

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

May 26, 2026

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 Tuesday, May 26, 2026 at the Marion County Governmental Complex located in Ocala, Florida.

INTRODUCTION OF WORKSHOP BY CHAIRMAN CARL ZALAK, III

Chairman Zalak advised that the workshop was scheduled this afternoon to discuss the Parks and Recreation Department funding.

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 Carl Zalak, III, District 4; Vice-Chairman Matthew McClain, District 3; and Commissioner Craig Curry, District 1. Commissioners Kathy Bryant, District 2 and Commissioner Michelle Stone, District 5, arrived shortly after the meeting commenced. Also present were County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes, Assistant County Administrator (ACA) Angel Roussel and ACA Tracy Straub.

It was noted for the record that the Deputy Clerk was in receipt of a 52 page Agenda packet to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION

1. Present Belleview Health Department Project Update

Parks and Recreation Director Jim Couillard presented the following recommendation:

Description/Background: The Parks & Recreation department is providing the Marion County Board of County Commissioners (Board) with an update on the process of bond funding to address deferred maintenance backlog, recreational opportunities and land conservation for Marion County. During a workshop in May 2026, the Board directed the department to continue with the process as part of the effort to have a measure on the ballot for the General Election in November.

Being presented today is a draft Feasibility Report provided by the Trust for Public Land, as well as information on the overall list of projects across Marion County, including demographic and population growth data, non-profit and political action committee strategies, and a schedule for process through August 2026. This is one in a series of workshops being planned to keep the Board and the community updated on this important initiative.

Budget/Impact: None.

Recommended Action: For discussion.

Parks and Recreation Director Jim Couillard stated the last direction from the Board was to develop project lists per District and then meet with the Board, which staff have done. He advised that the lists have not been prioritized at the level of funding, noting the level has not been determined yet. Mr. Couillard referred to a slide as seen on the overhead

screens depicting demographics and population growth by District. Each District is broken down by square miles (sq mi), there is data relating to Census 2010 and Census 2020, as well as University of Florida (UF) Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) projection for 2025, due to currently being mid-census. He commented on the population growth numbers for the past 15 years, the percentage of change within each District, the total changes in the past 5 years and the percentage of change over the same time period. Mr. Couillard referred to the density of population per sq mi within each District. He addressed the rate of growth in District 2 and District 5 with District 2 having grown nearly 35 percent (%) over the past 15 years and District 5 growing 31.3%. Mr. Couillard stated District 3 has the highest density with 758 individuals per sq mi. He addressed percentage of population per District, noting they were all pretty well even at 19% prior to the growth that happened. Mr. Couillard advised that Chairman's Zalak's District 4 has the lowest density per sq mi and the biggest land mass at 607.92 sq mi.

Commissioner Bryant commented on the density per sq mi data and stated she would have liked to have seen the percentage per sq mi instead of the actual numbers due to the significant differences relating to area of the Districts. She stated Commissioner McClain has the highest density per sq mi regarding population; however, it is the smallest District by area.

Mr. Couillard advised that staff can run those numbers and provide them to the Board.

Commissioner McClain questioned whether there is a breakdown of how much park land is in each of the Districts. Mr. Couillard stated that information is contained on a spreadsheet, noting the Department maintains a robust park inventory that breaks down ownership, square area, etc. The park acreage is not included in today's presentation; however, staff can provide that data.

Mr. Couillard commented on demographic trends relating to median age. He provided an overview of population and growth data relating to the municipalities.

Mr. Couillard provided an overview of the project list for Commissioner Curry's District 1, which includes: \$9,470,000.00 in asset replacements; \$24,045,000.00 for new/expansion relating to existing parks; and \$0.00 for new parks. He advised that Commissioner Curry did not see the need to add parks in his District, nor did he feel it was necessary to do any type of acquisitions.

Mr. Couillard provided an overview of data relating to Commissioner Bryant's District 2, which has the highest rate of growth while being served by just 5 existing parks. He stated there is \$2,725,000.00 needed in asset replacement, \$5,650,000.00 for new/expansion projects. There is \$5,945,000.00 in land acquisitions, which spurs new development in the amount of \$8,900,000.00. The combined total for District 2 existing and new parks is \$23,220,000.00. Mr. Couillard advised that the total is lower than District 1 due to there being fewer parks; however, the need is great. He stated there is 1 new proposed park, southwest (SW) Regional Park and the acquisition project is the Heart of Florida (HOF) Loop Trail (Cannon Gap Acquisition). Mr. Couillard advised that if the funding or agreements with the solar farm fall through, staff have developed a plan to request the ability to acquire a large swath of land from the Stavola Family to help make the paved trail connection that would end at Pruitt Trailhead and end over the west of Bridges Road. He stated it would soon connect everything from Baseline all the way out to Dunnellon, across the Withlacoochee River down into Citrus County and into the Withlacoochee State Forest trail system, which is all part of the HOF loop.

Mr. Couillard commented on putting more skin into the game with the Statewide Regional trail system, noting it is how more funds are brought to communities through the Shared-Use Non-motorized (SUN) Trail organization.

Mr. Couillard advised that the SW Regional Park is the land swap proposal between Independence Park (County owned) with a piece of the Greenway along 49th Avenue. He stated he was approached by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) at the Corridor Connect event at On Top of the World (OTOW) and they questioned whether the County is interested in the land swap. Mr. Couillard advised that this would be a lease to lease swap not land to land.

Commissioner Bryant commented on ensuring there are no other projects that need to be added to Liberty Community Park, noting it is a highly utilized park.

Commissioner Curry stated there has been an emphasis on larger developments providing recreational amenities/open space for residents within those projects and questioned if the impact of those areas has been reviewed. Mr. Couillard stated the Department has not but will look into the matter. He advised that the last Parks and Recreation Master Plan occurred in 2017 and a request from the Board at that time was for the consultant to actually take a look at how all these big retirement communities, (like Del Webb that have very vast recreation amenities) fit within the County's level of service (LOS) standards that are inside of the Comprehensive Plan. The numbers came back very, very de minimis. Mr. Couillard stated staff never really excluded them from the County's overall needs calculator, noting staff would look at whatever has been built because if it is not built, it should not be counted. He advised that staff could take a look at built versus (vs.) unbuilt to see where they fall.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Mr. Couillard stated other communities follow a tactic similar to that. Instead of mandating that facilities are built within those communities, they mandate a park partnership where they are actually providing a substantial amount of funding for a public park to be built nearby. He advised that he understands the differences in how they are operated, and the Board's concern regarding those costs.

Chairman Zalak stated the Board does not want to be in the pocket park business; they want regional parks and the opportunities they provide. He stated even if staff got somebody to partner with capital to help build a park down the road, it is great for the moment and helps get the park built, but it does not help the County operate that park long term and that becomes the funding challenge.

Commissioner Bryant advised that there is not a lot of land available, noting it makes sense to put the amenities within the communities where people are living. She stated a regional park in this area is a game changer for those individuals who currently have to drive across town to get to all of their children's activities.

Commissioner Stone commented on opportunities to partner with municipalities to expand what they have in place.

Commissioner Bryant opined that a regional facility is still needed.

Chairman Zalak stated if the County purchased the 40 or 50 acres past where the new high school is being built in Marion Oaks, added on to it, and had a sharing ability it would do more for the community than what the Board could do alone.

Commissioner Stone advised that the Board could request assistance from the Legislature to draft something special that would allow for this type of use, noting Senator Stan McClain is open to that based on a conversation she has had with him.

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In response to Chairman Zalak, Commissioner Bryant stated she is not in favor of changing the Board's plan relating to the DEP land swap and putting the regional sportsplex at the new high school rather than the original location.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Mr. Couillard advised that the County will get 40 acres in the land swap.

Commissioner Bryant opined that the land swap property is a more centrally located site. Mr. Couillard stated the County owns parcels that abut the property and there is the potential to partner with other Departments that own the land, potential for offsite stormwater management and there is a County drainage retention area (DRA) in that area. He advised that ACA Angel Roussel and Utilities Director Tony Cunningham have looked at a few different parcel configurations and possibly some acquisitions down the road.

Commissioner Bryant commented on adding on to schools, noting there will be competing interests relating to schedules for high school sports and outside leagues.

Mr. Couillard advised that one of the first calls the Department got when they opened the sports fields at Rotary Sportsplex was from Forest High School requesting to use them for practice. He stated there is no agreement with the Marion County School Board (MCSB); however, they use a lot of the County's parks for their sporting events.

Commissioner Bryant advised that the Board is talking about a land swap, not purchasing 40 acres.

Mr. Couillard commented on the alignment with the HOF loop trail and how SW 49th Avenue Road and the paved trail come down the side of that is a phenomenal opportunity for an eco-tourism hub. It is super easy to get to off of Interstate 75 (I-75). It's easier to get to that than it is to Santos.

Mr. Couillard provided an overview of data relating to Commissioner McClain's District 3, noting there are 6 existing parks, in addition to 1 historic asset (Ma Barker House). He stated there is \$18,675,000.00 needed in asset replacement, \$29,210,000.00 for new/expansion projects, with the total for that sub-category being \$47,885,000.00. Mr. Couillard advised that there are no requests for new parks or acquisitions. He stated District 3 has the highest density per sq mi.

Mr. Couillard addressed Chairman Zalak's District 4, noting it is the largest District with 607.92 sq mi. Asset replacement for District 4 is \$7,150,000.00 with new/expansion totaling \$11,487,000.00. He stated there were acquisitions Chairman Zalak requested the Department look at which came in at \$5,212,000.00. New park development is actually a zero acquisition project that is a long gun range. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is looking to move the gun range off of State Road 40 closer to town. Mr. Couillard advised that it costs approximately \$1,500,000.00 to develop one of these facilities, noting the Department is looking for the right location.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Mr. Couillard stated there are minor improvements relating to Wrigley Fields. He advised that the County has only developed the first half, so there is still another 35 acres to the north of the baseball complex.

Mr. Couillard provided a brief overview of Commissioner Stone's District 5, noting there has been roughly 31% growth over the past 15 years. There are 6 existing parks and less than \$250,000.00 in asset replacement. He stated there are very few new/expansion projects. The big ticket items within District 5 include land acquisition (\$7,500,000.00) for another regional park in the northwest and development of that park is estimated at \$8,300,000.00. Mr. Couillard advised that relating to the number 1 priority, land acquisition in this area should be high on the Board's list. He commented on the parks in

District 5, noting there is interest from the public sector regarding the Norm Westbrook Park. Mr. Couillard stated a developer inquired about the Phase 2 budget for the playground and he wants to make it bigger. He advised that the individual lives in that area and currently drives 30 to 45 minutes to get to a public playground they feel safe on. Mr. Couillard referred to a slide that provides a breakdown of data relating to Countywide projects. He stated there are 2 large items on this list, asset replacement in the amount of \$7,025,000.00 relating to Countywide replacement of all sports field lighting from metal halide to light-emitting diode (LED). Mr. Couillard stated this will result in a cost savings for the County, noting in some areas the leagues assist in paying the electric bills while others are the sole responsibility of the County. He advised that the conversion can be done in a phased approach. Mr. Couillard advised that he spoke with individuals in Martin County where they did something similar with their bond years ago and it has paid off in dividends, noting they can keep the parks open later without having to worry about the running of the lights. He stated this year alone the Department has spent nearly \$30,000.00 of its budget just repairing lights across the County. Mr. Couillard advised that the sports field lighting at Belleview is not included in the list due to being addressed as part of the overall redevelopment of that facility. He addressed the multi-functional facility, noting this is a partnership between bond funding, tourism funding and Emergency Management funding to build a facility that could be utilized as a shelter in times of need, as well as hosting indoor tournaments/activities to boost tourism. Mr. Couillard stated the proposed facility has not been identified in any Commissioner District, it has been kept as a Countywide project due to staff being unsure where it would be located specifically. He commented on potential projects including electronic entry gates at parks to assist in collecting entry fees; Marion County branded entry signs in strategic parks; and funding for trails.

Mr. Couillard referred to a handout providing a compilation of all the parks, asset replacements, new development, and the Countywide numbers, noting the list has not been prioritized. He advised that as the Trust for Public Land (TPL) team comes up and starts talking about funding limits and where the community may tolerate, it will provide a framework to work within. Mr. Couillard stated staff will start prioritizing the lists and getting down into, if there is a 20 year bond, what can actually be achieved in 20 years.

Mr. Couillard commented on a slide providing a breakdown of municipality engagement, noting there have been staff discussions with Belleview, Ocala and Dunnellon. He advised that The Town of Reddick just went through another election and staff have some MOUs they are waiting to get back from them for other reasons, so as soon as staff engage with them, those discussions will happen. The same is true with the Town of McIntosh.

Mr. Couillard stated Pennies for Parks did cover the cost of acquisitions and park improvements within each of the respective city limits. He commented on 2 potential options relating to bond funding: 1) specific project list; and 2) percentage of population. He provided a breakdown of percentages by municipality.

Mr. Couillard commented on land conservation, noting State agencies like DEP, Florida Forest Service, and the 2 Water Management Districts (WMD) each have land conservation and management missions each with different resource management goals and outcomes. He advised that Marion County has an opportunity to use land conservation strategically for its own goals and outcomes such as protection of specific wildlife corridors, recreational connectivity and setting aside land to ensure long-term protected linkages. Mr. Couillard commented on the importance of the role Marion County

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plays relating to the wildlife corridor. He addressed the success of the Land Bridge, noting bear genetics are being seen west of I-75 from the population that exist in the Ocala National Forest. Mr. Couillard stated specific values can be set aside to serve as matching dollars for other grants. He advised that staff can also look at holding funds to help contribute to the Sun Trail program like other communities that actually leverage their own funding. Volusia puts in \$1,000,000.00 a year towards trails and they get a lot of attention from Sun Trail, from the Department of Transportation (DOT) and DEP. Mr. Couillard stated there may be an opportunity to help the local agricultural sector by working with Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) and Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (RFLPP) to help set aside these working ranches and farms, even the horse farms. Pasco County has had good success with that where they are actually helping acquire citrus groves that are now non-productive and then setting them aside to help with the Florida Wildlife Corridor and species movement.

Mr. Couillard advised that the date to have any type of ballot initiative turned over to the Supervisor of Elections office is August 18, 2026.

Commissioner Curry commented on the expansion of existing parks and acquisition of new lands that would develop into new parks and questioned how staff plan to fund the operational costs relating to those facilities. Mr. Couillard stated staff are scraping by with the existing team; however, relating to the asset replacement and newer expansion, some of those are actually cost reduction projects. Conversion to turf and conversion to LED help save the Department dollars. He advised that new acquisitions and new expansion projects could cost more staff. It depends on the size, location and type of park, but a new Sportsplex would require funds to operate. Mr. Couillard stated it could be included in some of the bonds, but he will let the bond experts talk to that specifically.

Commissioner McClain questioned where he can find information relating to fee generation to offset some costs. Mr. Couillard stated some of those projects include a park like Carney Island, which have improvements like Recreational Vehicle (RV) campgrounds and boat storage that are instant revenue. Campgrounds, tent camping, and cabins are investments that yield returns long-term. He advised that there is more investment at Kiwanis Beach, things there that could actually bring in more and higher paying events than what staff are capable of doing now. Mr. Couillard stated the Department has to look at the assets it has, noting Horseshoe Lake provides a great opportunity to build more cabins, more group camping, more things that actually contribute back into those fees fund over the long term.

Commissioner McClain advised that when talking about prioritization, he is going to be looking at those types of things that are going to be able to generate revenue for some of these things in the future.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Commissioner McClain stated he is looking for matching dollars or projects that generate dollars like the RV campground at Carney Island.

Chairman Zalak questioned whether Commissioner McClain is looking to fund the operation portion. Commissioner McClain advised that is correct.

Commissioner Bryant stated she does not believe the RV park at the Southeastern Livestock Pavillion (SELP), just because it is generating revenue, should be a higher priority than a Regional Park that is going to serve the actual citizens of Marion County.

Commissioner Stone commented on the LED project and questioned how it will generate additional revenue other than lowering expenses.

Chairman Zalak questioned what the return on investment (ROI) is and whether just the infrastructure will also need to be changed out or just the lights. Mr. Couillard stated it depends on the park, noting at Rotary Sportsplex the boxes on the backs of buildings used to control lights are extremely dangerous. He advised that the system in place at the soccer fields now is just a control key, with no breakers or switches for individuals to throw. Mr. Couillard stated Rotary would be revamped from the power source to the light bulbs. He advised that the vendors who provide the service have the calculations relating to the ROI.

Commissioner McClain stated while he agrees with Commissioner Bryant, he is in favor of making sure the County has some of these things, noting when there is a healthy Fees Fund, the County is able to reinvest those into some of these other parks.

Commissioner Bryant advised that this has been a conversation that the Board has had for 16 years and the fees are a great addition; however, there will never be enough fees generated from Parks and Recreation to support the operations and maintenance (O&M) of parks. She stated there were 320,000 citizens when she and Charman Zalak joined the Board and soon there will be over 500,000. Commissioner Bryant advised that the needs are great in the County.

Commissioner McClain stated he agrees a regional park in District 2 needs to be prioritized, as well as some of these other things.

Chairman Zalak opined that there needs to be facilities that generate dollars and things that will take care of the community. He advised that the issue is balancing the O&M. Chairman Zalak commented on discussions with individuals at the World Equestrian Center (WEC), Disney and other locations, noting while it does not sustain their operations, food and beverage is a contributor. He stated food and beverage is not taken advantage of in Marion County.

In response to Commissioner McClain, Mr. Couillard advised that there is a commercial park pass program with vendor agreements and they do pay, but it is very small. Sportsplexes are run by their leagues, which they use to pay umpire fees, light bills, etc. He stated staff do not get involved with the percentage of ticket sales at the SELP due to it all being part of that event organizer's ability to pay a pretty handsome rental fee. Some of them are high demand on County staff and some of them are kind of easier for staff to manage.

Commissioner Bryant out at 10:08 a.m.

Associate Director of Conservation Finance, Pegeen Hanrahan, TPL, Hermitage Boulevard, Tallahassee, advised that she work specifically on ballot measures. She stated the organization across the Country relating to parks, land trails and open space, and natural lands driven by what local communities want. Ms. Hanrahan advised that her organization has worked on over 5,500 land acquisition projects across the Country. She commented on a schoolyard program where the TPL actually works with school districts and local governments to do Interlocal Agreements (ILAs) to figure out the kinds of relationships that balance between school facilities and public facilities, as well as the security and the access issues. Ms. Hanrahan stated her organization actually brings the children in the schools to help design what they would like to see in their schools, allowing them to see the potential of being a Landscape Architect like Mr. Couillard or being someone who actually builds school facilities or does the landscaping, chooses the trees, different types of things.

Commissioner Bryant returned at 10:09 a.m.

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Ms. Hanrahan advised that she works on funding, which is almost always voter authorized. She stated in researching both her comments for last week at the Corridor Connect at OTOW and then today, she believes Pennies for Parks may be one of the very first voter authorized funding sources here in Florida back in 1988. The TPL has worked on 470 separate projects and that does include Blue Run of Dunnellon. Ms. Hanrahan advised that was a Florida Communities Trust project with the City of Dunnellon. Marion County manages that and the Trust likes to see the public/private partnerships, public/public partnerships and then most importantly bringing down those dollars from State and federal agencies in order to leverage what Marion County voters have authorized.

Florida Director of Conservation Finance Casey Bauer, TPL, stated in Marion County there are over 1,000,000 acres, 458,000 acres fall within the wildlife corridor and thankfully 77% of those are already protected; however, there still is an additional 106,000 acres left, mostly on the eastern side of the County that there is an opportunity to protect in some way or fashion. He referred to a map on the overhead screens depicting the corridor conserved lands in dark green and the corridor opportunity areas in light green. Mr. Bauer advised that TPL has helped pass 689 ballot measures for parks, land, trails and schoolyards since 1996, representing \$112,000,000,000.00 in funding, with an 84% win rate. In Florida, TPL has worked on 45 successful ballot measures with a 90% win rate. He stated Ms. Hanrahan's rate is roughly 94% to 95%. Mr. Bauer advised that looking back at the 30 years whether it is a recession, a war, a dot-com crash, COVID, post COVID inflation, that success rate and that passage rate overall stays the same, or increases, noting there is not necessarily a time to not move forward with the conservation measure or a ballot measure versus a time to proceed. He provided a brief overview of data relating to local ballot measures from 1996 through 2024. Mr. Bauer stated there are 24 Florida Counties overall with existing voter-approved conservation funding.

Ms. Hanrahan advised that the Agenda packet contains feasibility research that TPL has covered with staff, noting she expects staff will have edits. She stated TPL focused almost exclusively on the bond because there is already an Infrastructure Sales Tax, which is the other kind of main mechanism TPL sees in Florida, although sometimes there is a property tax allocation. Ms. Hanrahan advised that the Board has the authority just to pass a property tax; however, the more it goes over the rollback rate, the higher number of votes are needed. She stated depending on the Board's direction today, next the TPL will likely move to the public opinion survey. TPL has already conducted approximately 8 public opinion surveys in Florida so far this election cycle and all of them have come back strong enough to move forward; but did not move forward for valid reasons. Ms. Hanrahan advised that TPL will work with staff on both the program recommendations and the ballot language, noting the ballot language is something TPL gives a lot of attention to because it is only 90 words maximum here in Florida. She stated the organization knows that everyone who is going to cast a ballot is going to read those words, so TPL wants them to be legal, ethical, straightforward, and also reflective of community values. There will need to be a local campaign, locally driven and funded. Ms. Hanrahan advised that the County is not involved in that, noting it is driven by local citizens. She stated the organization is primarily funded by the Bellini Better World Fund, which is funded through Arnie Bellini, a tech entrepreneur based in Tampa. Ms. Hanrahan advised that his real focus is the Florida Wildlife Corridor. She stated it is very common for local governments to pair conservation priorities with active recreation priorities within a single ballot measure, noting it is not unusual in a Sales Tax to look at other types of infrastructure,

roads, public safety, libraries, etc. Ms. Hanrahan advised that based on the polling, TPL may or may not recommend moving forward. She stated Mr. Couillard mentioned an August deadline, which is really a Supervisor of Elections deadline. The Board can keep moving forward and then pull back basically up until that Primary Election; however, there are points at which if staff have not done some of the key steps, it is harder to decide to do them last minute due to the requirement relating to advertising public hearings and taking community input, etc. Ms. Hanrahan advised that the Board should have already received the feasibility research, noting TPL somewhat reviews the funding mechanisms, the fiscal capacity, the history of funding in Marion County, the ballot language requirements and some of the best practices that the organization recommend. She referred to a slide depicting Marion County bond financing estimates, noting they are conservative. Ms. Hanrahan advised that this slide provides an estimate of the funding necessary for various levels of bonds starting at \$60,000,000.00 and going to a \$140,000,000.00 bond. She stated the reason TPL stopped at \$140,000,000.00 is that it is typically recommended that the cost per average household be less than \$50.00 per year. It is generally a more reasonable number for voters to absorb. TPL does discuss that number both in the polling and in the campaign to let voters know there are costs and there are benefits to anything that the local government does. Ms. Hanrahan provided an example based on \$100,000,000.00 using a 4% interest rate, and a 20 year maturity, noting the debt service on that is approximately \$7,300,000.00 annually. Ms. Hanrahan advised that the County's total tax base is \$35,000,000,000.00, which would require 0.2088 of a mill and for the average single family home that equated to roughly \$32.00 per year.

Ms. Hanrahan addressed Commissioner Curry's comments in regard to the balance between the operating costs and capital costs, noting there is a provision in Florida law that allows a bond plus some additional millage. She stated the limitation in that Statutory provision is that the millage needs to be dedicated to projects that were purchased, acquired or constructed using the bond. Ms. Hanrahan advised that if the Board were to utilize this mechanism, it can choose a millage rate, authorize up to that millage rate in the ballot language along with a specified bond number. The additional revenue that comes from the millage that is not necessary to service the bond can be used for operating expenses over that time horizon associated with those projects. She provided an additional example based on 0.0025 of a mill, noting the average single family home assessed at \$155,621.00 in this scenario would cost \$39.00 annually. Ms. Hanrahan advised that if the County did a \$100,000,000.00 bond, again using the example, that would leave roughly \$1,500,000.00 in revenue that can be used for operating expenses over the arc of those years. She stated that these numbers are relatively conservative due to projecting a couple of things: 1) no tax base growth; 2) all of the bonds are issued in year 1; and 3) assume the County is paying part of the capital cost using the types of matching grants that have been discussed. Ms. Hanrahan noted matching funds are easier in the natural land side for trails, water related facilities, rural and family lands, agricultural easements on horse farms or ranches or productive agriculture. There are fewer matching grants available for active recreation. She advised that there is the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP); however, those are in the hundreds of thousands maximum, not the multi-millions that might be seen in other areas of match. There is also a Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is a Federal fund that is also available for active parks. Ms. Hanrahan stated some of the funding sources that have been discussed are definitely part of the solution, such as a park pass or a fee

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that people pay at the more premier facilities, revenues from different types of vendors and savings on your energy bills and different types of things. She advised that ultimately the numbers tend to have too few zeros on the end of them, so the County needs to have some big funding source for the capital needs. Ms. Hanrahan commented on working in certain Counties on multiple occasions and what typically ends up happening is that individuals see the results of the projects and say do more of that.

Ms. Hanrahan provided a brief overview relating to 2024 polling data from Clay County. The measure received an overwhelming 73% support in Clay County, which is a very conservative community. The campaign was so positive that members of the Legislature were putting out their own endorsements. She stated the Collier conservation language does not authorize any bonding and is just a straight 0.0025 of a mill. Ms. Hanrahan advised that the Board does not have to levy it every year, but it provides that option that is voter authorized. She commented on the strict ballot language limit of 75 words of English that does not apply to Spanish, noting the title is limited to 15 words. Ms. Hanrahan commented on accountability measures, whether it is letting people know that all of the funding is open to public disclosure, how the money is spent, and providing individuals access to that. She stated many local governments will actually have a piece on their website that says this is what is going on with conservation and parks funding. Ms. Hanrahan advised that TPL encourages community outreach to let individuals know what is being proposed. She stated the main thing to pay attention to is that the November 2026 election is probably going to be most similar to the November 2022 election that had a 58% turn out. Ms. Hanrahan provided an overview of the recent voting history in Marion County relating to fiscal measures. She advised that citizens would need to come together, noting TPL usually works with local nonprofits. Ms. Hanrahan stated it is perfectly legal for a nonprofit to spend money on issue campaigns, not on candidate campaigns, noting TPL will usually work with some combination of active recreation and natural lands. There has been a lot of communications with Horse Farms Forever (HFF), for example. Ms. Hanrahan advised that normally TPL has local citizens come together and say they want to do this, let them raise the money, put together a speaker's Bureau and communicate the goal to the voters. She stated the County cannot spend funds, noting it could before the Legislature clamped down. Staff are restricted and should not go out advocating. They can educate, they can respond to questions, the County can put information that is neutral on its website; however, in terms of advocacy, it really needs to be privately funded through private local leadership and TPL laid out a timeline. Ms. Hanrahan advised that the Supervisor of Elections needs the ballot language about the same time that he will be getting the results of the Primary Election.

Commissioner Curry out at 10:32 a.m.

In response to Commissioner Stone, Ms. Hanrahan stated the only 2 Counties to draw back are Orange County and Citrus County. Orange County has never passed an Infrastructure Sales Tax. It polled at 62%; however, the Mayor is running for Governor and came to the conclusion he did not want to be an advocate at the time. She advised that TPL will likely work with Orange County in 2028. Citrus County was a little tougher. Ms. Hanrahan stated conservation uses polled off the charts, but the roads were a little bit less, although it was still possible to pass. It was above 52%. The reason Citrus did not move forward was that they actually had a visit from the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) the week before and were under a great deal of scrutiny and felt the timing was not right. She advised that TPL has referred 8 local governments in Florida despite being aware of the discussion on property taxes.

Commissioner Stone commented on the approved ballot language for the School Board mill.

Ms. Hanrahan stated if there is more than one mechanism on the ballot, TPL will test both of them to determine whether or not people understand that there may be more than one thing that would go forward.

Commissioner Curry returned at 10:34 a.m.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Ms. Hanrahan advised that normally if there is more than one thing on the ballot, at least one of them is typically a renewal. She stated that one of the things that will be important to voters about the school millage is that it is not new. It is a continuation of the existing level, which will likely be part of the School Board's messaging.

Ms. Hanrahan advised that the bigger question mark is whether or not a Constitutional Amendment goes forward and what that implication is for Marion County government. She stated if the Board ends up having to make such significant cuts in its regular operating budget that adding anything new is just a no go, then it may be something to put off until 2028 or indefinitely. Ms. Hanrahan advised that as more information comes out of Tallahassee, the Board will have to react to it and if it ends up meaning the decision is not doing this right now, then that is fine.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Ms. Hanrahan stated the date to have the ballot language to the Supervisor of Elections is August 18, 2026. She advised that it is her suggestion due to staff needing to work around the Board's schedules and get the hearings on the calendar and all those types of things are to go ahead and poll the question and see how people feel. Ms. Hanrahan stated TPL will need the Board and staff to provide the target number; however, they usually include a higher and a lower number too, just to kind of bracket what is realistic.

Chairman Zalak questioned what the options are for the Board relating to the number options for the County to poll. Ms. Hanrahan advised that most of the Counties that TPL works with in the State of Florida end up doing a bonded amount and a mileage amount so that they can spend some of it doing operations. She stated it is usually a relatively small number, but if you look at \$100,000,000.00, it ends up being \$1,400,000.00 give or take for management. But that's 0.0025 of a mill. If the Board wants to just do the bond, for 0.0025 of a mill, it could do \$120,000,000.00. Ms. Hanrahan advised that it is easier to pass a smaller amount, noting it is not unusual to do a series of smaller numbers that are voter authorized.

Commissioner McClain commented on the process of informing voters of what the cost could be and questioned if the dollar amount can appear on the ballot or just the millage rate. Ms. Hanrahan stated the Board could do either and/or both. She advised that relating to the millage rate the Board can choose a number and if in two years or four years a County Commission says they do not want to do that anymore, they are not bound to issue that millage. Ms. Hanrahan advised that the benefit of bonding is that a County that bonds \$100,000,000.00 is able to do \$100,000,000.00 worth of projects up front, noting the inflation rate has been so significant that this may make good sense. She stated it is always a consideration in land conservation projects. If a piece of property is under threat of development and the County does not have the funds to purchase it, then it will probably be developed and it will be lost forever. Ms. Hanrahan advised that those are the kinds of considerations as to why communities typically consider bonding. She stated straight millage is an option, noting the 0.0025 of a mill brings in \$8,800,000.00 in annual

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revenue. It is a lot of dollars; however, it would not enable the Board to do a bunch of projects up front.

Chairman Zalak questioned what the hybrid is that allows the County to both pay for its operation over time and have the capital. He commented on having enough money to run the O&M if the Board does this and questioned what the point is of doing it and building all this stuff that the County cannot run. Ms. Hanrahan stated the hybrid model allows bonding plus a millage that is more than what is necessary just for the bonding. She provided an example from Clay County based on \$45,000,000.00 and up to 0.0002 of a mill, noting not all of the 0.0002 of a mill was necessary to service \$45,000,000.00 in bonding. Ms. Hanrahan advised that Clay County has some funding remaining annually to cover operational costs, but just associated with those projects, it cannot be used to do operational costs for a project that was not acquired through the bonds.

Chairman Zalak questioned how that would work for the County due to some of its project lists are improvements to current facilities and whether Board could use operational dollars on those facilities. Ms. Hanrahan stated she believes that is acceptable, noting there is not a bunch of Administrative Code or anything that really outlines this matter. She advised that the Board has millage authorization regardless, this is just sort of putting it in a voter authorized category. Ms. Hanrahan stated this is actually legally treated differently when a County is moving toward its 10 mill caps, noting Marion County is not. She advised that her perception is that as long as the projects are affiliated with the bonds, the Board can spend funds at those facilities.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Ms. Hanrahan stated if the Board wanted to pursue \$150,000,000.00 or \$175,000,000.00, TPL can test that figure; however, the bigger the number gets, the more there is voter hesitancy. She advised that TPL will test the figure with a statistically valid sample of live phone calls to kind of understand how residents feel.

Commissioner Bryant commented on using the \$140,000,000.00 figure, noting it would equate to roughly \$45.00 annually with a millage of 0.0029 of a mill. She questioned whether TPL has a slide showing the figure relating to a \$140,000,000.00 bond plus millage. Ms. Hanrahan advised that she could provide the Board with that number. She stated this is a conservative estimate since the Board is not going to issue \$140,000,000.00. Ms. Hanrahan advised that the County could go ahead and start collecting the millage and it will have tax based growth, noting TPL also assumes there is no tax based growth, so it will probably never reach that \$45.00 number.

Commissioner Bryant stated if the County did the \$140,000,000.00 with the millage it would lose \$30,000,000.00 over 20 years relating to funding for projects.

Ms. Hanrahan advised that Finance Director Jennifer Cole can bring the Board more detailed numbers based on her understanding of everything else going on in Marion County.

Chairman Zalak stated TPL can test a couple numbers for the Board, high, low and medium and just see what the variation is.

Mr. Couillard advised that giving Ms. Hanrahan the direction today to proceed with the polling is one of staff's main boxes that the Department wanted to get checked today. He referred to a slide on the overhead screens and provided an overview of next steps for staff and TPL.

Chairman Zalak commented on the polling language, noting having a piece of the recreation stronger in the ballot language, using those last five words the County gets to drive that point home is a good thing.

Commissioner Bryant opined that if the Board is going to do any conservation, it needs to identify what those are. She questioned whether there are any of the projects that staff already identified that can be tied to conservation. Mr. Couillard stated a couple of the acquisitions in Chairman Zalak's District were considered for development; however, as far as conservation lands, they are not really connected to anything except for the one closer to Indian Lake.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Mr. Couillard advised that projects like connecting over to Goethe State Forest can be tied to conservation as to possibly being connected with the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

Commissioner Curry commented on the Sales Tax, noting getting the 20 year option passed will pay dividends for the community. He stated this is a similar situation, noting if the Board is going to go through this exercise and take the time and get the community's attention, then it needs to do as much as possible.

Chairman Zalak advised that is why he requested TPL test numbers that are high and medium to see if the results really change. He stated he would have thought anything past 10 or 12 years on the Sales Tax would have actually downgraded the number significantly and it did not. Chairman Zalak advised that the County needs some polling, noting the polling from the 20 year Sales Tax was right. He stated the context of property tax is going to play a role in this depending on what happens in that Session.

Commissioner Bryant opined that the Board should only have 2 numbers polled, noting when there is a low, medium and high, people will naturally go to the low figure. She advised that if you just do the 2, individuals are going to take a second and think well, it is only \$4.00 or \$5.00 more a year.

Ms. Hanrahan stated there are different ways to poll, and if individuals are given a lower number, they are always going to choose a lower number. She advised that TPL typically asks a specific number and then they say what if it were higher for the ones who said yes. Ms. Hanrahan stated TPL will ask a lower number often times to the ones who said no. She advised that another way to do it is to split the sample and ask half one number and half another number. There are some challenges with that, but ultimately TPL usually rely on their pollsters' judgment. Ms. Hanrahan stated recently TPL has been focusing on a number as the target number, but then asking a lower number and a higher number after that. She advised that the pollster TPL uses is very capable, noting he used to be with a national Republican firm, now he runs his own. Ms. Hanrahan stated at the end, TPL sometimes has him do presentations or meet one-on-one via Zoom.

Mr. Bouyounes advised that if the Board looks at the list from Mr. Couillard and the projects that he has shared, the estimated cost just to keep up with the existing parks and to improve them is \$116,000,000.00. He stated relating to the new projects staff can further debate and prioritize whether to build a new park or not, noting the cost is almost \$70,000,000.00. Mr. Bouyounes advised that if the goal is to keep that ballot language below \$50.00, the figure should be around \$150,000,000.00 to test and to see what the response will be from the public. He stated when staff go and sell it to the public, they will tell them the projects being done and the Board needs to be able to live with the dollar amount to make those projects happen.

Commissioner Bryant opined that if the Board opts for \$140,000,000.00 that will be conservative, noting the taxable base is going to grow and so the County will end up with more revenue than originally anticipated based on that alone. She advised that with some of the research that staff are doing right now when it comes to being able to use the heads and beds tax for some of this capital stuff, there are opportunities with some matching

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funds there.

Commissioner McClain stated he is comfortable with the \$140,000,000.00 and prioritizing the list. He advised that as the Board discusses the ballot language and what it is doing between recreation and conservation and what the public wants, he wants this to be a fair question. Commissioner McClain stated he wants transparency relating to what the Board will do with the funds and that this is not all about going and buying up a ton of land for conservation. He advised that the majority of this piece is going to be part of the County's recreation stuff as well as some of the conservation piece; however, the ballot language needs to reflect that, so the Board is asking the public an honest question even if that means it gets 70% instead of 75%.

General discussion ensued relating polling and projects.

Mr. Bouyounes stated the Board should be explicit relating to any project requiring the acquisition of conservation land.

Commissioner Bryant questioned whether there is any opportunity for matching dollars from the Florida Wildlife Corridor if any of those projects will tie into what they are trying to accomplish. Mr. Couillard advised that there are several agencies and entities that are highly involved with that project, noting there is a lot of room for leverage.

Commissioner Bryant stated when the gap is closed that is going to be just like the Land Bridge and become a wildlife corridor.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Chairman Zalak stated the figure will be \$140,000,000.00 but will be broken down between millage and a bond. He advised that he is unsure exactly what the millage rate will need to be versus the bond number, which staff will have to figure out. Chairman Zalak opined that the Board should stay under \$50.00.

Ms. Hanrahan advised that TPL can poll \$140,000,000.00 and what the millage rate ends up being in the balance between the millage and the impact to the voters, is probably going to be a little more reliant on the staff's analysis. She stated if the Board puts \$140,000,000.00, that is their maximum bonding number; however, over the arc of time, that millage rate will bring in more that can be used for some combination of operations and even capital that is pay as they go.

Commissioner Curry opined that \$140,000,000.00 is not the right number, noting it should be higher.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Commissioner Curry opined that the minimum number should be \$150,000,000.00. He advised that the funds will not be wasted, they will be reinvested in the community for a specific need and purpose.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Mr. Couillard stated he focuses on the number citizens would be paying annually. He recommended polling \$140,000,000.00 or \$150,000,000.00.

Commissioner McClain advised that he is also focused on the number this will cost the taxpayer.

Mr. Couillard opined that considering the annual cost to taxpayers is a good way to look at this matter.

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There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting thereupon adjourned at 11:06 a.m.

Carl Zalak, III, Chairman

Attest:

Gregory C. Harrell, Clerk

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