

APRIL 20, 2011

A [Budget Workshop Meeting](#) of the [Board of Lee County Commissioners](#) and State and Constitutional Officers was held on this date with the following members present:

Frank B. Mann, Chairman (arrived at 9:06 a.m.)	Charlie Green, Clerk of Courts
John E. Manning, Vice Chairman	Roger Desjarlais, Chief Deputy Property Appraiser
A. Brian Bigelow	Sharon Harrington, Supervisor of Elections
Ray Judah	Cathy Curtis, Tax Collector
Tammara Hall	Mike Scott, Lee County Sheriff
	Steve Russell, State Attorney
	Kathleen Smith, Public Defender
	Rebecca Hamilton, Medical Examiner
	Lisa Kiesel, Chief Deputy Court Administrator

The Vice Chairman called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Assistant County Manager Pete Winton referenced [informational handout materials](#) provided to the participants. Mr. Winton identified the General Fund as the major issue facing the County this upcoming fiscal year due to the reduced tax base, and pointed out efficiencies and cost-saving measures being taken. He responded to several Board questions, and advised that operational budgets were in the process of being developed. Chairman Mann arrived during Mr. Winton's comments. Commissioner Hall spoke in favor of retaining the integrity of designated funds. Commissioner Judah addressed the misperception that millage roll-up adjustments that retain the same revenue year-over-year equate to a tax increase, and requested an open discussion on decreased property values effect on millage rates. It was pointed out that several municipalities, and the School District, raised their millage rates last year, while the County held steady. Mr. Winton addressed several items pointed out by Chairman Mann on the fiscal situation being faced in the upcoming three years. The Chairman then called on each of the State and Constitutional Officers for a report.

1. **FY 11-12 BUDGET ISSUES BY ENTITY**

- A) Clerk of Courts Charlie Green addressed the revenue shortfall, and advised that the revenue stream appears adequate to cover the County needs once allocations are identified. Mr. Green noted that while the Clerk's office has made major reductions and is about as lean as possible, he would not encourage raising taxes if core needs were not addressed.
- B) Public Defender Kathleen Smith addressed the differing impacts of the House and Senate proposals on Court systems throughout the State. She referenced her reduced employee headcount and advised that she is currently the lowest funded public defender per case in the State. Ms. Smith provided an update of the Public Defender activities and cutbacks from both a State and a County funded perspective, and expressed appreciation for the relationship her office has with the County.
- C) State Attorney Steve Russell reviewed his funding from both a State and County perspective, and outlined cutbacks and other cost saving measures that have been undertaken. Mr. Russell indicated that his office is also affected in a major way by current and proposed State funding cutbacks.
- D) Medical Examiner Dr. Rebecca Hamilton stated her department runs on a comparatively small budget but remains aggressive in cost cutting measures. She pointed out the Medical Examiner is a 24/7 operation staffed by five (5) full-time investigators with external fee sources of about 90% from Lee County, 7% from Hendry County and 3% from Glades County, as well as certain other fees for services.
- E) Deputy Tax Collector Larry Hart, on behalf of Tax Collector Cathy Curtis, referenced a summary handout and reported that the Tax Collector is a fee-based office, with all unexpended revenue being returned to the County. Mr. Hart advised that the Tax Collector's Department of Revenue approved budget was \$29.2 million. He advised that FY10/11 expenditures were \$15.9 million, and all unused fees were returned to the County. He outlined upcoming legislative impacts to the Tax Collector as well as the cost saving measures and cutbacks they have and will continue to undertake.
- F) Chief Deputy Property Appraiser Roger Desjarlais, on behalf of Property Appraiser Ken Wilkinson, indicated that the Property Appraiser's Department of Revenue approved budget was comparatively small with 82% made up exclusively of personnel costs. Mr. Desjarlais stated they follow Board policy on pay and benefits and, while currently below 2005 budget amounts, they still expect to be even lower next year despite the rise in the number of real estate transactions.

- G) Supervisor of Elections Sharon Harrington prefaced her comments by stating that all her funding comes from the General Revenue Fund as Elections is not a fee based department. Ms. Harrington advised that her budget is up over last year at \$1.5 million, with the largest component being redistricting. She provided an outline of mandated expenses, affirmed the lack of any State funding, and responded to Board questions.
- H) Chief Deputy Court Administrator Lisa Kiesel, on behalf of Trial Court Administrator Richard Callanan, reported that every department within the Court system has undergone major cuts over the last five years. Ms. Kiesel outlined measures that were taken and budget impacts that are foreseen. She advised that the Economic Recovery Effort will negatively impact foreclosure and civil case backlogs. There was further discussion on the anticipated spike in foreclosure cases, with Clerk of Courts Charlie Green providing an explanation on the anticipated spike in foreclosures due to financial institutions clearing up their paperwork. Ms. Kiesel concluded her report by advising that their funding support comes from the State and the County in about an equal 50/50 split.
- I) Following Chairman Mann's commendation on the efforts of Sheriff Mike Scott to reduce his budget and retain service levels, Sheriff Scott summarized his efficiencies and programs while stressing his priority for the highest levels of public safety. He also conveyed impacts the State cutback will have on our prison and court systems.

2. COMMISSIONER ITEMS AND DISCUSSION

- A) Commissioner Manning indicated that unfunded mandates, homesteaded properties and revenue sharing, especially potential raiding of the Transportation Trust Fund, were his primary concerns going forward.
- B) Commissioner Bigelow spoke in support of moving technology-enabled processes forward, and consolidating County properties. Among his suggestions were kiosk workstations, and shared polling locations. Brief discussion ensued, with input by Supervisor of Elections Sharon Harrington on current options and the work in progress by a task force to look into future polling options.
- C) Commissioner Judah reviewed the status and provided clarifying comments on the decision to expend funds to purchase the right-of-way for CR 951. He asked for comment by Assistant County Manager Pete Winton on various County municipalities adjusting their millages without increasing taxes. Mr. Winton confirmed that while the Commissioners held their millage rates, Cape Coral, Fort Myers and the Lee County School District each raised their millage rates. He indicated that, while not a suggestion, a one mill roll-up would cover the current \$50 million deficit. Commissioner Judah reiterated his point that a millage rate adjustment that would allow us to collect the same amount of revenue is not a tax increase. Mr. Winton responded to a question by Commissioner Manning on revenues and expenses to date.
- D) Commissioner Hall stated that while benchmarks are fine to use, an earlier comparison of Lee with Pinellas County was too dissimilar. She stressed the successes being realized by the efforts of many, while providing a rationale for going back to a 3.9 millage rate, holding the base line, and achieving a \$25 million deficit reduction this year.

Following statements on the challenging times, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 10:36 a.m.

ATTEST:
CHARLIE GREEN, CLERK

Deputy Clerk

[Chairman, Lee County Commission](#)