

After Agenda

**Board of Commissioners of Spalding County
Work Session
Monday, February 20, 2017
10:00 AM
Meeting Room 108, Courthouse Annex
119 E. Solomon Street**

The Spalding County Board of Commissioners held their Work Session in Room 108 in the Courthouse Annex, Monday, February 20, 2017, beginning at 10:00 a.m. with Chairman Bart Miller presiding. Commissioners Rita Johnson, Raymond Ray and Donald Hawbaker were present. Commissioner Flowers-Taylor joined the meeting at 10:20 a.m. Also present were County Manager, William P. Wilson Jr., Assistant County Manager, Eric Mosley and Executive Secretary, Kathy Gibson to record the minutes.

A. Call to Order led by Chairman Bart Miller.

Invocation led by Commissioner Donald Hawbaker.

Pledge to the Flag led by Commissioner Raymond Ray.

B. Agenda Items

1. Discussion of compensation issues.

William Wilson, County Manager, stated that at the last meeting the Board requested information regarding a request by the Sheriff's Department. He advised that Bill Gay, Human Resources Director has done a quick survey of individuals in Sheriff II positions and those are attached to the agenda.

He then advised that the Personnel Ordinance allows the County Manager to approve up to a Step 6 at the time of hiring, based on their experience, their knowledge and level of education if the Department Head requests consideration. Traditionally, everyone is hired a hiring rate and moves to Step 1 after a 9 month successful probationary period.

Sheriff Dix had requested that several positions be moved to a Step 6 as a hiring rate, which Mr. Wilson approved. At the last meeting, it was requested what the difference in pay between the hiring rate and Step 6 resulted in for the Department. Annually, the difference is approximately \$27,700; however, these individuals came in at the middle of the fiscal year so \$13,850 is what will be incurred between January 1 and June 30th of this budget year.

The Board also asked what the difference in Command Staff under the previous Sheriff versus this Sheriff. Human Resources has compiled the information and this is attached to the agenda as well. Command Staff salaries for of FY17 were \$378,324. Command Staff salaries for the current administration is \$578,519 which is a difference of \$195,000.

He then advised that Mr. Gay had compiled a survey of Deputy Sheriff's in

surrounding counties: Clayton, Henry, Fayette, City of Griffin, Coweta, Pike, Upson, Thomaston, Troup and Spalding. The survey was not for the Command Staff. He stated that this information shows that Spalding County compensation is behind many of the counties.

Mr. Wilson reminded the Board that they had authorized, at the Retreat, a Classification and Compensation Update which is currently underway for every position inside in the County and that report will be ready in June of this year.

Mr. Wilson advised that the City of Griffin has a minimum, mid-range, and maximum pay scale. They do not have a step system like the County; however, the City Manager also has the discretion to offer up to a 10% pay increase at the time of hiring which is the equivalent of what the County Manager can authorize. He advised that he had those salaries available that covered Police Office up to Chief within the City of Griffin Police Department.

Mr. Wilson then reminded everyone of the email sent out by Commissioner Hawbaker on Friday of last week regarding legislation that is currently before the General Assembly that could “weigh in” on this conversation.

Commissioner Hawbaker advised that the Georgia Sheriff’s Association has been advocating a significant increase in salaries and benefits for Deputies, Jailers and Sheriffs in the area of approximately 20%. The ACCG expects this legislation to be presented prior to the end of this legislative session. It is believed that this is a result of the approximate 20% increase that Governor Deal has requested for State Patrol officers. He advised that the legislation was voted on in the House last week and the 20% was built into the legislation, so it appears that is going forward.

Commissioner Hawbaker then stated that according to information that is currently available, the means for funding on the summaries compiled by the ACCG and the Sheriff’s Association would come from an additional SPLOST type of tax or an additional 1% sales tax. This would require Counties to adjust all form of law enforcement personnel compensation and benefits. The results of this legislation will be better defined and passed probably before we can get the compensation study back to us in June of this year.

Commissioner Hawbaker stated that he feels that the Board should be prudent in making any decision and see what happens regarding the current legislation and get the results of the salary study that has been requested so that the Board can make a more informed decisions toward the middle of this year.

Mr. Wilson then reminded the Board that during the retreat it was agreed that when preparing the budget we could move ahead with Phase III of the four phase plan to address pay compression which implements up to 2 steps or 5% and will be based on the date of hire. We also will be preparing the budget with an additional increase in the County’s match moving from a 2% match to a 3% maximum, which means if an employee puts in 6% to deferred compensation, the County will match up to 3% resulting in a total 9% contribution to your retirement account.

Mr. Wilson advised that the renewal numbers will be coming in for the health insurance around the middle of March. He stated that we would be doing everything that we can do to keep the cost to the employee the same; however, the prescription drug costs continue to increase so we may have to look at making an adjustment there.

Commissioner Ray asked if you could take the last two years of the pay compression plan and condense it to one year what would that cost and how many mils would taxes have to increase to accommodate.

Mr. Wilson stated that that compilation had not been done; however, Phase II of pay compression implemented last resulted in an increase of approximately \$350,000 and that is just the salary portion on top of the Phase I increase implemented the year before which was in the range of \$284,000. So to do the last two phases in one year would be approximately \$500,000 which would equal about $\frac{1}{2}$ mil of tax. Which is still basing it on the date of hire, if you chose to do it all on July 1 it would be closer to $\frac{8}{10}$ ths of a mil. Spreading it out by anniversary date lessens the initial cost to the County because it spaces the expenditure out over the year according to the hire dates of the employees.

Mr. Wilson added that historically the County has given Cost of Living increases, he advised that over the last 30 years there have been many more Cost of Living raises than step raises and all Cost of Living raises went into effect on July 1, the beginning of the new budget year. That is what employees became accustomed to over the years so increases implemented based on employment date have not been well received.

Mr. Wilson stated that the purpose of the work session was primarily to furnish information to the Board, but if the Sheriff or others would like to speak, the Board could consider opening the floor.

Commissioner Ray asked that if the County looked at all POST Certified officers for the CI, the Jail and throughout the rest of the County. How many employees are we talking about being POST Certified or Correctional Certified or Firefighters?

Mr. Wilson stated it would probably be $\frac{2}{3}$ rds of the total number of employees which would include 911. He then advised that the pay system is designed to encompass every employee from a Pay Grade 7 to a Pay Grade 55. Every job in Spalding County has a worth assigned to it on the Pay Grade and you will find several jobs that are on the same pay grade. For example, a Lieutenant in the Sheriff's Department might be on the same pay grade as a Lieutenant in the Fire Department, so if you change that for one Department, it doesn't just change the single job description it will affect everyone in that pay grade.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor expressed her concern over the current pay grade system as it stands today and the ability of the County to work within this system to fix the problems for the employees.

Commissioner Ray stated that he respectfully disagreed in that the Pay Plan is structured to take a new employee into the County and as they learn and grow

within and allow them over the years to gain experience and to gain service within the county. As they gain that experience through their service and experience their pay is increased to account for the training and the experience. He added that although he feels the pay scale needs to be updated, we have to look out for our employees and these employees came to work under the current Employee Handbook. The employees just want to make sure that their families are taken care of and he understands that. He stated that just like in the military a salary is designated by position and when you sign up you are aware of the pay. Commissioner Ray stated that a first responder should be paid for their service, but it is incumbent on the Board to pay them at a rate that we can afford so that we can facilitate the need of our employees and the need of our taxpayers.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor then stated that she does feel that all of the first responders should make more money. However, she stated that when the Sheriff came and made his request, the people who came to work, knew what they were coming into the County making and they were given the amount approved by the County Manager as a starting salary. She then stated that she couldn't justify giving a few people a raise, everybody in that department is important and to her the person who is the most important is the one who is facing 81 prisoners that have either already been convicted or have been charged with multiple offenses and all they have is basically a "stick" to keep people off of them. She feels that the Board should look at anyone who is put in danger as part of their job and not a select few.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor advised that the citizens of Spalding County are very aware of the service that our first responders give to them and although a raise in the amount of taxes they have to pay is never popular, she believes that a certain percentage of a mil increase would be justified if presented to the taxpayers for pay increases for these employees.

Sheriff Dix stated that he wanted everyone to know that this is not about the Sheriff's Office, it is about public safety. Public Safety across this state and across this Country is underpaid. When you are talking about a pay scale, if the base of that scale is below the average, then even though we are getting step increase we are remaining below the average. He stated that he feels that that the departments are going to have to "buckle down", that the responsibility is going to have to be a shared responsibility between the Agency Heads and the Board of Commissioners.

Chairman Miller stated that he feels the Board agrees that the base pay for employees needs to increase, but it comes back to where is the money to fund these increases going to come from and that is our concern. Spalding County already has a high mileage rate and we have to come up with a solution. He added that this is not a problem just in the Sheriff's Department, it is a problem county wide.

Sheriff Dix stated that he didn't want anyone to feel that this is an adversarial type of thing, he advised that we are all working together to get to the same place. He stated that he didn't want it to be an "us" and a "them", we are working

toward a common goal.

Chief West stated that he agrees with Sheriff Dix and believes that the one thing that would help is if the facts were “laid out” for the public they could better understand. The personnel that we are training and losing over a few thousand dollars more in pay at another county is of real concern. It costs Spalding County approximately \$19,000 to train and certify a firefighter and they are then leaving the County to go somewhere else for an increase in pay to benefit their family. He feels that if the Public is invited into to see the whole picture it might help them to understand the situation.

Commissioner Hawbaker asked Chief West’s recommendation on how to retain firefighters that we have trained and recoup at the very least the amount of money in these individuals for their training.

Chief West asked Deputy Chief Polk to address this question for the Board. Deputy Chief Polk stated that Law Enforcement has a contract that is signed by their employees and he would like to see some type of contract developed for the Fire Department so that they will be with the Department for at least the number of years it would take for the County to recoup the money invested in their training.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor encouraged the Board to look at alternate means of hiring and retaining employees. She suggested a hiring bonus type plan where the employee would get a bonus for at the time they completed a term of service. She stated that what we are currently doing is not working, so we are going to have to get inventive in our hiring practices. She stated that we need to do what we need to do to get people here and we need them to commit in writing that they will stay here for a period of time.

Tim Crane, Interim Public Works Director, expressed his appreciation for the “outside of the box” thinking he has heard this evening. Mr. Crane stated that he hopes something can be done to help recruit and maintain dependable workers for the County. Draw up a simple contract that is easily enforceable. Make it clear that if you sign on, you will be responsible for reimbursing the County for training if you leave prior to the commitment in the contract.

Warden Carl Humphrey advised that everyone is competing from the same pool of individuals. Not only are the different departments within this County competing for the same individuals so are all the surrounding Counties. Pay is going to be a major determining factor, if an individual is going into law enforcement, they are going to go wherever they are going to be able to make the most money. He stated that we are all competing for a very small group of people. He advised that he is having a problem hiring Correctional Officers right now because they can go to the State and make \$2-3,000 more than what we offer. Not too long ago, local government was \$4-5,000 more than what the State was paying and we are currently experiencing the results of that swing in starting salaries.

Warden Humphrey added that signing bonuses and things of that nature may

be a good idea, but he's not sure that is something that is going to help us in the long run.

Chairman Miller requested the amount of overtime that is paid in the Sheriff's Department and Fire Department in a year. He stated that this is money that can be saved if the Departments are fully staffed. He further stated that we have got to come up with some way of retaining not only the first responders, but we have to look at every position within the County, but this is going to take time. However, we are going to have to come up with a solution that will benefit the employees and be something that the taxpayers can get behind.

Mr. Wilson stated that he looks forward to the results of the pay classification update request. He further stated that budgets are due this Friday. He added that he has authorized Human Resources to post hiring rates up to step 6 on current openings in order to get people to apply which is different from what we have done in the past.

C. Adjournment

Motion/Second by Hawbaker/Ray to adjourn.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor asked for clarity on what is going to be done.

Mr. Wilson advised that at this time we are going to wait on the results of the pay classification study. He added that he has authorized Human Resources to post hiring rates up to step 6 on current openings in order to get people to apply which is different from what we have done in the past.

The meeting adjourned at 11:22 a.m. Motion carried unanimously by all.