have been many initiatives presented and all are subject to future budget constraint.

Chairman Stone encourages staff to continue to innovate and dream big.

#### BOARD DISCUSSION AND CLOSING COMMENTS

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting thereupon adjourned at 4:56 p.m.

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Michelle Stone, Chairman

Attest:

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Gregory C. Harrell, Clerk

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