

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

April 7, 2026

**CALL TO ORDER:**

The Marion County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) met in a workshop session in Commission Chambers at 2:02 p.m. on Tuesday, April 7, 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 County's Preliminary Budget.

**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; Commissioner Craig Curry, District 1; Commissioner Kathy Bryant, District 2; and Commissioner Michelle Stone, District 5. Also present were Clerk Gregory C. Harrell, County Attorney Matthew G. Minter, County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes, Assistant County Administrator (ACA) Tracy Straub, ACA Angel Roussel, ACA Amanda Tart and Director of Internal Services Mike McCain.

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

**WORKSHOP PRESENTATION**

1. Introduction – Mounir Bouyounes, PE, County Administrator

The following information was presented by County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes, Administration:

Description/Background: County departments have completed and submitted their proposed budgets to the Budget Department. Over the next month, the County Administrator will conduct a comprehensive review of these submissions and make any necessary adjustments.

On March 30, 2026, the Chairman and the County Administrator met with the Constitutional Officers to discuss the challenges and opportunities associated with Fiscal Year 2027. Some of the identified cost drivers (particularly in the General Fund) are as follows:

- Funding a substantial increase in Health Insurance.
- Funding a new union contract with Fire Rescue.
- Funding additional detention officers for the Jail.
- Funding capital projects and machinery & equipment.
- Funding COLA and personnel adjustments.
- Loss of revenue from one-time transfer and expected decrease in Shared Sales Tax.

The above items will have an impact on the final millage in Fiscal Year 2027.

Budget/Impact: None.

Recommended Action: Staff is seeking direction on the priorities of the Board.

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County Administrator Bouyounes advised that this workshop is a follow up to the one held on January 26, 2026, noting at that hearing staff shared some projections on proposed revenues and issues the BCC may be dealing with in the upcoming fiscal year (FY) 2026/27 budget. He stated the message from the Board at that time was staff know what it needs to do so go and get it done. Mr. Bouyounes noted all BCC Departments turned in their proposed budgets at the end of February and after review by the Budget Department, that information was released to him a couple of weeks ago. He advised that major cost drivers in the proposed budget include employee health insurance and the proposed contract negotiations with the Professional Firefighters of Marion County, Local 3169.

Mr. Bouyounes advised that he recently had a meeting with all 5 Constitutional Officers and they are aware of the numbers that will be presented to the Board.

## 2. Constitutional Officers

County Administrator Bouyounes presented the following:

Description/Background: Updates from the Constitutional Officers for FY 2026-27.

Budget/Impact: None.

Recommended Action: For information only.

Marion County Sheriff William "Billy" Woods, Marion County Sheriff's Office (MCSO), expressed his appreciation for the meeting last week to review Constitutional Officer budgets. He addressed some of the challenges MCSO will face this year. Sheriff Woods commented on County growth and the effects it has on his budgets. He addressed a study that was performed showing MCSO is approximately 120 deputies short due to population growth. Sheriff Woods advised that since 2016 the average calls for service in one year were 225,000, noting this past year 264,000 calls were answered by deputies. He stated his deputies do an outstanding job protecting citizens and keeping crime as flat as possible, noting this year there was a decline in crime rates. Sheriff Woods noted so far this year his Department has already received 63,000 calls over the past 3 months. He commented on the operating costs associated with the jail, noting inmate medical is the largest cost. Sheriff Woods stated the total operating budget cost for the jail is approximately \$24,000,000.00 and out of that inmate medical services accounts for \$15,000,000.00 or 62 percent (%) of the cost. He advised that the contract with Heart of Florida Healthcare is almost up and staff are sending out bids right now looking for other vendors, noting staff have already been there and done that before and these other vendors are going to be at a considerably higher cost for services. Sheriff Woods clarified that he is not talking like \$100,000.00 difference, but probably closer to \$2,000,000.00 to \$4,000,000.00 higher, which is still an unknown cost at this time. He advised that sending out bids for service does not give a suggestion that Heart of Florida (HOF) has done or is doing anything wrong, noting there are always areas in which healthcare service can improve and HOF has always done their best. Sheriff Woods stated in February alone there were 11 inmate on inmate batteries and 3 inmate on deputy batteries.

Sheriff Woods addressed other healthcare costs, noting in the month of January, 71 inmates were seen by physicians, 386 seen by Registered Nurse Practitioners (RNP's), and 1,500 inmates were seen by nurses for whatever ailment or complaint in which they had. He stated one of the biggest concerns is prescription medication and noted in one month just under 1,200 prescriptions were handed out. Sheriff Woods stated many people do not truly understand what goes on in a jail, especially when it comes to prescriptions. He advised that he receives complaints from people that their family member did not get

their prescription; however, this is no different than when someone goes to a new doctor, and the new doctor does not have past medical files and does not know what the patient has been prescribed. Sheriff Woods clarified that staff cannot just take anybody's word for what they are being given medically, noting the inmate has to be diagnosed. On top of that, what some inmates do with the prescription, and he has witnessed this because when medical staff go in and provide the medication to the inmates, some do what is called mouthing the medication. He advised that what an inmate will do is shove the medication back up in the corner of their mouth and keep it there, open his mouth so it appears to have been swallowed, but what ends up happening is the inmate will spit it out later and sell it to another inmate so that they can get high off of it or break it down into any other substance that they wish to use to get high.

Sheriff Woods commented on staffing, noting at the end of February there were 12 vacancies for detention deputies and 7 for detention assistants. Also, in the month of February, there were 9 staff members that actually left, with 7 of those being detention deputies or detention assistants. He addressed inmate population, noting the jail was previously pushing the 2,000 inmate limit, but is now averaging just under 1,500 inmates per month. Sheriff Woods advised that there are many reasons for that, especially the great prosecutions by the State Attorney's Office of getting inmates out of the jail and sending them to prison; however, the inmate population is not the true number of people to come into the jail itself. For example, in the month of February, staff booked 1,000 individuals, which is the average each month of individuals that are being handled by jail staff. That equates to 12,000 inmates that come in and out of the jail in a year. He advised that averages to 2 detention deputies watching 250 inmates in a cell, noting in the month of February, staff did 14,000 shakedowns, which means they have to inspect each and every cell in one month. Sheriff Woods also noted there were just under 133,000 meals prepared in the jail for the month of February. He stated the figures presented show why there is a need for the additional 5 to 10 detention deputies he will be requesting in the upcoming budget.

Sheriff Woods addressed staff salaries, noting the plan includes a 3% salary increase, which is the same as last year. He opined that if the County goes below that, it hurts because it starts creating vacancies of people leaving to find higher paying jobs.

In response to Commissioner McClain, Sheriff Woods stated the starting wage for a detention deputy is \$62,400.00.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Sheriff Woods stated the biggest unknown to affect his budget will be inmate healthcare until he understands what that new contract is going to look like financially.

Sheriff Woods addressed his proposed 4-Year plan to add 30 to 35 road deputies each year, noting his overall personnel is just over 1,200 employees. He commented on the challenges for MCSO in regard to non-sworn employees, especially in the Information Technology (IT) Department, noting law enforcement has changed over the last three decades when it comes to technology and competing with the private sector is extremely difficult. Sheriff Woods commented on challenges with the cost of new vehicles, those vehicles being outfitted, as well as fuel cost, noting last year 48,000 gallons of fuel was used in February and this year in February it was 51,000 gallons. He noted in the month of February there were 184 vehicle repairs that had to be done by the Fleet Department. Chief Financial Officer Jeremiah Powell, MCSO, commented on the cost associated with retirement benefits should Senate Bill 7028 pass.

General discussion ensued in regard to retirement costs.

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Clerk Gregory C. Harrell stated he will also be seeking a 3% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) on behalf of his employees. He advised that his staff are doing everything they can to keep operational expenses flat, noting he will not be seeking any new full time employees (FTEs). Clerk Harrell stated Property Appraiser Jimmy Cowan does a really good job of keeping everyone apprised of what the overall property value increases are coming in at and Budget Director Audrey Fowler does a good job of running those numbers and applying them as the County gets closer to the mark. He noted property values are coming in at a lesser rate than they have in the past few years (approximately 6.5% rather than 10%). Insurance costs have gone up significantly this year. Clerk Harrell commented on the new Fire Rescue contract which is going to cost the County approximately \$4,000,000.00 more this cycle. On top of that there are requests for new FTEs for MCSO, as well as other Departments that need to keep pace with growth; however, when you load those salaries with benefits, they come at a cost.

Clerk Harrell advised that for the second year running, Ocala has been named the number one metro growth area in the Nation, noting Marion County's growth was at 3.4%. And for the second year in a row, Marion County is the second biggest growing metro in the Country according to the US Census Bureau. He advised that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) at the end of 2025 was about 2.7%; oil/energy increases are expected in the next month or so; and core inflation is right about the same, hovering around 2.5%. Clerk Harrell opined that the County has got to be careful that it is not slipping into an international recession. A lot of that is certainly beyond the County's control, but is part of the unknowns that the Board needs to be mindful of at this time. There is still the specter of potential property tax reform although no one knows exactly what is going to happen there. He opined that it appears that the property tax reform may not happen in the way people thought it was going to happen, but is something that the County needs to be cautious about and mindful of the parameters that could be placed around that reform. This would stress County Departments and all Constitutional Officers other than the Sheriff's budget and Fire Rescue/EMS. Clerk Harrell opined that the proposed property tax reform would be pinpointed pinching of County Departments and your other Constitutional budgets. He commented on Florida Statute (FS) 129.01, which unlike the Federal government, requires the County to pass a balanced budget. Clerk Harrell stated there is going to be some interesting and difficult decision making for the Board and noted the Clerk's Office is here to help provide the Board with whatever information it needs to help the County make those tough decisions as best it can.

Marion County Supervisor of Elections Wesley Wilcox stated he had nothing to add.

Marion County Tax Collector George Albright advised of a very spirited conversation he had with County staff relating to health insurance costs and the need to encourage employees to think carefully before they go and use an outpatient clinic facility because the cost of some of them are no more different than hospital costs. He addressed the need for employees to use the County's clinics first to be more cost efficient. Mr. Albright stated the County and Constitutional Officers are going to have to be more aggressive about working with employees and having them make wise decisions because healthcare costs are simply not sustainable.

Mr. Albright stated he will be requesting a 3% COLA for his employees as well. He advised that he returned \$138,000.00 back last year, even after the compression study cost and employee pay adjustments. The Tax Collector's Office made approximately one million transactions last year and handled one million the year before. He noted his Office did have some increases this past year that is running into next year. Mr. Albright advised of

a new hardware setup that is taking Frivus and Fidelis, which is the Tag and Title and Driver's Licenses software and combining them into one platform, noting he is having to re-train all of his employees on that new software. He stated things are going good at the Tax Collector's Office and it is staying busy, but will meet the challenge and are the Board's partner through this process.

3. Budget Model Exercise Presentation - Audrey Fowler, Budget Director

The following information was presented by Budget Director Audrey Fowler:

Description/Background: Audrey Fowler, Budget Director will present a budget model exercise for FY 2026-27.

Budget/Impact: None.

Recommended Action: For discussion and direction.

Budget Director Audrey Fowler advised that at the end of February, she was asked by the Board if she could provide an aggregate percentage of how the changes in the budget would affect every Department in the General Fund. She stated after about four hours of working on that study, she realized very quickly that an aggregate percentage was not really going to be an achievable goal because there are so many disparate cost drivers that are affecting the budget. Primarily health insurance, which is a fixed amount per employee. For example, a department of seven employees is going to have a much smaller percentage of impact on their budget versus a larger department like the Marion County Library where there are 50 or 60 employees. Ms. Fowler stated she started working on a model that filled out the changes in the budget, looking more along the lines of policy pieces, which meant breaking out personnel and operating costs, capital projects, what is needed for the Fund Balance, what revenues that the County has and then putting that information into a millage as a result of that information. Since presenting the first model, the Budget Department received feedback from the BCC and the County Administrator, so she went and updated the model a couple of times and staff have gone through various versions of the model to add more detail as it became available.

Ms. Fowler referred to the charts shown on the overhead screen, noting she began with scenario one, which is the adopted FY 2025/26 millage rate of 3.0900 mills with no operational increases. She provided a brief overview of the expenditures broken down into 10 major personnel groups (BCC, EMS, Public Safety Communications, MCSO, all remaining Constitutional Officers, as well as Courts and other agencies). This model factors in whatever percent the County sets the health insurance at and adds it in incrementally, same with merit increases and COLA. Ms. Fowler stated there was a discussion that the Board had earlier this year about moving some Parks and Recreation Department staff from the Fees Fund to the General Fund so that information was added in as a variable for consideration. Ms. Fowler noted the proposed Fire Rescue and EMS contract was also put in as a variable. She advised of a letter that the Sheriff's Office provided that included the cost of what one Detention Deputy adds to the budget, noting all these variables and different numbers can be added into the model. Ms. Fowler stated the model was then broken down into the operating costs for the BCC, public safety agencies, Courts, and Constitutional Officers to include incremental operating changes. Ms. Fowler addressed the Capital Improvement Projects (CIP), noting that \$59,000,000.00 was all funded from prior years one-time money and are committed to capital projects at this time. A lot of that will most likely end up in next year's budget as a Carry Forward, but it cannot be reassigned at this point. She commented on the request for last year's Grants and Aid, including the portion that the County has to send to the

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CRAAs, both the City of Ocala and Silver Spring Shores. Ms. Fowler addressed the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) funding, which is a revenue match. She clarified that there is a base amount and then there is the increase amount that results in revenue, noting the County would lose \$0.40 on the dollar if the County does not fund that program. Ms. Fowler advised of the one-time, non-recurring transfer from the General Fund to Fine and Forfeiture Fund for the first year for adjustments that the Board made at that time, as well as the recurring transfer for the Medical Examiner and Fire/Admin. She commented on Reserves in the General Fund, not just the Cash Carry Forward, which includes Reserve for Contingencies, as well as other Reserves that are in the General Fund. Ms. Fowler advised that going forward this number is increased in order to ensure that the County is properly funding the 20% Fund Balance requirement.

Ms. Fowler stated there is a total budget of \$358,000,000.00 in the General Fund that matches the line item totals right now, which includes the one-time transfer from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), as well as \$101,000,000.00 of Fund Balance and now reflects net budget of zero, which means it was balanced.

Ms. Fowler addressed taxable property values, noting staff do not know at this point what the estimated taxable value increase is going to be, but after talking with the Property Appraiser and the State of Florida it is estimated at approximately 6.8%. She stated with all the information provided; the model reflects the need for a 0.0200 mill increase.

Ms. Fowler advised that a millage rate of 3.0290 has been determined to be the required increase in millage based on information she received from the County Administrator's Office. The first increase to note is due to the health insurance increase of 20%, which is the employer paid cost that has an impact on the General Fund of \$2,900,000.00 and is based on the actual adopted positions that are in the budget at this time. She commented on the Fire/Rescue and EMS contract which adds a \$4,000,000.00 estimated increase. Ms. Fowler stated in order to stay at 3.0900 mills, the budget is between \$7,500,000.00 to \$8,000,000.00 short of funding just from those two required pieces, which would require a millage increase of 0.2200 mills.

In response to Commissioner Curry, ACA Amanda Tart stated the annual cost for the Employee Health Clinic, which is funded out of the Health Insurance Fund is about \$3,100,000.00 for the operation of the clinic. The Employee Health Clinic should take pressure off those costs, but it has only been open for three months, so the County is not going to see that relief until it has been open for at least a year. She stated the Employee Health Clinic has had over 1,000 people go in and get established and see the clinic staff. The County is also running all of its Workers' Compensation cases through the clinic as well. So, while the County is moving in the right direction, it is probably going to be in year 2 before it really starts seeing any relief off of those costs. Ms. Tart noted a couple of things that have added to the cost of health insurance this year are, as Mr. Albright mentioned, the use of emergency rooms. So, staff are putting forth a campaign to help educate people not to go to the emergency room. The County has also had some very costly prescriptions that staff are working to see what can be done, noting many of those do not have a generic that is offered and the County is spending about \$4,000,000.00 a month on claims. She stated in the past staff have budgeted over \$2,500,000.00 for prescription costs, but those costs have increased and are now steady at \$4,000,000.00 a month. Ms. Tart noted staff are working to educate people to help bring those claims down. She opined that some of the things are predictable and the clinic can help with those and other things are unpredictable and they are going to happen.

Commissioner Curry questioned whether staff can do any projections on the clinic going

forward for the next year to 18 months.

Ms. Tart advised that staff may be able to look at things like how much the County is spending on claims for doctor's office visits and prescriptions that could be filled at the clinic and maybe do some projections there. The thing that is hard to calculate is the preventative care that people should be getting at the clinic and what long term outcomes that will have to hopefully help reduce the number of high dollar claims where people are ending up in the hospital for months at a time.

General discussion ensued in regard to the recent increase in smaller stand-alone Emergency Rooms versus Urgent Care Centers.

Ms. Fowler stated the Advent Emergency Room (ER) located on State Road (SR) 200 and Interstate 75 (I-75) bills at that same level as their hospital's ER and that is going to cost the employee themselves more money out of pocket, not just the County.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Ms. Tart stated employees can no longer get prescriptions filled at the HOF, but can get them filled at no cost at the Employee Clinic. General discussion resumed.

Ms. Fowler advised that the next model she is presenting includes all of the County Departments "asks" as were presented to her and include new vehicle requests, new FTEs, merit and COLA requests at 3% (except for Fire, EMS and law enforcement), BCC position changes (reclassifications), and overtime increases for first responders.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Ms. Fowler stated the \$4,000,000.00 increase for Fire/Rescue and EMS contract is just the General Fund's portion. She advised that by reducing the Sheriff's request down from 15 to 10 new detention deputies, it would reduce the budget by approximately \$618,480.00. She referred to the chart as shown on the overhead screen and advised that the Operational Budget Changes for the BCC to reflect the amount of \$1,265,347.00 and the Operation Budget Changes for EMS/Public Safety Communication Public Safety Radio (PSR) are \$641,878.00.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Mr. Bouyounes clarified that Operational Budget Changes for the BCC cover operating expenses from mowing properties, fuel and electric costs, and other operational cost, noting he has not yet reviewed those items.

Ms. Fowler stated she has not yet received the Operational Budget Changes for Courts yet, noting she placed a 2.5% proxy in the model.

Mr. Bouyounes referred to the line item that addresses CIP, noting in the 5-Year Plan there are 3 projects scheduled for next year. The first project is to finish the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Courthouse; the second project is related to work at the Public Defenders' building; and the third project is for work at the Southeastern Livestock Pavilion (SELP). The total cost associated with those projects is approximately \$6,600,000.00. He clarified that those are new projects and are not budgeted.

Ms. Fowler advised that there is a request for Machinery and Equipment in the amount of \$807,215.00 for BCC Departments and \$45,316.00 is for Public Safety Radio, noting there are some Grants & Aid embedded within the BCC Departments. She noted she places a proxy for Machinery and Equipment for the Courts at \$100,000.00 for Information Technology equipment. Ms. Fowler referred to Grants & Aid Agencies and advised that Senior Services requests went down a little this year because the agency had a Carry Forward that they are not requesting to utilize it at this point in time.

Ms. Fowler addressed health insurance increases associated with the MCSO, noting if she placed a proxy in the formula at 10%, which would will increase the amount to \$2,400,000.00. She commented on the recurring transfer to the Medical Examiner and Fire Administration, noting the increase in Fire Administration transfer to the Fire Fund

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usually goes up about \$50,000.00 a year. The increase in the Medical Examiner transfer was the District 5 percentage according to the latest budget staff received. The Reserves increased and that was by using one time money. All other revenues and have not made any adjustments. This budget is sitting between \$26,000,000.00 and \$27,000,000.00 in the negative. A millage rate of 3.7800 would be required to balance everything that was on this list. Ms. Fowler advised that using all those same variables but changing the millage rate to 3.3500 mills, which was the prior year's rate, would leave a \$17,814,190.00 deficit, noting this scenario did include capital projects.

Chairman Zalak noted the budget could be reduced by \$6,000,000.00 if the capital projects were removed and even more if Parks and Recreation projects were removed. General discussion ensued.

Ms. Fowler advised that even if the Board stayed at the 3.0900 mills, property tax bills will go up approximately \$6.00 per every \$50,000.00 of taxable value, noting a home with \$150,000 of taxable value, would see an increase of about \$19.00.

General discussion resumed.

Ms. Fowler advised that the model reflects March 2026 estimates of revenue and staff will revisit them again in May as the Board gets closer to the budget. She addressed Sales Tax, noting she just reviewed the February numbers, and it was actually holding to where staff expected. But unfortunately, in March, gas prices went up, which reduces disposable income. So usually, the County is going to suffer on the Sales Tax side and will not know the true impact of that until the very end of May when staff receive the month of April estimates. She stated the Infrastructure Sales Tax was sitting solid at \$69,000,000.00 as projected.

General discussion ensued relating to the 20% estimated increase in health insurance costs.

Sheriff Woods requested the Board put his deputies' COLA back to 5%, noting the affects growth has had on the demand for law enforcement services on roadways. He commented on the upcoming Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) road project on SW 66<sup>th</sup> Street bridge (Williams Road), which means access for deputies on the south end of the County from east to west is going to be Highway 484. Sheriff Woods opined that the intersection of Highway 484 and I-75 is the worst in the entire State.

General discussion ensued.

In response to Commissioner McClain, Ms. Fowler stated increasing the millage rate to 3.4800 mills would have an impact of approximately \$60.00 for someone who owns a home valued at \$150,000.00 compared to the \$19.00 increase at 3.0900 mills.

General discussion resumed.

Chairman Zalak advised that he has requested Budget staff and the County Administrator to continue work to get to the bottom line costs associated with millage rates at 3.0900, 3.3500 and a 3.4800 mills as the Board moves into the summer budget workshops.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Ms. Fowler stated the \$6,600,000.00 for the 3 CIP projects Mr. Bouyounes addressed earlier (3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Courthouse, Public Defenders' building, and SELP) are not included in the 3.0900, 3.3500, or 3.4800 mill scenarios. She clarified that those projects are only included in the 3.7800 mills scenario, which is the one with the \$27,000,000.00 deficit.

Mr. Bouyounes stated it was his recommendation to put those 3 projects off for a year and look for one time money to do those capital projects.

Ms. Fowler advised that out of the \$59,000,000.00 the County has right now for CIP, as those projects are closer to being completed and those budgets are finalized, there is

typically funds remaining in those projects that are then able to be reassigned to other projects, noting there are a couple of projects in the General Fund that are getting close to being finished. So as those numbers settle and staff know exactly what those savings are, then that one time money can be reassigned and can be phased into some of these other projects or do one of the smaller ones, depending on what the priority of the County Administrator and the Board is at that time. She advised that in regard to the 20% set aside for Reserves, the amount required is calculated by the Clerk's Finance team at the end of each fiscal year, noting there is almost always going to be excess Carry Forward from what is projected. Ms. Fowler stated the first thing staff does is take whatever is necessary for that Cash Carry Forward out of those funds and fund the Reserve that makes that whole before releasing any of those funds to go into one-time expenses for capital or balancing the budget.

Commissioner McClain questioned whether it was possible to change the policy to adjust it from 20% to 18% set aside for Reserves, which would allow the County to move those extra dollars to a capital project. Chairman Zalak stated the Board lowered the Reserve percentage down to 12% during the recession.

General discussion ensued.

Ms. Fowler advised that there is also \$2,000,000.00 in Reserve for Contingencies, that is one-time money as well, noting those funds are utilized by the Board throughout the year for things that come up that were not budgeted. For example, last year the Supervisor of Election held a Special Election and needed the County to cover the cost of \$360,000.00 associated with that event and then he returned the money.

General discussion resumed.

Ms. Fowler stated the amount of Reserves in the General Fund is what the County's bond readings will be looking at and whether there is enough cash on hand for operations across all of the County, not just the General Fund.

Commissioner Stone commented on outside agencies that the County currently funds, but are not required by Statute.

Mr. Bouyounes advised that those agencies have submitted their budgets and he is going to schedule meetings with them to go over their requests.

Commissioner Bryant opined that if the County is not required to fund an agency, then the Board needs to have a conversation about whether or not they should still be funding it and if it should still be funded at the level as before.

Chairman Zalak noted the Board needs to give guidance to the County Administrator as to what it wants those agencies to come back with (i.e., flat budget request, 10% decrease, etc.).

Ms. Fowler stated there was very minimal movement on the outside agencies as far as any increase or decrease from the previous year's budget requests.

General discussion ensued relating to the funding of outside agencies.

Chairman Zalak advised that his strategy standpoint going forward is to work with the Clerk's team and the County Administrator, by performing these 3 levels of millage rates and continue to tighten the budget, noting hopefully the Sheriff will have a negotiated rate for inmate healthcare by the time the Board comes back for the budget workshops.

Ms. Tart advised that typically in May, Human Resources (HR) staff brings Commissioners an Agenda Item with all of that healthcare information in regard to the breakdown of what the employees' cost would be, as well as the cost to the County.

**NEW BUSINESS:** County Administrator Bouyounes advised that last month at the

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Withlacoochee Regional Water Supply Authority (WRWSA) meeting, it came to staff's attention that the Heart of Florida Landfill (HOF) owners are drilling exploration wells to be used for leachate disposal once they receive approval from DEP. He noted Commissioners are probably getting emails from different citizens from other Counties asking Marion County to take a position on this issue, but this is the first time he has had a chance to address this matter with the Board. Mr. Bouyounes advised that it is his understanding that the HOF landfill is in the exploration phase and has not yet applied for a permit so he does not know who the County would send an objection letter to if that is the position the Board wants to take, noting staff are waiting for the application to be submitted. He stated after an application has been submitted there will be a time period for public input, which he opined would be the time for the County to state its position and send a letter, unless the Board has different directions.

Chairman Zalak stated what people are worried about, as with any injection well, is that what is being injected would be considered raw sewage; however, it is his understanding that individuals still have to treat that sewage to a certain extent before you inject.

Mr. Bouyounes clarified that staff's understanding is they wanted to inject directly or leachate into that well before treatment.

Chairman Zalak stated he would not be in favor if the HOF wants to inject without pre-treatment.

Commissioner Stone concurred, noting the entire State is too close to sea level to be doing this type of injection.

General discussion ensued.

It was the general consensus of the Board to direct staff to send a letter to DEP advising that the Marion County BCC is aware that there may be an application by HOF and they have concerns and would like to be notified of any application.

Commissioner Stone opined that the Board should notify the HOF of their concerns and that they would not likely support such an application.

**NEW BUSINESS:** ACA Tracy Straub advised that the BCC's Planning and Zoning (P&Z) meeting scheduled for Wednesday, April 22, 2026 has no applications to be heard so that meeting will be cancelled; however, staff would like to schedule some one-on-ones with Commissioners during that time.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting thereupon adjourned at 3:39 p.m.

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Carl Zalak, III, Chairman

Attest:

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Gregory C. Harrell, Clerk