

BUDGET MEETING #6
LEVY COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
September 2, 2025

The Budget Meeting #6 of the Board of County Commissioners was held on September 2, 2025 at 4:00 P.M. in the BoCC Meeting Room at the Levy County Government Center.

CALL TO ORDER: Madam Chair Mills called to order the budget meeting at 4:00 P.M.

INVOCATION: Given by Comm. Hiers

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Led by Comm. Hodge

ROLL CALL:

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Madam Chair, Comm. Desiree Mills
Vice Chair, Comm. Tim Hodge
Comm. Charlie Kennedy
Comm. Rock Meeks
Comm. Johnny Hiers

ALSO PRESENT:

County Attorney – Nicolle Shalley
County Manager – Mary-Ellen Harper

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

- **Action Taken:**
 - Amendments: No changes
 - Motion Comm. Kennedy
 - Second Comm. Hodge
 - Vote Outcome 5-0

PUBLIC COMMENT: *(Audio 5:05)*

- **Jill Brown (Williston):** concerned about false calls to Sheriff and fire driving up costs, vehicles being registered to Marion instead of Levy, school budget increases not benefitting her as a substitute teacher.
- **Steven Dredsky (Chiefland):** Highlighted the doubling of taxes (from \$411 to \$900) under the proposed budget, straining residents, particularly those relying on food distribution programs. Shared concerns about economic pressures (inflation, rising costs) and questioned the

necessity of tax increases, referencing discussions with Chair Mills about using grants instead of tax hikes.

- **Robert Arnold (Bronson):** Urged minimizing budget increases due to economic uncertainty and the impact on retirees on fixed incomes.
 - **Renate Cannon (Chiefland):** Pleaded with the board that she understood the need for the assessment increases but it should be done incrementally and not by tripling the fees now.
 - **Linda Cooper (Williston):** Asked to see the proposed cuts and brought up cutting Veterans Affairs and subcontracting it out.
 - **Missy Smally (Bronson):** Compared county budgeting to household budgeting, suggesting each department cut 5-10% of their budget. Warned that significant tax/assessment increases could force retirees to leave Levy County, especially with rising flood insurance costs.
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Business or Informational Items

1. Requesting the Levy County Board of County Commissioners to receive a presentation on the Ad Valorem Tax Analysis and Revised Proposed Budget. *(Audio 25:06)*

- **Presenter:** Jason Rivera, Aclarian, Levy County Budget Officer
- **Discussion:**
 - **The proposed 2026 budget is \$198,506,694, a \$5.461 million increase from 2025 (down from an initial \$11 million increase).**
 - **Budget reductions of \$5 million were achieved, detailed in the last three pages of the budget book.**
 - **Key changes since the July 22, 2025, presentation:**
 - Preliminary millage rate set at 9 mills (previously 8.25 mills).
 - Fire assessment increased from \$129 to \$250 (66.75% of full funding, originally proposed at \$374).
 - EMS assessment increased from \$154 to \$250 (73% of full funding, originally proposed at \$339).
 - Landfill assessment unchanged at \$160.
 - **Budget reductions included:**
 - Maintenance department staff reduced by half, saving \$35,667.39 in overtime (from \$49,635.80 in 2023 to \$13,992.41 in 2025).
 - Economic development insourced to increase grant acquisition and job creation.
 - Standardized office hours (8:30 AM–4:30 PM) to eliminate random overtime.
 - Landfill policy updates saving over \$100,000.
 - Five full-time positions were eliminated county-wide.
 - 25% reduction in take-home vehicles, reducing fuel costs.
 - **Reserves:**
 - Minimum 20% reserve policy (8% contingencies, 12% cash) maintained across major funds (general, solid waste, fire, EMS, TDT).
 - Reducing millage to 8.75 would require an \$800,000 reduction, either through additional cuts or drawing from reserves.

- **Public Input:**

- **Linda Cooper (Williston):** Consider 1.5% COLA or no COLA for government employees. The public is not getting a COLA raise.
- **Jill Brown (Williston):** EMS service should charge people whether or not they ride if the ambulance is called for service. Bill the insurance and make others pay for it. Households don't have the money and you should stay within your means.
- **Missy Smally (Bronson):** Fire service didn't send a bill when they saved my house. I would have paid dearly. Don't call 911 or unless it's absolutely necessary. Make people pay payments monthly.
- **Dana Henson (Williston):** People want services whether they use them or not. These are not Levy County people speaking to you. People can't afford it but they still deserve the service. Levy County has some of the best medical personnel and fire and law enforcement. I would rather have a bad road than do without the other services.

- **Continued Board Discussion:**

- **Community Paramedicine Program:**
 - Funded by grants, not tax dollars, aimed at reducing non-emergency EMS calls through education and connecting residents to primary care.
 - Expected to improve EMS unit availability and response times.
- **Veteran Services:**
 - Discussion on reducing from two to one veteran service officer position to cut costs, with one position currently vacant.
 - Concerns raised about service accessibility if reduced, as the officer conducts field visits, leaving the office unstaffed.
 - Suggestion to use volunteers to assist with administrative tasks to maintain service levels.
- **Planning and Zoning:**
 - Transitioning from JDP contract (transaction-based fees) to in-house planners under a development director to reduce costs.
- **Public Concerns Addressed:**
 - Commissioners acknowledged economic struggles, particularly for retirees, and emphasized that proposed increases are not finalized.
 - Noted 138,600 acres of non-taxable land (state parks, federal, county, municipal) increases the tax burden on residents.
 - Emphasized efforts to minimize increases through grants and efficiency measures.

- **Board Consensus**

- **Assessments:**

- Fire: \$250 (approved, halfway between \$129 and \$374).
 - EMS: \$250 (approved, halfway between \$154 and \$339).
 - Landfill: \$160 (no change).

- **Millage Rate:**

- Preliminary consensus to reduce from 9 mills to 8.75 mills, resulting in an \$800,000 revenue reduction to be balanced by drawing from reserves rather than further cuts.

- **Next Steps:**

- Budget adjustments to be finalized for the September 9, 2025, public hearing (tentative rates).
 - Final approval scheduled for September 23, 2025.

- **Additional Notes:**

- Commissioners emphasized balancing service needs (EMS, fire, law enforcement) with affordability, acknowledging the challenge of funding critical services in a rural county with significant non-taxable land.
 - Suggestions included enhancing public education on non-emergency transport options and exploring billing for non-emergency calls to reduce misuse.

Adjournment

- **Time:** 5:39 P.M.

Minutes Submitted by: Matt Brooks, Clerk of Court & Comptroller

Date Submitted: 09/02/2025