

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

September 10, 2025

CALL TO ORDER:

The Marion County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) met in a special session in Commission Chambers at 5:39 p.m. on Wednesday, September 10, 2025 at the Marion County Governmental Complex located in Ocala, Florida.

INTRODUCTION OF PUBLIC HEARING BY CHAIRMAN KATHY BRYANT

Chairman Bryant advised that the public hearing was scheduled this afternoon to consider Annual Rate Resolutions and Certify Non-Ad Valorem Assessment Rolls for Stormwater Services, Solid Waste and Fire Rescue.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of our Country.

ROLL CALL

Upon roll call the following members were present: Chairman Kathy Bryant, District 2; Vice-Chairman Carl Zalak, III, District 4; Commissioner Craig Curry, District 1; Commissioner Matthew McClain, District 3; and Commissioner Michelle Stone, District 5. Also present were County Attorney Matthew G. Minter; County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes; Assistant County Administrator (ACA) Tracy Straub, ACA Angel Roussel, ACA Amanda Tart, and Executive Director of Internal Services Mike McClain.

PROOF OF PUBLICATION

Deputy Clerk Windberg presented Proof of Publication of a display ad entitled, "Notice of Hearing to Impose and Provide for Collection of Stormwater Special Assessment" published in the Star Banner newspaper on August 21, 2025. The Notice states the Board will consider the continued imposition of stormwater special assessments for the provision of stormwater services within the Marion County Municipal Service Benefit Unit (MSBU) for Stormwater Services, which includes the unincorporated area of the County.

The Deputy Clerk was in receipt of a 37 page Agenda Packet to follow along with the PowerPoint presentations.

STAFF PRESENTATION

PUBLIC HEARING: Adoption of the Annual Resolutions for Stormwater Services and Stormwater Management Programs, Residential Solid Waste Services Municipal Service Benefit Unit, and Fire Rescue Services Municipal Service Benefit Unit, and Certify the Non-Ad Valorem Assessment Rolls

Municipal Services (MS) Director Chad Wicker presented the following recommendation:
Description/Background: As required by Section 197.3632, Florida Statutes, the Board of County Commissioners shall hold a Public Hearing to adopt a non-ad valorem assessment roll for the levy, collection, and enforcement of non-ad valorem assessments and certify the rolls to the Tax Collector prior to September 15, 2025.

This Public Hearing has been scheduled to adopt the proposed resolutions for the Stormwater Services and Stormwater Management Programs in the Marion County Stormwater Service Area, the Residential Solid Waste Services Municipal Service Benefit Unit (MSBU), and the Fire Rescue Services Municipal Service Benefit Unit MSBU and certify the Non-Ad Valorem Assessment Rolls.

Property owners who made improvements within the past year have received, via first class mail, an insert within the proposed TRIM notice sent by the Property Appraiser notifying them of proposed or adopted Non-Ad Valorem Assessments. The insert reflected any changes to the Stormwater Services and Stormwater Management Programs in the Marion County Stormwater Service Area assessments, Residential Solid Waste Services MSBU, and their Fire Rescue Services MSBU. This year there is no proposed increase to the Stormwater Services and Stormwater Management Programs in the Marion County Stormwater Service Area assessments, the Residential Solid Waste Services MSBU, nor the Fire Rescue Services MSBU.

Budget/Impact: Stormwater Services and Stormwater Management Programs - Tentative Budget is \$4,026,722.11 (\$4,238,654.85 minus \$211,932.74 {5%} as Required by F.S.s. 129.01)

Solid Waste Services - Tentative Budget is \$34,698,704.87 (\$36,524,952.50 minus \$1,826,247.63 {5%} as Required by F.S. s. 129.01)

Fire Services - Tentative Budget is \$54,797,695.00 (\$57,681,784.00 minus \$2,884,089.00 {5%} as Required by F.S. s. 129.01).

Recommended Action:

1. Motion to adopt the Annual Resolution for Stormwater Services and Stormwater Management Programs and certify the Non-Ad Valorem Assessment Rolls,
2. Motion to adopt the Annual Resolution for Residential Solid Waste Services MSBU and certify the Non-Ad Valorem Assessment Rolls,
3. Motion to adopt the Annual Resolution for Fire Rescue Services MSBU and certify the Non-Ad Valorem Assessment Rolls, and
4. Authorize the Chairman and Clerk to execute as applicable.

MS Director Chad Wicker advised that property owners received, via United States (US) first class mail, an insert within the proposed Truth in Millage (TRIM) Notice sent by the Property Appraiser's Office (PAO) notifying them of the proposed or adopted non-ad valorem assessments. The insert reflected any changes to their Fire Rescue Services MSBU, Residential Solid Waste Services MSBU, and the Stormwater Services and Stormwater Management Programs. He noted this year, there are proposed rate increases for 2 of those 3 assessments.

Mr. Wicker addressed the Stormwater Services and Stormwater Management Programs and stated the assessment per Equivalent Stormwater Unit (ESU) has a minimum of \$10.57 and a maximum amount of \$15.00 per ESU based upon the type of mitigation credit approval per parcel. He stated there is no increase proposed for the Stormwater Services and Stormwater Management Programs assessment rate, which has a tentative budget of \$4,026,722.11.

In response to Commissioner Stone, County Engineer Steven Cohoon, Office of the County Engineer (OCE), provided a brief overview of the Stormwater Management Programs. In 1972 the Clean Water Act was adopted at the Federal level, and this is a result of the unfunded mandates of that Act. He advised that the County implemented Resolution 02-R-187, which is how the County complied with the Clean Water Act

requirements. Mr. Cohoon stated there is a maintenance component (\$5.00), as well as a program component (\$10.00) as part of that assessment. He provided a brief overview of those components (repair sinkholes in drainage retention areas (DRAs), Best Management Practices (BMPs) compliance, public education, etc.).

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Bryant opened the floor to public comment.

Shannon Guinther, NE 174th Court, Silver Springs, expressed concern that a lot of current structures are being built in flood zones without requiring compensated storage. He questioned whether there is a requirement for property owners to build DRAs on their own property.

Mr. Cohoon clarified that what Mr. Guinther is referring to relates to individual requirements on private property to alleviate adverse impacts on neighboring properties, which is addressed in the Land Development Code (LDC) and is not part of the Stormwater assessment. He clarified that this assessment does not go towards fixing/resolving Stormwater issues on private property.

Mary Ann Rondinella, NE 5th Terrace Road, Citra, advised that she has well water and no sewer outlet and expressed concern the assessment does not provide any benefits to residents in similar situations.

Mr. Cohoon clarified that the County must comply with the program element (i.e., public education, Stormwater inspections, etc.) as required by the Federal government. He advised that every road the County builds must have a Stormwater system that has to be maintained.

Ms. Rondinella opined that the majority of the financial burden should be placed on new construction.

Bruce Hafner, Juniper Pass, questioned whether the Stormwater budget was running into a deficit, and if not, why is there an increase.

Chairman Bryant clarified that there is no increase to the proposed Stormwater assessment, noting it is being set at \$15.00, which is the same as the previous year.

Tanya Day Russell, SW 116th Street Road, advised that her TRIM Notice showed a proposed tax increase for the upcoming year.

Chairman Bryant reiterated that there is no increase proposed for the Storm Water assessment. She noted there will be 2 more public hearings to address the other non-ad valorem assessments, once this hearing is concluded.

Carolyn Torre, SE 14th Avenue, commented on part of the assessment being utilized to address sinkholes and opined that the more development the County allows, the more problems arise with sinkholes. She commented on the recent sale of a water company that is allowing a company from California to draw water from Marion County. Ms. Torre opined that the site does not have adequate Stormwater and questioned whether anyone from the County reviews that area. She commented on the number of trucks that go in and out of that site and the impact it has on Marion County roads. Ms. Torre expressed concern that developers have not had to pay Impact Fees for years, yet it is overdevelopment that is causing these issues.

Chairman Bryant clarified that impact fees were reinstated in 2017. She advised that in regard to the sale of the water company, the Board had no purview over that private transaction.

Olamiju Olagbegi, SW 57th Court, questioned if it was possible for the County to invest funds to help subsidize taxes.

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Chairman Bryant advised that public comment is now closed.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stone, seconded by Commissioner Curry, to adopt Resolution 25-R-351 at the \$15.00 assessment rate for Stormwater Services and Stormwater Management Programs. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board (5-0).

A motion was made by Commissioner Stone, seconded by Commissioner Curry, to approve and certify the Non-Ad Valorem Assessment Rolls. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board (5-0).

Resolution 25-R-351 is entitled:

A RESOLUTION OF MARION COUNTY, FLORIDA, RELATING TO THE PROVISION OF STORMWATER SERVICES AND STORMWATER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS IN THE MARION COUNTY STORMWATER SERVICE AREA; PROVIDING FOR THE ANNUAL ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STORMWATER ASSESSMENTS AGAINST ASSESSED PROPERTY LOCATED WITHIN THE MARION COUNTY STORMWATER SERVICE AREA FOR STORMWATER SERVICES AND STORMWATER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS, FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING OCTOBER 1, 2025; APPROVING THE ASSESSMENT ROLL; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Commissioner Curry out at 6:03 p.m.

PROOF OF PUBLICATION

Deputy Clerk Windberg presented Proof of Publication of display ad entitled, "Notice of Hearing to Impose and Provide for Collection of Solid Waste Special Assessment" published in the Star Banner newspaper on August 21, 2025. The Notice states the Board will consider the continued imposition of Solid Waste special assessments for the provision of Solid Waste services within the Marion County MSBU for Solid Waste Services, which includes the unincorporated area of the County.

The Deputy Clerk was in receipt of a 7 page handout from ACA Angel Roussel entitled, "Revenue Sufficiency Results" and a 12 page handout entitled, "Public Hearing to Adopt Annual Rate Resolutions and Certify Non-ad valorem Assessment Rolls – Solid Waste" to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation.

STAFF PRESENTATION – Chad Wicker

MS Director Wicker advised that the current Solid Waste assessment is set at \$87.00 per residential unit, noting there is a proposed increase of \$128.00, which would set a new rate of \$215.00 per residential unit. The tentative budget is \$34,698,704.87.

Solid Waste Director Mark Johnson referred to the PowerPoint presentation and provided a brief overview of the request.

Commissioner Curry returned at 6:04 p.m.

Mr. Johnson advised that a Revenue Sufficiency Study was recently conducted, which reflected that the County is spending more money than it is currently bringing in to dispose of its solid waste. He stated the County purchased airspace, in advance, at the Heart of Florida (HOF) landfill and that airspace is expected to run out by 2031 depending on growth. Mr. Johnson stated discussions have been held as to whether the County should build more airspace or purchase more airspace depending on which option would be more cost effective. He noted there has been a lot of inflation over the past 17 years since

the County raised its assessment rates. Mr. Johnson advised that after the Department analyzed the Revenue Sufficiency Study, staff created a Master Plan that looked at different options for disposal, which included expanding and building space at the County's transfer station and/or expanding and building space at the County's landfill. He noted the Department held one-on-ones with Commissioners, as well as held public workshops for public input. Mr. Johnson advised that in 2011, Marion County purchased pre-paid airspace at the HOF landfill for \$8.00 per ton, noting if the County chose to purchase airspace today it would cost approximately \$30.00 to \$32.00 per ton. He stated in 2019/2020 the County had approximately 142,000 tons of garbage going to HOF and that amount has continued to grow each year. Mr. Johnson advised that last year the County was at 200,000 tons, noting the County has already consumed over 40 percent (%) of its current airspace at HOF. This means growth will determine when the County runs out of that airspace. He noted for the past couple of years, growth has been in excess of 7%. Mr. Johnson referred to page 7 of the PowerPoint presentation, noting the gray bars are Department revenues and the orange bars represent expenses. He opined that the Department has been fortunate to be able to utilize its Fund Balance and/or Reserves to work out of; however, the challenge is that the Fund Balance is dwindling and the Department still needs to be able to create more space to dispose of solid waste.

Mr. Johnson commented on the cost increases the Department is facing, noting there have been increases in the cost for hazardous waste disposal, leachate disposal, etc., as well as the increase in cost to truck the garbage from Marion County to HOF. He stated in 2008 the residential solid waste disposal fee was set at \$87.00 and has remained at that amount since then. Mr. Johnson stated it was able to remain flat due to the exceptional deal that the BCC made years ago with HOF, as well as the ability to utilize Fund Balance. He commented on the old Solid Waste Ordinance, which would have raised the rates by 1.5% of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), noting if the County had followed the Ordinance, the rate would currently be at \$281.00. Mr. Johnson advised that if the County would have followed the Water Sewer Index (WSI), which ties more specifically with the garbage industry, the rate would be at \$314.00. He commented on the benefits to citizens by not raising the rates over all those years, noting taxpayers saved approximately \$135,000,000.00. Mr. Johnson advised that staff reviewed assessments in other Counties throughout the State, noting Marion County is one of the lowest. He stated Citrus County's assessment is at \$27.00; however, that County charges \$160.00 per vehicle to use their disposal site in addition to the assessment. Mr. Johnson clarified that even at the assessment rate being proposed, Marion County is still one of the cheapest in the State. He referred to the 7 page handout entitled, "Revenue Sufficiency Results", which reflects 2 different models/options for the rate increase. Mr. Johnson advised that the models included a one-time rate increase, as well as a phased-in approach to stair-step the rate increase. He stated the one-time increase would raise the assessment rate to an annual cost of \$215.00, which would stay consistent for the next 10 years. The phased-in approach would begin at the rate of \$150.00 in 2026, \$190.00 in 2027, \$225.00 in 2028 and will remain at that \$225.00 rate until 2036. Mr. Johnson advised that the biggest difference between the 2 options is the Reserve totals, noting the Department has historically funded storm cleanup costs out of those Reserves. For example, the County expended \$2,600,000.00 in cleanup costs after Hurricane Milton last year and has still not received any recovery costs/reimbursements from the State. He stated another example is Hurricane Irma, noting the County's costs associated with that storm were approximately \$26,000,000.00 and it only received \$23,000,000.00 in

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reimbursements from the State. Mr. Johnson provided a brief overview of the differences in Reserve amounts with the one-time increase versus the phased-in approach.

General discussion ensued.

County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes referred to the 7 page handout entitled, "Revenue Sufficiency Results", noting if growth and garbage volumes goes up by only 1%, the County will gain about 2 years of capacity at the HOF landfill. He opined that if the County infuses \$7,400,000.00 into the Solid Waste Fund and the Department defers all of its capital improvements for expansion, then the proposed assessment could be \$135.00 for 2026 and then it would go up to \$160.00 for 2027. However, this still leaves the Department with a spending deficit going forward. Mr. Bouyounes provided a brief overview of other phased-in options/scenarios over the next 10 years.

General discussion ensued relating to the various options/scenarios presented by staff.

Mr. Bouyounes commented on the length of time it takes to permit an expansion of a landfill.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Mr. Bouyounes advised that the \$7,400,000.00 would come from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding that has not been dedicated to another project.

In response to Commissioner Stone, Mr. Bouyounes stated there was a scrivener's error on page 6 of the 7 page handout, noting the correct assessment rate amount for 2032 through 2036 would be at \$225.00. He clarified that this option would delay capital improvements for 1 year.

In response to Commissioner Stone, Mr. Johnson advised that the landfill expansion timeline previously provided to the Board allowed for approximately 1 year to design, permit and construct the expansion prior to exhausting the airspace at HOF. He stated the original goal was to have construction done in 2030 for utilization beginning in 2031, noting the option on page 6 pushes that timeline out to 2032.

Commissioner Stone advised that several weeks ago she received a copy of the Marion County Housing Study, which contained projections not only for Marion County growth, but growth across the State of Florida. She opined that the Board should keep those numbers in mind as it contemplates the assessment rates and which options it chooses.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Bryant opened the floor to public comment.

Bruce Hafner, Juniper Pass, commented on the cost of operations for the Department and questioned how it was operating at a deficit. He questioned whether the County has considered alternative means to dispose of its waste (shipping out of State, etc.). Mr. Hafner questioned how more people coming into the County is costing the County more money. Chairman Bryant clarified that the BCC is not siting another landfill, but rather expanding on the one the County already has. She stated with more people moving into the County, it is using up more of its pre-existing airspace than originally contemplated. Chairman Bryant commented on the affect the Covid-19 pandemic had on the amount of garbage going into the landfill. She requested staff provide Mr. Hafner with a printout of the Departments operating costs.

Candace Shashikarshe, NE 77th Street, questioned whether the County recycles anything it could get money from or does all the waste go straight to the landfill. Chairman Bryant stated there are recycling centers throughout the County, noting the County does receive money for the commodities it can sell.

Commissioner Zalak clarified that the only commodity that actually makes money is metal, noting it costs more to process plastic, paper, and cardboard than it does to just dump those materials.

In response to Ms. Shashikarshe, Mr. Johnson advised that the Department generated approximately \$600,000.00 in revenue from the sale of metal, noting it costs approximately \$131.00 per ton for single stream recycling and the value of that is about \$80.00. He clarified that although the County loses money on recycling of products (other than metal), it gains space at the landfill.

In response to Commissioner McClain, Mr. Johnson stated the County has looked at leveraging garbage to be fumes for cement kilns, noting that some of the new processing technology has not hit mainstream production yet, but staff continues to look for disposal alternatives that are less expensive.

Janis Keller, NE 59th Street, advised that she owns 3 properties on NE 59th Street, noting she just received her TRIM Notices which increased by \$215.00 each from last year. She opined that this is an extreme amount. Ms. Keller stated she has solar power and burns her own garbage in order to live a "green" life. She expressed concern that the increase will hurt senior citizens.

Jenny Schroer, NW 42nd Place, questioned if the 1% increase in tonnage includes new residents moving to Marion County. Chairman Bryant clarified that it includes all of the tonnage that comes into the landfill, noting as soon as a new home receives its certificate of occupancy (CO) that home has to pay into the assessment. She advised that part of the Solid Waste budget does include the County's Litter Cleanup program. Commissioner Curry noted out of the current \$87.00 assessment, approximately \$7.00 goes toward picking up and disposing of trash. Chairman Bryant commented on the Litter Task Force that was formed and included stakeholders from the Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) State Attorney's Office (SAO), Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Division of Forestry, Marion County Sheriff's Office (MCSO), and other law enforcement agencies. She commented on new litter laws and penalties that were created due to the hard work of the Task Force.

Ms. Schroer suggested Marion County offer curbside trash services throughout the entire County, which she opined would help stop people from dumping their trash illegally. Chairman Bryant commented on the size of Marion County, noting it would not be financially feasible to offer curbside pickup throughout the many rural areas.

Tanya Day Russell, SW 116th Street Road, opined that Marion County is overdeveloped, noting when developers remove natural buffers it creates issues relating to stormwater runoff, etc., and adds to the expense of hurricane cleanup costs. She advised that she opposes the proposed non-ad valorem increases for Solid Waste, noting these rising costs are a direct result of growth. Ms. Russell stated growth should pay for growth and opined that it is not right to spread these cost among long-standing residents who are not creating new demand. She advised that Florida Statute (FS) 197.3632 governs how assessments are adopted, noting the Florida Supreme Court has been clear in the cases of the City of Boca Raton versus (vs) State; and Lake County vs Water Oak Management Corporation that special assessments are only valid if they meet 2 tests: 1) they provide special benefit to the property; and 2) they are fairly apportioned among those receiving the benefit. Ms. Russell requested the BCC delay any decision until a Cost of Service Study has been completed and then it can hold another public hearing.

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Tina White, SE 54th Street, Ocklawaha, questioned how many homes in the County are being taxed. She expressed concern with the increase and opined that the assessment should remain at \$87.00.

Judy Etzler, NW 219th Street Road, stated she is in favor of recycling and encouraged citizens to recycle to help reduce waste going into the landfill, which in turn, may help reduce the assessment. She recommended the County send out flyers to residents that provide more information on recycling center hours and locations.

Giovanna Gallottini, Highway 314, Salt Springs, expressed concern with how the assessment is apportioned, noting a retired single person living in a small 500 square feet (sf) 1 bedroom mobile home pays as much someone living in a 4 bedroom multi-million dollar home. She requested the Board be creative when assessing properties more equitably and not place a burden on the most vulnerable part of the community's population, including senior citizens and low income residents.

Patricia Williams, SE 65th Circle, advised that there are no recycling systems available in her community. She stated she lives on social security and her taxes, based on the TRIM Notice, will be approximately \$8,000.00.

Fredda Goodstein, SW 109th Place Road, opined that based on the growth in Marion County, an \$87.00 assessment will not suffice, noting the reality is that even at \$215.00 it will not cover future needs.

Kathleen Scarpati, SW 60th Avenue, opined that the increase is too much and is unreasonable, noting she only received a 2.5% increase in social security. She expressed concern that insurance costs and taxes will drive seniors out of their homes. Ms. Scarpati stated the increase to \$135.00 would be reasonable, but not at \$215.00.

Carolyn Torre, SE 14th Avenue, commented on litter in her neighborhood. She expressed concern that Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is not reimbursing at 100% of the cleanup costs after major storms. Ms. Torre stated capital funds should be funded through new development not from existing residents.

Roger Tew, SW 116th Street Road, commented on the recent passing of the One Cent Sales Tax and opined that citizens are being double taxed. He expressed concern that increasing taxes will drive senior citizens out of their homes.

Kimberly Brooks, SW 159th Place, advised that she spoke to the Pasco County Solid Waste Department, noting that County utilizes waste-to-energy technology, which creates electricity. She stated Pasco County also recycles metal and utilizes ash from the waste-to-energy burners for concrete.

Beverly Garemore, NE 97th Street Road, Anthony, advised that at one time Marion County did have the landfill set up where it would produce energy, which needs to be put back in place. She opined that Germany is a prime example of how the utilization of waste-to-energy helps their Country. Ms. Garemore stated she has lived in Marion County for 25 years and has never seen a rate increase as high as this proposed assessment. She opined that people who live in bigger homes should be responsible for a larger portion of the assessment.

Raleigh Lamb, SE 95th Terrace, Belleview, advised that since the County does not recycle a lot more waste is being placed in the landfill, noting he lived in Hampton, Virginia where the County recycled everything. He stated the highest taxes he ever paid were in Hampton. Mr. Lamb noted the proposed taxes in Marion County bring that total up to what he was paying in Virginia.

Branko Dimovski, SE 120th Street, Belleview, stated he agreed that the assessment needs to be increased.

Mary Ann Rondinella, NE 5th Terrace Road, Citra, expressed concern with the sudden increase in the assessment after years of staying stagnant at \$87.00. She commented on new requirements placed on landfills for leachate collection, etc., and opined that the County should have planned better for the future. Ms. Rondinella advised that her property has a well and septic tank, noting there is no new growth in her area. She opined that there needs to be education to teach people how to compost and minimize their waste.

William Torrance, NE 71st Terrace, advised that he works in the Solid Waste Department and has worked in the solid waste industry for 40 years. He commented on Marion County rates compared to rates in the northeastern section of the State. Mr. Torrance stated nobody wants their taxes to increase; however, the County needs to set itself up for the future. He noted he agrees with the tax increase.

Kathleen Monroe, East Highway 25, Ocklawaha, advised that 15.6% of Marion County residents are living at or below the poverty level. She stated the median income for Marion County is \$53,000.00 and the median home is \$219,900.00. Ms. Monroe advised that her mother is 97 years old and is living along the poverty line, noting her taxes are proposed to increase by \$218.00. She expressed concern that her mother could lose her property because she cannot afford the tax increase. Ms. Monroe opined that Marion County is a beautiful place to live, but expressed concern with the increase in new development.

Commissioner Curry advised that several years ago, the BCC approved Amendment 11 to assist senior citizens in reducing their ad-valorem taxes.

Chairman Bryant suggested citizens who are having a difficult time paying their assessments should reach out to the Community Services Department to see if they qualify for any available programs

Leon Mears, SW 61st Court, advised that the cost of all services have gone up (taxes, insurance, groceries, etc.), noting the assessment rate should have increased gradually over the past 17 years. He requested the BCC raise the rate gradually to help those who are struggling financially. Mr. Mears opined that the County needs to have a recycling system similar to the ones they offer in Spain and other Countries. He stated new construction should be paying more than residents who have lived in the County for a long time.

Domenic Ferrelli, Chestnut Drive, opined that the can has been kicked down the road for decades and now the time is up. He commented on the time and cost involved in building a new landfill. Mr. Ferrelli opined that the State needs to take over the disposal of solid waste and build incinerators across the State of Florida.

Mary Miller, Teak Court, commented on the senior exemption. She advised that the person must own a home with a value of less than \$250,000.00 for at least 25 years, be age 65+, and have an income less than \$37,694.00. Ms. Miller noted proof of this information must be provided to the Property Appraiser's Office by March 1st of that year.

Jeff Tew, SW 116th Street, opined that it is absurd to suggest people to apply for welfare if they cannot afford to pay taxes. He noted most people would not qualify for the exemption the way the parameters are set. Mr. Tew expressed concern that citizens pay to have their trash picked up and then have to pay the County a Solid Waste assessment as well. He commented on new technology to dispose of and recycle solid waste.

Commissioner Curry clarified that the parameters for the senior exemption were set by the State of Florida, noting a citizen can apply for the exemption up to September 15th.

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Greg Peck, SE 165th Terrace Road, advised that the cost of living has increased so much that senior citizens cannot afford to stay in their homes. He noted he is on disability and the increase is too much. Mr. Peck stated he is not in favor of any new taxes.

Daryl Lloyd, SW 89th Loop, commented on the discount available to those who have lived in their home for 25+ years, noting it is not fair that some seniors get the discount and others do not.

Commissioner Curry reiterated that those are State requirements and not Marion County requirements.

Mr. Lloyd opined that the 2 minute limit for public comment is not enough time and stated he would like to have a one-on-one with Commissioners to get answers to his questions. Chairman Bryant directed staff to provide Mr. Lloyd with her contact information so that he may schedule a one-on-one with her.

Mr. Lloyd questioned what different possibilities staff have reviewed to try and create a stop gap measure to fulfill necessary funding besides raising the assessment.

Chairman Bryant advised that staff and the BCC have explored other possibilities, including energy alternatives, bonding, etc. She stated Mr. Lloyd can go to www.marionfl.org and review those meetings where the BCC discussed alternative disposal measures.

Kathryn Reddell, N. Highway 314A, advised that her mother lives in a 500 sf in-law suite on her property, noting because it is a separate building she has to pay double the assessment. She questioned whether there is a way to amend the assessment to charge by square footage as opposed to the number of units on the property. Ms. Reddell stated she and her husband are part of the "Adopt-A-Road" program and suggested the BCC promote this program so more people are made aware of it, which may cut some costs for the County.

Chairman Bryant expressed her appreciation to Ms. Reddell for being part of that program, noting the BCC tries to promote the "Adopt-A-Road" program every chance possible. She provided a brief overview of the program, noting the County will provide volunteers all the necessary supplies.

Terri Berger, SW 58th Avenue Road, advised that she has lived in Marion County for over 35 years, noting it used to be known as the Horse Capital of the World, but has now become House Capital of the World. She opined that new residents should be paying a higher proportion of these assessments. Ms. Berger expressed concern that the County is also requesting an increase in the Fire Rescue assessment.

Chairman Bryant requested staff provide Ms. Berger with her contact information so that they can schedule an appointment to discuss road issues.

Lester Sanchez, SW 24th Terrace, advised that in recent months Governor Ron DeSantis has criticized local governments for approving large increases in property taxes as home values have risen. He commented on the Governor's proposals to eliminate property taxes altogether, which should be on the ballot next year. Mr. Sanchez advised that on August 12, 2025, the Governor publicly spoke about it and stated, "What happens is, your property gets assessed higher and higher and is an unrealized gain when you have not sold it for that much just because they are telling you it is worth that much". He opined that the BCC's proposal is not aligned with the Governor's plans for Floridians and comes at a time when instead of lowering taxes, it is raising them. Mr. Sanchez advised that Governor DeSantis gave a speech at Marion Oaks granting Marion County over \$3,000,000.00 for roadway and clean water projects, \$6,500,000.00 to expand broadband/internet access, \$4,000,000.00 for the new Interstate 75 (I-75) interchange

and travel center, as well as \$4,700,000.00 for infrastructure improvements. He opined that the County needs to take care of the well-being, peace of mind, and quality of life of its residents. Mr. Sanchez questioned whether the Board has a plan for when Governor DeSantis eliminates property taxes.

Chairman Bryant advised that if the State eliminates property taxes, it will have to find another way for that revenue to come into Counties and municipalities in order to fund services that communities rely on (law enforcement, Fire Rescue, libraries, parks, etc.). She clarified that over 70% of Marion County's budget is for public safety services.

Olamiju Olagbegi, SW 57th Court, questioned if it was possible for the County to invest funds to help subsidize taxes.

Chairman Bryant addressed previous discussion relating to the possibility of utilizing ARPA funding to be able to help reduce the Solid Waste assessment.

ACA Tracy Straub advised that she spoke with Mr. Olagbegi earlier and clarified that he is questioning whether the County can generate revenue off of investments and bring that revenue in to help subsidize taxes.

Chairman Bryant commented on the importance of being very cautious and conservative when it comes to investing taxpayer dollars.

David Berger, SW 58th Avenue Road, advised that he has lived in Marion County since 1989 and questioned why the County is so short on revenue, especially with all the new growth.

Chairman Bryant advised that public comment is now closed.

There was a recess at 7:56 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 8:08 p.m. with all members present.

Chairman Bryant stated she took notes during public comment and during the break she gave those notes to staff to have public comment questions answered.

Mr. Johnson advised that one of the questions asked related to the number of parcels in the Solid Waste assessment, noting there are 169,883 improved parcels being assessed. In regard to communication regarding Solid Waste services, Mr. Johnson stated he will reach out to the County's Public Information Office (PIO) Department to put out some social media notices that addresses what the County recycles, other services and programs the Department offers, etc. He commented on proportional share when it comes to assessments, noting he would have to meet with the County's Legal Department to determine what options the Department has within the confines of State law.

Heather Encinosa, Nabors Giblin & Nickerson (NGN), advised that although she did not work on the County's Solid Waste assessment program, all assessments in general have to provide a special benefit to the property, have to be fairly and reasonably apportioned among properties, etc. She stated all of the Solid Waste assessments she has seen across the State are based on dwelling units (du's), which are the same as Marion County. Mr. Johnson addressed FEMA reimbursements, noting staff actively and routinely engage with them to ensure the County receives all of its money back. He stated the County is still waiting for last year's reimbursement, which is a typical timeframe. With regard to Hurricane Irma, Mr. Johnson stated the cost for storm cleanup was \$26,000,000.00 and the County was able to recoup \$23,000,000.00 of that cost. He provided a brief overview of what it entails to receive FEMA reimbursements. Mr. Johnson advised that the County has 2 contractors that work storm cleanup, one that collects the debris and one that certifies the work was actually done, noting the certifying entity turns the receipts over to

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the Department. The Department then pays the contractors and takes the certifications and receipts for expenditures and sends them to FEMA for reimbursements. He clarified that different storm events have different thresholds as to what FEMA will reimburse, noting some are 100% reimbursable and some may only be reimbursable at 75%, etc.

Chairman Bryant reiterated that every dime expended goes through the Clerk of Court and Comptroller's Office. She commented on the need to keep an Unrestrictive Reserve in Solid Waste for storm cleanup.

Mr. Johnson stated there is a lot of information regarding this and other Department matters on the Solid Waste page on the County's website at www.marionfl.org. He advised that the Solid Waste Department is an Enterprise Fund and receives no Sales Tax dollars, noting it collects fees for direct services (assessments), as well as the fees collected at the landfill. Mr. Johnson stated in regard to recycling, there are 18 recycling centers throughout Marion County that accept single stream waste, which includes all recyclable products (paper, plastics, cardboard, metal). He stated the reality is that out of the 200,000 tons collected at these centers, only about 5,000 tons is recyclable. Mr. Johnson noted the landfill also takes approximately 2,200 to 2,500 tons of tires annually that are shipped off and processed for recycling. He advised that there is approximately 45,000 tons of yard waste that is ground and processed, noting some of that goes to Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU) to make power and some is composted at Compost USA. Mr. Johnson noted there are a lot of opportunities for citizens to recycle. He stated the Department also properly disposes of needles, as well as household hazardous waste so that it stays out of the waste stream.

Chairman Bryant stated the Department has reviewed most of the suggestions made during public comment.

Mr. Johnson commented on the suggestion for a waste-to-energy program similar to Pasco County, noting it was previously reviewed back in 2022; however, it was found to be cost prohibitive. He stated the cost to Pasco County just to expand its waste-to-energy facility was approximately \$550,000,000.00.

Chairman Bryant advised that in 2011 when the BCC purchased airspace at the HOF, it tried to make HOF a Regional Landfill; however, none of the surrounding Counties wanted to participate.

Mr. Johnson commented on the suggestion that new buildings should pay more for their assessment, noting everyone receives the exact same services on a per unit basis whether the home is newer or older. He provided a brief overview of the franchise hauler system for citizens who pay a private hauler to collect their garbage at home. Mr. Johnson clarified that the citizen is paying for someone to pick up their waste and transport it to the County's facility, noting the disposal cost of that waste is included in the assessment. He commented on commercial haulers that go through the transfer station at the Baseline Landfill, noting the County does charge for that at a rate of \$60.00 per ton (will increase to \$65.00 per ton beginning in October 2025). Mr. Johnson addressed all the other various alternative waste disposal methods the County has analyzed, noting in the end, re-opening the County's own landfill was the most cost effective solution in the market today. He advised that the County does sell its landfill gas to G2 Energy; however, the landfill gas has been dwindling due to the County exporting a lot of the waste to HOF. Mr. Johnson addressed the Department's revenues and expenses, noting the Department has been utilizing its Reserves for the past 5 years; however, that is no longer sustainable. Chairman Bryant stated she is in favor of the phased-in approach, but could not support the proposed assessment rate that was listed on TRIM Notices.

Commissioner McClain expressed concern with having funding for the Department's capital needs, noting if the Board chooses the lower rate this year, citizens will end up paying more in the future. He opined that setting the assessment at the proposed rate of \$215.00 over the next 10 years will help set up the Department's Reserve balance for future major storms.

General discussion ensued.

Commissioner Stone advised that the people she spoke to were more inclined to know what they are going to have to pay for the assessment over the next 10 years versus the continual increase over that same time.

General discussion resumed.

Commissioner Curry stated the reason the BCC is here tonight is because it did not raise the rates over the past several years, noting had they raised the assessment at the CPI rate of 1.5% annually the rate would currently be at \$282.00. He opined by setting the rate at \$215.00 it would solve all of the solid waste problems. Commissioner Curry opined that the BCC spends taxpayer funds in a very judicious fashion, noting by being conservative and trying to keep the cost down over so many years, it has created this problem.

General discussion ensued.

There was a recess at 8:38 p.m. due to audio difficulties

The meeting reconvened at 8:40 p.m. with all members present.

Commissioner Zalak stated he is in favor of the phased-in approach.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stone, seconded by Commissioner Curry, to adopt Resolution 25-R-352 for Residential Solid Waste Services MSBU at the rate of \$215.00 over the next 10 years and to certify the Non-Ad Valorem Assessment Rolls. The motion was approved by the Board by a vote of 3-2 with Commissioners Bryant and Zalak dissenting.

Resolution 25-R-352 is entitled:

A RESOLUTION OF MARION COUNTY, FLORIDA, RELATING TO THE PROVISION OF SOLID WASTE SERVICES, FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS IN THE MARION COUNTY MUNICIPAL SERVICE BENEFIT UNIT FOR RESIDENTIAL SOLID WASTE SERVICES; PROVIDING FOR THE ANNUAL ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SOLID WASTE ASSESSMENTS AGAINST ASSESSED PROPERTY LOCATED WITHIN THE MARION COUNTY MUNICIPAL SERVICES BENEFIT UNIT FOR RESIDENTIAL SOLID WASTE SERVICES, FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING OCTOBER 1, 2025; APPROVING THE ASSESSMENT ROLL; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

There was a recess at 8:42 p.m. due to audio difficulties

The meeting reconvened at 8:44 p.m. with all members present.

PROOF OF PUBLICATION

Deputy Clerk Windberg presented Proof of Publication of a display ad entitled, "Notice of Hearing to Impose and Provide for Collection of Fire Rescue Special Assessment" published in the Star Banner newspaper on August 21, 2025. The Notice states the Board will consider the continued imposition of Fire Rescue special assessments for the

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provision of Fire Rescue Services within the unincorporated area of Marion County and the municipalities of Belleview, Dunnellon, Reddick and McIntosh, which collectively constitute the boundaries of the Marion County MSBU for Fire Rescue Services.

STAFF PRESENTATION – Chad Wicker

MS Director Wicker advised that the next public hearing relates to the request for consideration of the Fire Rescue Services MSBU assessment. This assessment is based on two components: 1) demand and 2) availability. He stated for the residential category there is a proposed increase of \$27.36 per du for the demand component and an increase of \$56.70 per equivalent dwelling unit (edu) for the availability component. This raises the total assessment from \$199.91 to \$283.97 per du. In the non-residential categories, Mr. Wicker stated there is a proposed increase of \$56.70 per edu for the availability component along with increases to most of the per sf demand component rates, with the exception of miscellaneous buildings which are proposed to have a slight decrease in the demand component. The tentative budget for MCFR services is \$54,797,694.80.

Fire Chief James Banta, MCFR, advised that the Fire Rescue MSBU is a non-ad valorem assessment that includes the unincorporated areas of the County including Rainbow Lakes Estates and the incorporated areas of the Cities of Belleview, Dunnellon, Reddick and McIntosh. Special benefits to property include: protecting the value and integrity of improvements, structures and land through the provision of fire rescue services; protecting the life and safety of intended occupants in the use and enjoyment of property; and lowering the cost of fire insurance by the presence of a professional and comprehensive fire rescue services program within the County. He advised that in 2019, a study was performed based on 2017/18 call data in order to determine what the assessment rate should be, and based on that information the rate was set at a combined rate (demand and availability) of \$199.91 per residential du. Chief Banta stated a new study was performed this year and is based on 2022/23 call data. The result of that study recommends a combined rate of \$283.97 per residential du, which is an increase of approximately \$84.00. He advised that based on that rate, the estimated total revenue is \$57,681,784.00. Chief Banta stated the revenue helps pay for personnel, operating costs, utilities, repairs/maintenance, fuel, uniforms, and training. He clarified that the assessment does not pay for major capital equipment, which comes from Sales Tax revenue and Impact Fees for new development.

Chief Banta provided a brief overview of assessment options (phased-in versus one-time increase for the next 5 years), noting it is staff's recommendation for the one-time increase of \$283.97 per residential du.

In response to Chairman Bryant, Chief Banta stated the phased-in assessment rate would allow the Department to maintain as it has been operationally; however, it could present challenges in some of its preplanning for the future.

In response to Commissioner McClain, Chairman Bryant clarified that the proposed assessment rate Resolution would come back to the Board annually for the Commission to phase-in the increase over 5 years until it reaches that maximum rate.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Bryant opened the floor to public comment.

Candace Shashikarshe, NE 77th Street, opined that increasing the assessment will affect renters, noting the increases will be passed on to them through rent increases. She commented on the number of seniors that are struggling financially. Ms. Shashikarshe

stated County Departments need to reevaluate their budgets to determine where they can make cutbacks.

Judy Etzler, NW 219th Street Road, complimented the Fire Rescue and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Departments, noting she saw them in action when a building burnt down in her community and they immediately responded. She addressed Commissioner Curry's comments relating to the parameters for the senior tax exemption and opined that more people need to know about these programs. Ms. Etzler advised that she used to live in Alachua County and is still receiving emails from that County relating to events and programs that are offered to their citizens.

Kathleen Monroe, East Highway 25, stated she was disappointed by the Boards last vote on the Solid Waste assessment. She advised that she has 21 rental units (half are vacant), noting last year she paid over \$22,000.00 in taxes and this year she is set to pay over \$26,000.00. Ms. Monroe stated the insurance on her properties has increased tremendously over the past 2 years.

Jenny Schroer, NW 42nd Place, opined that the BCC should implement the phased-in (year by year) increase to help citizens right now.

Mary Ann Rondinella, NE 5th Terrace, expressed concern with the increases in these assessments and opined there needs to be a careful audit of those numbers and confirm that those costs are real. She advised that under the ad valorem taxes, she also is being taxed for EMS and Fire Rescue on top of the non-ad valorem assessments. Ms. Rondinella stated her non-ad valorem taxes, if passed, are going to increase 70% in one year. She advised that even though there is a brand new fire station in Citra, her homeowners insurance bill still increased this year.

Chairman Bryant advised of the difference between ad valorem and non-ad valorem assessments, noting those are 2 different funds. She stated funding for EMS services come out of the ad valorem assessment and clarified that the non-ad valorem assessment is strictly for fire services. Chairman Bryant stated EMS services covers the entire County including the municipalities; therefore, it is funded by the General Fund (ad valorem taxes).

Beverly Garemore, NE 97th Street Road, Anthony, questioned what edu stands for. Chairman Bryant stated edu stands for equivalent dwelling unit.

Ms. Garemore advised that her home is only 860 sq ft and stated her taxes have doubled. In response to Ms. Garemore, Chief Banta advised that the study comes up with an edu based on the average size of a residential house in Marion County (approximately 2,630 sq ft). He stated everyone pays the same rate regardless of the size of the residence.

Ms. Garemore opined that the rate should be based on the size of the dwelling/property and not across the board for everyone.

Chairman Bryant advised that public comment is now closed.

Commissioner Stone reiterated that the citizens she spoke to were more inclined to know what they are going to have to pay for the assessment over a period of time without it changing annually.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stone, seconded by Commissioner McClain, to adopt Resolution 25-R-353 for Fire Rescue Services MSBU at the rate of \$283.97 over the next 5 years and to certify the Non-Ad Valorem Assessment Rolls.

Chairman Bryant advised that she is extremely disappointed with what happened with the Solid Waste assessment, noting that was the opportunity the Board had to provide some relief to taxpayers. She stated she could support this motion due to the services it involves.

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

Resolution 25-R-353 is entitled:

A RESOLUTION OF MARION COUNTY, FLORIDA, RELATING TO THE PROVISION OF FIRE RESCUE SERVICES, FACILITIES, AND PROGRAMS IN THE MARION COUNTY MUNICIPAL SERVICE BENEFIT UNIT FOR FIRE RESCUE SERVICES; PROVIDING AUTHORITY, DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATION; CONFIRMING THE AMENDED AND RESTATED INITIAL ASSESSMENT RESOLUTION; IMPOSING FIRE RESCUE ASSESSMENTS AGAINST ASSESSED PROPERTY LOCATED WITHIN THE MARION COUNTY MUNICIPAL SERVICES BENEFIT UNIT FOR FIRE RESCUE SERVICES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING OCTOBER 1, 2025; APPROVING THE ASSESSMENT ROLL AND PROVIDING FOR COLLECTION; PROVIDING FOR APPLICATION OF ASSESSMENT PROCEEDS; PROVIDING FOR EFFECT; PROVIDING FOR CONFLICTS AND SEVERABILITY; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

A motion was made by Commissioner Stone, seconded by Commissioner Zalak, to authorize the Chairman and Clerk to execute the non-ad valorem documents as applicable. The motion was unanimously approved by the Board (5-0).

CLOSING COMMENTS:

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting thereupon adjourned at 9:11 p.m.

Kathy Bryant, Chairman

Attest:

Gregory C. Harrell, Clerk