

AUGUST 30, 2005 – SPECIAL BUDGET MEETING

The following Board members were present: Kenneth Pridgen, Chairman, Scott Brannon, Vice-Chairman, Commissioner Larry Jones, Commissioner Cindy Meadows, and Commissioner Rosier Cuchens. Mr. Ronnie Bell, County Administrator, was also present.

Commissioner Cuchens led with prayer followed by the pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag. Chairman Pridgen called the meeting to order.

Sheriff Ralph Johnson and Captain Danny Glidewell were present to represent the Sheriff's Department.

Ms. Bonnie McQuiston, Walton County Taxpayers Association, appeared before the board with a presentation regarding the sheriff's budget. She began by thanking those who cooperated and gave information that assisted in her research and presentation. She spoke about the budget analysis done by Cody & Associates, Inc. for the 2003 budget and again for the 2006 budget. She felt that the Sheriff Johnson could do a better budget analysis than did Cody & Associates, which she felt was inconsistent and erroneous.

Ms. McQuiston stated that the Cody study outlined the two responsibilities of the Sheriff's Department which are protecting people and property. She referred to a slide presentation that outlined a comparison of the surrounding county's Sheriff's Departments' budgets. Her opinion was that Walton County was in-line with those counties studied. She provided a copy of a table showing the present staffing of the Walton County Sheriff's Department compared with that of 2002. She was no longer opposed to the budget increase requested by the Sheriff's department. Ms. McQuiston

also felt that the Sheriff Johnson, as a constitutional officer, should make all decisions regarding his department and staff.

Commissioner Cuchens asked if the percentage of increase was high for a one year period. Ms. McQuiston replied the increase would make the salaries consistent with cost of living in Walton County and competitive with surrounding counties.

Commissioner Brannon asked how the Sheriff's office salaries compare with those of the State Prison in DeFuniak Springs. Ms. McQuiston replied that the prison starts officers at \$29,000 with an annual 3% cost of living increase.

Mr. Bell questioned where the figures for the salary ranges were obtained. Captain Glidewell replied that they are an average of salaries from surrounding counties. Sheriff Johnson agreed with Mr. Bell in that the increase would allow him to compete with surrounding employers and retain his staff.

Ms. McQuiston asked for clarification regarding the inclusion of insurance in the proposed budget figures. Mr. Imfeld stated that the Board of County Commissioners does pay the staff's insurance.

Ms. McQuiston stated that she was asked to determine what the break down of the Sheriff's budget was per resident of Walton County. She stated the amount was \$247 per each of the 48,000 residents. She felt the figure provided no insight because the property taxes paid by property owners, not just residents, in Walton County contribute to a portion of the budget.

Ms. McQuiston presented the total budget for 2006 as \$15,320,000.00, which represented an increase of \$1,400,000.00. Mr. Imfeld clarified that last years budget was approximately \$13 million and this year's proposed budget is \$17 million, of which 93-

94% is paid by ad-Valorem taxes. He further stated that the county lost \$100,000 due to article 5 changes and is currently approximately \$500,000 short because of Juvenile Justice costs.

Ms. McQuiston clarified public question regarding Sheriff Johnson's request for two additional officers for security at construction sites. She stated that per Florida law the Sheriff's department is responsible for providing protection to all property. She also addressed the question of going to 12 hour shifts and eliminating additional positions and vacation schedules. Her position was that the Sheriff should make all decisions about what works best for his department. Ms. McQuiston also commented on loss of leave time. She then covered the salary reimbursement of School Resource Officers which is \$19,500.00 per officer or 49% of an average deputy's salary. Per the negotiated contract, the department is allowed to use the schools as a training facility.

Chairman Pridgen questioned the patrol of construction sites and loss of leave time. Captain Glidewell stated that the department does not provide security for the sites, but that the construction sites require more time and effort to patrol. He also affirmed that the department is working to ensure that no leave time was lost by the fiscal year end of September 30, 2005.

Commissioner Brannon asked for clarification on the increase in the number of officers. Captain Glidewell stated that the requested increase in staff was 7 corrections officers and 18 law enforcement officers. They have since received a request from the Superintendent of Schools for an additional resource officer at Emerald Coast Middle School. The updated request was \$44,000 less than the originally submitted budget. The

total requested budget, including an estimate for benefits and health insurance, was \$16,455,916.00.

Ms. McQuiston explained that her original opposition was due to a lack of information. After gathering and reviewing additional information, she felt that the increase was warranted. She also felt that the information now available should be used as a benchmark to measure and determine future budgets.

Commissioner Cuchens questioned the counties dependency on the Cody study. Mr. Imfeld stated that update given by Cody & Associates is not reliable, but does give a benchmark. Commissioner Cuchens requested Mr. Imfeld give his personal opinion on the budget increase. Mr. Imfeld stated that overall the request was reasonable and that he had no problem supporting it. Commissioner Cuchens expressed concern that the Cody study had misguided the county.

Sheriff Johnson stated that the Cody study was not perfect, but gave them a good idea of what was needed and the breakdown of calls per officer. He appreciated the work by the Taxpayers Association and the Board and felt that the openness of the Sheriff's office would give valuable insight to those in question of the budget.

Commissioner Cuchens stated that he felt the Cody study was not aggressive enough. Sheriff Johnson stated that the unexpected population growth called for service growth. He stated that the Cody study was a conservative view, because the need actually exceeds the budget. Commissioner Cuchens asked if the county would outgrow this analysis as well. Sheriff Johnson stated that he would request more officers as population growth indicated a necessity.

Mr. Bob Hudson asked the Sheriff if the fuel allowance would be sufficient considering the increase in cost. Captain Glidewell felt the allowance would be sufficient.

Sheriff Johnson asked if the feedback from the Traffic Units was acceptable to the board. The commissioners stated that they were appreciative of the information and work by the Sheriff's Department.

Mr. Imfeld stated that the first public hearing to consider the final adoption of the budget is September 6, 2005 at 5:05 at DeFuniak Springs Court House and the second is September 19, 2005 at 5:05 at the South Walton Annex.

Mr. Bell gave an update on Hurricane Katrina. He stated that the bridge was closed yesterday for a couple of hours. Sustained winds recorded in South Walton were 52 mph with gusts up to 71 mph. He also stated that the beaches are closed and will remain so until the water recedes. He also discussed reports of damage reported within Walton County.

Commissioner Cuchens expressed concern regarding the DOT sub-contacted company, BMS. He felt that Highway 20 was in jeopardy of sustaining major damage if not loss. Mr. Bell added that the condition of the causeway on Highway 331 should also be addressed. He stated that staff would look into drafting a letter expressing their dissatisfaction with both areas.

Mr. Bell reported that the EOC was operating at a level 3, but would likely revert to a recovery mode pending advisement from the State. The Freeport school was opened as a shelter, but closed today because school returned to session. The Red Cross opened the First Baptist Church in DeFuniak Springs as a host shelter. He then gave updates regarding weather watches and warnings affecting Walton County. Mr. Bell requested the

Board move into Emergency Session to discuss extension of the Emergency Debris Removal Contract with Crowder Gulf.

Motion by Commissioner Jones, second by Commissioner Brannon, to enter into Emergency Session. Ayes 5, Nays 0. Jones Aye, Meadows Aye, Pridgen Aye, Brannon Aye, and Cuchens Aye.

Mr. Bell recommended that the Board extend the current contract with Crowder Gulf to cover any debris issues on the beach, Coastal Dune Lakes, or residential areas.

Motion by Commissioner Brannon, second by Commissioner Meadows, to approve the extension of the Crowder Gulf Emergency Debris Removal Contract. Ayes 5, Nays 0. Jones Aye, Meadows Aye, Pridgen Aye, Brannon Aye, and Cuchens Aye.

There being no further business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 10:39 AM.

APPROVED:_____

Kenneth Pridgen, Chair

ATTEST:_____

Martha Ingle, Clerk of Court