

Brevard County Board of County Commissioners

*2725 Judge Fran Jamieson Way
Viera, FL 32940*



Minutes

Tuesday, September 10, 2024

5:30 PM

1st Budget Hearing

Commission Chambers

A. CALL TO ORDER 5:30 PM

Present: Commissioner District 2 Tom Goodson, Commissioner District 3 John Tobia, Commissioner District 4 Rob Feltner, and Commissioner District 5 Jason Steele
Absent: Commissioner District 1 Rita Pritchett

C. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Goodson led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

D.1. Announcement of the Percentage Change in the FY 2024-2025 Aggregate Tentatively Adopted Millage from the Aggregate Rolled-Back Rate

Frank Abbate, County Manager, stated Item D.1. allows for the reading of the tentative aggregate operating millage rate to fund the portion of the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 budget that is supported by property taxes; and he asked the Budget Office to read into the record the tentative aggregate millage rate for Fiscal Year 2024-2025.

Jill Hayes, Budget Office Director, stated the aggregate tentative millage rate for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 budget is 4.4390; the tentative aggregate millage represents no change when compared to the aggregate rolled-back rate of 4.4390; and the tentative aggregate millage rate represents a 4.3 percent reduction when compared to the current Fiscal year 2023-2024 aggregate millage rate of 4.6383.

Chair Steele stated there is no vote required for this Item; and he asked Ms. Hayes when the final budget hearing is going to be.

Ms. Hayes replied the final budget hearing will be two weeks from tonight; and that is September 24th at 5:30 p.m.

Chair Steele asked if the acceptance of some of the Items tonight could be changed at that meeting.

Ms. Hayes replied yes.

The Board acknowledged the Budget Office reading into the record the percentage by which the aggregate millage necessary to fund the tentative budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 is changed from aggregate rolled-back rate of 4.4390 mills, aggregate tentative adopted rate of 4.4390 mills, and percentage change of 0.00 percent, including voted millages, and the tentative rate represents a 4.30 percent reduction from the current Fiscal Year aggregate rate of 4.6383.

D.2. Public Comment, Re: Revised Tentatively Adopted County Operating and Capital Budget for FY 2024-2025

Frank Abbate, County Manager, stated Item D.2. allows for the public to comment on the revised tentative County budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025; and he asked the budget office to read into the record the revised tentative budget information, before the public comments.

Jill Hayes, Budget Office Director, announced the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 tentative budget is \$2,250,925,875; and this budget represents an increase of \$100,817,548, or 4.69 percent more than the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 current budget of \$2,150,108,327.

Jack Meglio stated he wanted to address some of the things from the fire/rescue side; they have a budget problem which does not allow them to provide for a proper amount of ambulances, especially in South Brevard County where the bulk of the citizens live, whether it is incorporated or not; they are in need of additional rescues; he does not know how many, but they definitely need more ambulances for the call volume that has been increasing; the current budget does not allow for those additional units; and if the taxes were set appropriately, the services could be met with where they need to be.

Michael Bramson, President of the Brevard County Firefighters Union, stated this 2024/2025 budget that is before the Board creates an insufficient amount of funds to correctly fund and provide public safety services; in the public safety sector in which he works, specifically in the field of fire and rescue, the dual certified firefighter/paramedic is the standard of service; that is a person who has achieved the State of Florida certification for firefighting and the State of Florida certification in the field of paramedicine; this model allows one person who sits at a relative constant state of readiness to conduct care with a wide scope of skills; in April 2014, Brevard County had 255 of these firefighter/paramedics out of 453 personnel; and in April 2024, a decade later, Brevard County had only 162 firefighter/paramedics with a field of 483. He added the current budgetary practices will continue to reduce the skills and professional services provided to Brevard County and its cities; this service is only provided by Brevard County, as no city provides a service for an emergent care to transport a human being to the hospital; these reductions in budgets affect every single person in Brevard County, not just unincorporated; and these communities have the right to know that the continued discounts, roll-backs, exclusions, and other budgetary restrictions continue to reduce the services across Brevard County.

Ryan Barrack stated he stands before the Board as a taxpaying resident of District 1, and he rejects the proposed 2024/2025 budget, as it does not adequately support public safety; public safety and infrastructure are the very core of government function; it is his opinion that this local government has not prioritized its revenue sources and spending effectively or efficiently; no one could have predicted the inflation that people were subject to during Covid, but refusal or inability to adapt to that inflation has put public safety into a bad position; and the fire assessment increase from three years ago came up incredibly short. He went on to say in some cases, capital outlay projects have been deferred, enhanced infrastructure to meet the needs of the growing community has been tabled, and employee attrition hovers around seven field personnel per month; the County is losing seven firefighters per month; this year's projection of field-certified employee turnover in fire rescue is between 82 and 85; with the fourth quarter still ahead, they have already surpassed last year's attrition in fire rescue with the loss of 62 field personnel; and the attrition is costly and inefficient, as it leads to an increase of an excess of \$2 million annually spent on training replacements. He noted they have celebrated a sponsorship program which will cost an excess of \$250,000 annually, to help fill the vacancies, while applications from certified personnel has slowed to a trickle; to his knowledge, no other department under the Board is slinging scholarships like the NCAA; the theory of sponsorship opportunities for low-income residents is a beautiful idea, however, the future staffing of a government agency should probably not rely so heavily on this concept; the happy medium between new hire and experienced mentors that traditionally takes place in the fire service, is being disrupted, as BCFR seasoned personnel are leaving for greener pastures at a rate of seven per month, only to be replaced by youth and inexperience to serve the residents; and he believes the Board has been deceived that fire rescue attrition is on-par with the turnover observed with the other departments under the Board. He continued to say the cost for replacing firefighters or deputies in lieu of retaining them is like no other; the brain drain and loss of experience in public safety from attrition cannot be quantified, but he assures the effects are profound; experienced firefighters and deputies are absolutely invaluable to the community and as policy makers, he hopes it becomes the highest of their priorities; and the residents of Brevard are not getting the return on investment they deserve on their tax dollars,

please stop the bleeding. He stated on this evening before the anniversary of the worst terrorist attacks in the country's history, he will use the remainder of his time so all can reflect with a moment of silence to recognize the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice on 9-11.

Sandra Sullivan stated there is a public safety crisis, please reject this budget because the Board has not addressed the crisis; fire and emergency medical service (EMS) are leaving because there is about a \$30,000 gap between what other comparable counties are offering at year 10; while a 33-percent fire assessment was done in 2021 to bring staff more in-line with comparables, this has not been happening because the County is using a disproportionate amount of this to address the cost of growth and additional equipment; the Board needs to offset that by increasing both fire and impact fees; and she showed a graph reflecting a 2022 amount of \$620,000 and Fiscal Year 2025-2028, \$30 million, and a graph showing the increase in cost of both firetrucks and ambulances. She noted the Board has done nothing to avert the crisis; there has been a loss of over 60 Fire/EMS personnel, and she expects 40 more will leave by the end of the year; this will create a critical level of service failure because there is not enough people to man the stations; but the Board can fix the budget now and restore the EMS assessment, non-ad valorem tax Countywide that existed prior to 1998. She added this can be done now via Interlocal agreements with cities, like stormwater; prior to 1998, there was a non-ad valorem tax, EMS assessment on the property tax for unincorporated which needs to be restored Countywide now, and it does not require a referendum; the 1998 referendum proves that residents of Brevard County support Countywide EMS transport services, but later, a lawsuit required the EMS tax must be non-ad valorem; she checked with the Supervisor of Elections and it was Countywide; and she read "the EMS specialist assessment shall be imposed on all improved real property and the benefit unit of such real property is..." blah, blah, blah. She went on to say in 2004, there was a lawsuit that said the County cannot have it under ad valorem taxes, right now, the EMS is still under ad valorem taxes under General Fund; it is not sufficient to cover the cost of EMS, which is obvious under calculations; it is a pretty simple service; she asked the Board to please reject the budget and correct the funding issue for the firefighters; in addition, please look at impact fees and appropriately address that, otherwise, the future does not look good for public safety; and she asked what is public safety worth to the Board.

Chair Steele asked the County Manager what the fire fee is now for new homes.

Mr. Abbate replied on the average, it is in the area of about \$250 for an average home.

Chair Steele remarked he finds that extremely low; he thinks most of the surrounding counties are \$500 or \$1,000; but that is something the Board can talk about at another time; and he asked if there were any questions before he moves on.

Commissioner Tobia mentioned he thinks this was before Chair Steele's time on the Board, but it had a West Melbourne City Council member, and the County provided fire services to West Melbourne; the member told the Board that if the fire fees increased any more that they would look at going in a different direction; he knows they hired a service to figure out what that cost would be; he just wanted to put that out there; that person may not be in West Melbourne anymore, but it was something that West Melbourne was looking at, breaking away if the fees were raised any more; and that is something to be mindful of.

Chair Steele stated there can be further discussion at the final meeting to see where it goes.

Morris Richardson, County Attorney, asked to make a clarification; earlier the Chair asked if there could be a change at the final adoption budget hearing; he just wanted to clarify that the final millage rate at the adoption hearing cannot exceed what is approved today as the tentative millage rate.

Mr. Abbate added that the fire assessment is a separate item that is not even part of that.

Attorney Richardson noted that is not part of the discussion today; and he is just talking about the millages because earlier the Chair asked whether that could be revisited.

Chair Steel replied okay, the millage rate cannot be revisited.

Attorney Richardson stated it could be changed downward, but not upward from what is tentatively approved.

Chair Steele remarked but the fire budget could be changed at the second...

Mr. Abbate interjected the fire assessment cannot be raised.

Chair Steele replied he is not talking about the fire assessment, he is talking about the fire budget.

Mr. Abbate remarked the general fund portion could be.

Chair Steele replied that is all he needed to know; there is a way to go up if it wanted to after the final vote, on September 10th; and he asked if he is hearing that correctly.

Mr. Abbate replied yes, with the understanding that the general fund only pays 45 percent; and the rest of the fire budget, 55 percent, whether it is capital or staffing, is paid by the fire assessment, which cannot be adjusted at this time.

Chair Steele asked if it cannot be adjusted at this time, how is it going to...if the Board wanted to adjust the fire assessment, what process is that; and he asked if Mr. Abbate would want to talk to him about that later.

Mr. Abbate replied sure, he is happy to go through that.

Chair Steele stated he could get an understanding of what can be done there, because he thinks it is incredibly low; but that is neither here nor there.

The Board accepted public comments concerning the tentatively approved budget and millage rates for the County's 2024-2025 Fiscal Year, including Charter Officers and Dependent Special Districts.

D.3. Adoption of FY 2024-2025 Tentative Millages

Frank Abbate, County Manager, stated for Item D.3., it is recommended that the Board discuss and tentatively adopt the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 millage rates; and any changes to the millage rates under this Item would be recomputed and announced under Item D.4.

The Board discussed and tentatively adopted the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Millage Rates.

Result: Adopted
Mover: John Tobia
Second: Rob Feltner
Ayes: Goodson, Tobia, Feltner, and Steele
Absent: Pritchett

D.4. Announcement of the Recomputed FY 2024-2025 Aggregate Tentative Millage

Frank Abbate, County Manager, stated based on the approved changes in millage rates that were approved on Agenda Item D.3., he will ask the Budget Office to read into the record the revised aggregate millage rates.

Jill Hayes, Budget Office Director, stated the aggregate rolled-back rate for the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 budget is 4.4390 and the aggregate tentative millage rate for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 is 4.4390; and the tentative aggregate millage rate is equal to the aggregate rolled-back rate.

The Board acknowledged the Budget Office reading into the record the percentage by which the aggregate millage necessary to fund the tentative budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 is changed from aggregate rolled-back rate of 4.4390 mills.

D.5. Adoption of Budgets for FY 2024-2025 for Certain Districts and Programs

Frank Abbate, County Manager, stated for Item D.5., in accordance with the Brevard County Code of Ordinances, he is requesting adoption of the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 budgets for the following agencies: Solid Waste, Stormwater Utility Department, Fire Services Non-Ad Valorem Assessment, and Melbourne-Tillman Water Control District.

The Board accepted the budgets of Solid Waste Management Department, Stormwater Utility, and Fire Rescue Operations Assessment; and adopted Resolution No. 24-084, adopting the final operating budget for Melbourne-Tillman Water Control District for Fiscal Year 2024-2025.

Result: Adopted
Mover: John Tobia
Second: Tom Goodson
Ayes: Goodson, Tobia, Feltner, and Steele
Absent: Pritchett

D.6. FY 2024-2025 Budget Resolution: Barefoot Bay Water and Sewer District

Frank Abbate, County Manager, stated under this Item, he is requesting that the governing body of the Barefoot Bay Water and Sewer District approve a resolution adopting the budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025.

The Board, as governing body of the Barefoot Bay Water and Sewer District, adopted Resolution No. 24-001, adopting a final operating budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 of the Barefoot Bay Water Utility and Sewer District.

Result: Approved
Mover: John Tobia
Second: Tom Goodson
Ayes: Goodson, Tobia, Feltner, and Steele
Absent: Pritchett

D.7. Tentative Approval of a Resolution Adopting the County's Budget for FY 2024-2025

Frank Abbate, County Manager, stated under Item D.7., based on the action taken during this public hearing, he will ask the Budget Office to read into the record the revised tentative budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025.

Jill Hayes, Budget Office Director, stated the revised tentative budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 is \$2,250,925,875; and this revised tentative budget represents an increase of 4.69 percent, or \$100,817,548 from the current budget of \$2,150,108,327.

Mr. Abbate stated he is requesting tentative approval of a resolution adopting the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Brevard County budget.

Katie Delaney stated she would have loved a little bit more public participation; in the budget workshop in February, a lot of people were upset that they were not able to comment on each individual item; there was only one portion at the end where people could comment; since a workshop is supposed to be a place where people talk-out different objections or suggestions, it would have been nice to have more time for the public to have input; it also would have been nice, because that was not afforded to the public in February, it would have been nice to have a workshop or something where citizens could have had a question and answer session about how this whole thing works; and more people want to be engaged in government now. She went on to say that a lot of people do not know how and why, and all of those things, so it would have been nice to have something for the public to get more engaged; moreover, she is asking the Board to deny this budget because it was put together prior to finding out what the needs were for public safety; as the Board heard tonight, there is a serious need, which the Board knows; she loves the conversation that was had tonight, but wishes that it would have happened in February when these things could have been changed and it was not so late; there is the 1998 referendum for fire rescue and that right there shows that the people of Brevard value the firefighters and fire rescue staff; and going forward she hopes that is a top priority for the Board to focus on. She added she would like to comment on impact fees; this week, when she was present for the Planning and Zoning meeting, she was sitting next to a man who said he is a developer and that Brevard County has the lowest impact fees from anybody around; that developer said that Brevard needs to update its impact fees, which is a pretty big statement coming from a guy who has to pay them; and she asked if the Board could take that into account, moving forward.

Sandra Sullivan stated she would like to agree with what Ms. Delaney said about the comments at the workshop; they were not afforded on each presentation and the public was only allowed three minutes at the end; in fact, a vote was taken under one of them, contrary to State law which requires public comment before a vote is taken; she would also like to add that the subject of impact fees, for fire and EMS in particular, was brought up by herself they and have not been updated in 32 years; and the graphs she presented showed the cumulative cost increases of ambulances and fire trucks. She added transportation, this is infrastructure, this is, again, what it is costing for growth; what she sees is the 2021, 33-percent increase on fire assessment; so much of that is going to address growth and not to the promise that was made to the citizens of Brevard County in the agenda item that would go and address to retain the firefighters and its personnel; and it is taking from Peter to pay Paul. She went on to say honestly speaking, the County has kicked the can down the road on impact fees for so long, and because of constraints now by the State, it would be good to lobby to the State to fix that; the can has been kicked down the road so long that even fixing impact fees will not fix or avert the crisis that Brevard is facing; it is looking at pretty significant tax increases coming in the future, and it has not updated in transportation in 23 years, with over an \$800 million deficit on capacity needs; and she asked what was said by Commissioners Tobia and Pritchett at the

budget workshop, was that the next Commissioners could worry about it. She stated the other reason that she asked to reject the budget is that she would like to see North Brevard Economic Development Zone (NBEDZ) sunset; it was intended to be a Special District only for five years; the tax is on the backs of the small businesses, funding big business; one of the latest agendas for that meeting, they want to use the tax revenue on the backs of the small businesses to fund putting sewage lines from Space Florida and the Cape to Sykes Creek; she asked really, she thinks the State can pick up and ask the Federal government to pay for the infrastructure for State and Federal jurisdictional areas, and not taxing small businesses; and that tax was put into place when Brevard County was in an economic recession and it is now booming. She went on to say it was supposed to be a five-year tax; taxes are not supposed to be forever for things like that; she would like to see some Fiscal accountability; public safety has to be addressed; and for that reason alone, she asked to please reject this budget.

The Board adopted Resolution No. 24-085, adopting a tentative Budget for FY 2024-2025, consisting of a total revised budget for FY 2024-2025 as \$2,250,925,875 which includes County agencies of \$1,908,672,808 and Charter Offices of \$227,094,739, and Dependent Special Districts of \$115,158,328.

Result: Approved

Mover: Rob Feltner

Secunder: John Tobia

Ayes: Goodson, Tobia, Feltner, and Steele

Absent: Pritchett

E.5. John Tobia, Commissioner District 3, Re: Board Report

Commissioner Tobia stated he had an employee recognition; he would like to recognize Johanna Jorge, Special Projects Coordinator for Public Works Engineering, for one and one-half years of service; she has over 10 years of experience in municipal government and over 25 years in customer service; Johanna is the first smiling face the public sees when coming into Engineering and ROW Permitting; and in the past year and one-half, she has welcomed the opportunity to help in any task she has been assigned. He added shortly after starting, Johanna was given the responsibility of tracking all ADROW-use agreements for Public Works; at the time she was assigned to the task, less than 60-percent of the ROW-use agreements had provided the required yearly insurance documentation; Johanna worked diligently with the Homeowner's Associations and insurance carrier to meet 100-percent compliance on all current agreements; this is just one example of her hard work and dedication; and Johanna always has a smile on her face and is one of the most pleasant people to be around. He went on to say she is an asset to the County and a prime example of what an employee should be; he added she has a loving husband, two beautiful adult daughters, and now dedicates her time to two very special dog babies; she enjoys traveling, shopping, and relaxing with family, friends, and coworkers; and he thanked her for all she does, and her interaction with the public.

Upon a motion and vote, the meeting adjourned at 6:04 p.m.

Result: Approved

Mover: Rob Feltner

Secunder: John Tobia

Ayes: Goodson, Tobia, Feltner, and Steele

Absent: Pritchett

ATTEST:

RACHEL M. SADOFF, CLERK

JASON STEELE, CHAIR
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
BREVARD COUNTY, FLORIDA