

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

October 6, 2024

CALL TO ORDER:

The Marion County Board of County Commissioners met in special session in Commission Chambers at 12:31 p.m. on Sunday October 6, 2024 at the Marion County Governmental Complex located in Ocala, Florida.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

The meeting opened with invocation by Commissioner Zalak and 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; Vice-Chairman Kathy Bryant, District 2; Commissioner Craig Curry, District 1; Commissioner Matthew McClain, District 3; and Commissioner Carl Zalak, III, District 4. Also present were Chief Assistant County Attorney Dana Olesky, County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes, Assistant County Administrator (ACA) Angel Roussel, ACA Tracy Straub, ACA Amanda Tart, Supervisor of Elections Wesley Wilcox, Property Appraiser Jimmy Cowan and Administrator Mark Lander, Florida Department of Health (DOH). Clerk Gregory C. Harrell was absent due to a prior commitment.

The Deputy Clerk was in receipt of a 22 page Agenda packet to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Chairman Stone advised that this meeting is being held to discuss the Declaration of a State of Emergency due to Tropical Storm Milton.

Deputy Clerk Windberg was in receipt of a proof of publication entitled, "Sunshine Notice", published on the Marion County Florida website on October 6, 2024. The Notice states the Board will consider the necessity of a Resolution to declare a State of Emergency regarding Tropical Storm Milton.

County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes requested the Board allow staff to take the Agenda Items out of order and allow Emergency Management Director James Preston Bowlin to provide an update on the storm at this time (Item 2.1.). It was the General consensus of the Board to concur.

2. COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR:

2.1. Updates from James Bowlin, Director of Emergency Management

County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes presented the following recommendation:

Description/Background: Staff will provide updates on various procedures for readiness and preparations for the days leading up to the storm and plans for after the storm.

Budget/Impact: None.

Recommended Action: For information and Board discussion.

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Emergency Management Director James "Preston" Bowlin, MCSO, advised that the storm has inconsistencies as to its direction, noting the "cone of uncertainty" is estimated for 75 miles in either direction. He expressed concern relating to the recent devastation on Florida's west coast caused by Hurricane Helene. Mr. Bowlin commented on the emergency resources in those areas, as well as in North Carolina (National Guard, Incident Management Teams (IMT), water pumps, emergency resource generators, etc.), which makes resources thin throughout the rest of the United States (US). He advised that landfall is predicted to be in the Tampa area as a Category 2 hurricane; however, it is estimated that Marion County will feel Category 1 storm impacts throughout the entire community. Mr. Bowlin stated he will be meeting with the Marion County School Board (MCSB) regarding the need to open emergency shelters. He advised that messaging is going out to the public relating to sandbags, individual assistance related to previous storm damage from Hurricane Helene, Baseline Landfill hours of operation, etc. Mr. Bowlin stated Governor Ron DeSantis has spoken with the Department of Transportation (DOT) relating the use of emergency service lanes for evacuations due to the oncoming storm. He advised that the State Department of Emergency Management (DEM) is predicting the largest evacuation and sheltering that the State of Florida has ever incurred.

Commissioner Curry reiterated that anyone who had damage from Hurricane Helene needs to document the damage prior to this upcoming storm. He commented on several interchanges that are closed or will be closed in Marion County, including State Road (SR) 200 and County Road (CR) 484 and questioned if there is any DOT coordination that the County needs to perform in order to prepare for people evacuating from the coast. Commissioner Curry advised that many citizens in North Carolina that had Starlink satellite internet system seem to have the ability for continuous communications and opined that this may be something to consider.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Mr. Bowlin stated the citizens' information line is (352) 369-7500. He advised that the County's mobile command unit currently has satellite capabilities that will support the Emergency Operation Center (EOC), as well as a Starlink satellite internet system.

Chairman Stone clarified that Starlink is not recognized by the United States (US) government as being a reliable service at an acceptable government level. She opined that after these storms the government should re-evaluate this matter, noting Starlink seems to be the only sustainable satellite service. Mr. Bowlin advised that Governor Ron DeSantis has ensured that every EOC in the State of Florida has a Starlink, noting the EOC also relies on Hamm Radio Operators who have the ability for radio communications to be transmitted to electronic mails (emails). He stated the National Weather Service (NWS) projects Marion County will have wind speeds of 58 to 73 miles per hour (mph) (Category 1 Hurricane speeds) from Tuesday evening through Wednesday morning.

Commissioner Curry expressed concern that Commissioners do not have access to Starlink satellite services to utilize for communication with each other and staff when other telephone/internet services are down. Mr. Bowlin advised that analog phone lines work as well, noting the EOC has 4 available and the Marion County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) has some as well.

Chairman Stone noted power outages are likely to result from this storm event.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Mr. Bowlin stated he will meet with the MCSB later today, but knows that West Port and Vanguard schools will definitely be opened as

shelters. He stated DOH has already begun to reach out to citizens with special needs to provide an estimate of who is in town and will need sheltering.

Commissioner Zalak expressed his appreciation to Mr. Bowlin and the rest of staff who have been deployed during Hurricane Helene and are now preparing for this storm event, noting it reflects on how Marion County and the State of Florida is so resilient.

Mr. Bowlin advised that this year, staff instituted an IMT, which was deployed to other Counties and States that were affected by the most recent hurricane. He noted Marion County is unique in its partnerships with other municipalities and the private sector in working together for its citizens.

Chairman Stone reminded residents who are planning to utilize shelters to bring things that will make them more comfortable (snacks, medications, etc.).

Commissioner Bryant stated citizens can keep updated by utilizing the County's Facebook account and the County's website (www.marionfl.org). She noted the landfill is open today and sandbag locations are already open.

Mr. Bowlin advised that staff is working on identifying "points of distribution" should citizens need, food, water, tarps, etc.

Chairman Stone recommended local residents stay off of Interstate 75 (I-75) if possible, to allow for traffic flow of citizens who will be evacuating.

Commissioner McClain requested Property Appraiser Jimmy Cowan provide an update. Property Appraiser Jimmy Cowan advised of the need for citizens to take pictures and document any damage from Hurricane Helene prior to this upcoming storm, noting his office has already received notification of 59 properties that were reported damaged from that storm for a total of \$1,587,913.00 in damages. He advised that the fastest way for the Property Appraiser's Office (PAO) to get out into the field to assess these damages is for homeowners to report damages directly to the PAO.

Mr. Bowlin stated first responders can also report any damages they may come across. General discussion ensued.

Mr. Bouyounes stated DOT is in communications with staff and will alter their plans for construction work on their interchanges to accommodate the emergency situation the County is facing.

Mr. Bowlin advised that Alert Marion provides notifications (email, voicemail, and texts) to Marion County residents when there are any life threatening situations including storms, active shooters, hazardous materials, etc., noting individuals can sign up at <https://alertmarion.com> or call (352) 369-8100.

1. COUNTY ATTORNEY

1.1 Request Approval of Resolution Declaring a Local State of Emergency

County Attorney Matthew G. Minter presented the following recommendation:

Description/Background: A tropical storm named Tropical Storm Milton is expected to strengthen into a hurricane, bringing the potential for severe weather to Marion County, including intense thunderstorms and strong winds. Advance preparation and planning are critical to an effective county-wide response in the event of severe weather, which justifies the adoption of this declaration of state of local emergency.

Budget/Impact: None.

Recommended Action: Motion to approve and authorize the Chair and Clerk to execute Resolution declaring a state of emergency regarding Tropical Storm Milton.

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Chief Assistant County Attorney Dana Olesky, Legal, advised that Legal has prepared a Resolution for the Board's consideration and adoption, noting the document contains the Governor's Executive Order 24-214 and incorporates those portions of the Order that pertain to Local Governments as part of the Resolution.

A motion was made by Commissioner Bryant, seconded by Commissioner Zalak, to adopt resolution 24-R-459 declaring a State of Local Emergency relating to Tropical Storm Milton. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board (5-0).

Resolution 24-R-459 is entitled:

Declaration of State of Local Emergency

Mr. Bouyounes requested clarification that during this State of Emergency situation, the Chairman would have the authority to execute any emergency amendment to contracts and would then bring it back to the BCC for adoption/ratification. It was the general consensus of the Board to concur.

3. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS: NONE

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting thereupon adjourned at 1:04 p.m.

Michelle Stone, Chairman

Attest:

Gregory C. Harrell, Clerk