

**Board of Commissioners - Work Session**

**June 3, 2024, at 3:00 PM**

**Room 108, Spalding County Annex Building**

**Minutes**

The Spalding County Board of Commissioners held a Regular Meeting on Monday, May 6, 2024, at 3:00 pm in the Spalding County Annex Room 108, with Chairman Clay Davis presiding. Commissioners Rita Johnson and Ryan Bowlden were present for the meeting. Commissioner Gwen Flowers-Taylor, James Dutton, and County Manager Dr. Steve Ledbetter were absent. Also present were Director of Accounting and Finance, Erica Dye, County Attorney, Stephanie Windham, and Deputy County Clerk, Ragan Jones, to record minutes.

1. **OPENING (CALL TO ORDER)**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Clay W. Davis.

**PLEASE SILENCE YOUR CELL PHONES AND ALL OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES.**

1. **INVOCATION**

1. Commissioner Ryan Bowlden delivered the Invocation.

1. **PLEDGE TO FLAG**
2. Commissioner Rita Johnson led the Pledge to the Flag.

**IV. AGENDA ITEMS**

* 1. Budget Review with the first reading on June 17, 2024, and the final reading on June 20, 2024.

Chairman Davis explained the reason for the workshop was to discuss discrepancies or concerns with the draft and staff presented FY25 Budget. He explained the Board will vote on the FY 25 Budget first reading June 17, 2024, and adopt the FY2025 June 20, 2024.

Commissioner Johnson asked Ms. Erica Dye to provide a synopsis of the budget.

Mrs. Dye stated the proposed budget for FY25 is 70,100,000. We continue working with Human Resources to ensure accurate amounts to align with the pay study.

Chairman Davis stated the plan for supplement items and other related expenses was to pay for them as funds become available. He noted during June, July, and August, extending into September, the revenue is minimal, while expenses continue to go out. Therefore, he believed the county policy should retain as much money fund balance as possible. Although some supplementary items will require immediate payment, he proposed Dr. Ledbetter present these items individually as funding is arranged, for approval on a case-by-case basis.

Davis stated he spent time reviewing the supplemental list and was pleased with the status. He mentioned Commissioner Flowers Taylor reviewed it as well.

Commissioner Johnson stated she had an opportunity to spend time with the County Manager and reviewed the supplemental list. She emphasized the items of priority will be addressed first.

Chairman Davis stated if additional funds are needed, they will start with the lowest priority items and work their way up. The budget is balanced with a millage rate set at 15.588.

Chairman Davis further stated, from a policy perspective, he expects the county will maintain at least 90 days of fund balance. He emphasized the importance of this practice, especially given past experiences with emergencies like the tornado. This rationale underpins his approach to retaining funds in the fund balance until they are needed for supplement budget items.

Regarding the upcoming meeting on the 17th, he does not foresee issues with approving the budget. However, the supplement budget items and other related matters will require further discussion, which he believes will be the focus of their conversation.

Davis expressed concerns regarding the entrance fee for the Aquatic Center. He mentioned the budget includes funds for the Aquatic Center's operations, and the initial plan was to have a management group oversee operations. The Park and Leisure Advisory Committee (PLAC) recommended entrance fees of $6 for children and seniors and $8 for others. However, Davis proposed a different approach for the first year. He believed children accompanied full-time by parents, grandparents, or guardians should be able to enter for a nominal fee, such as $1 or $2. His goal was to encourage children to use the pool. He suggested leaving the specifics of this policy to the County Manager, ensuring clear communication with a sign indicating that fees will change next year. This initial subsidization aimed to attract children to the Aquatic Center while maintaining proper supervision and control.

Commissioner Johnson asked if there was consideration of introducing a family plan or something similar.

Chairman Davis stated Commissioner Dutton suggested offering an inexpensive yearly pass that could be paid monthly. This would allow people to access the Aquatic Center at a lower overall cost compared to paying for three or four months individually. The goal is to make it affordable for families.

Davis directed Ms. Dye to present this idea to Dr. Ledbetter and have the PLAC work out the details. Davis requested PLAC to return a recommendation for the sign wording for implementation. The plan was to ensure children access the Aquatic Center with their parents or guardians, who must remain present.

Commissioner Bowlden noted, based on his experience in law enforcement and working part-time jobs at places like movie theaters and skating rinks, parents often drop off their kids and leave. This resulted in numerous unsupervised children, leading to frequent issues such as fights. He emphasized that adult supervision by parents or guardians would be a significant benefit in preventing such problems.

Chairman Davis proposed discussing the age range for children allowed entry, suggesting it be limited to those below the driving age, around 15 years old or younger.

Commissioner Johnson inquired about the involvement of the pool management team in overseeing concessions and pricing. She wondered if there were plans in place to increase income through various strategies, such as adjusting concession prices or implementing other revenue-generating initiatives.

TJ Imberger clarified that there are no concessions available in the building, so the revenue generation would primarily come from vending machines.

Chairman Davis emphasized the immediate focus on kickstarting the pool's operations by supplementing it for the first year. He stressed the importance of ensuring accessibility for everyone during this initial phase, even if it means adjusting the fees. He suggested subsequent years could see a return to a ‘standard pricing’ structure.

Chairman Davis addressed transportation to the pool, acknowledging that it's a considerable distance for our citizens. He mentioned that while transportation isn't typically within the Commissioners' purview, they need to find a solution. Dr. Ledbetter is in discussions with Three Rivers Regional Commission, which may have a feasible plan for providing transportation. Davis suggested the cost would likely be manageable for the county, and they wouldn't be responsible for the day-to-day operations. He proposed setting up a seasonal service during the summer months or establishing a dedicated route to the pool year-round.

Commissioner Johnson inquired about exploring the possibility of collaborating with the school system for transportation to the pool.

Chairman Davis addressed the issue of gym funding, expressing concern that it may need to be completely rebuilt due to its current condition. While this is not within the budget, he stressed the importance of addressing it as soon as possible, given its significance to the community. He estimated the cost at $4,000,000, a substantial amount, but emphasized the community's expectation for its renovation. He proposed thoroughly reviewing the funding options and, if necessary, exploring partnerships to ensure the project's completion.

Commissioner Johnson reminded the group that the gym project was part of the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) initiative. She emphasized that if there were plans for future SPLOST projects depend on the delivery of projects from previous SPLOST funds, addressing the current gym renovation would be essential.

Chairman Davis discussed the proposal for curbside pickup, citing an example where a neighboring county had implemented it successfully. He noted while there might have been initial challenges, it could improve the appearance of the county. He highlighted the significant savings of $1,000,000 for the program.

He reminded the group of the Request for Proposal (RFP) previously set up to establish the curbside pickup service, which also included the option of maintaining at least two recycle centers for waste disposal. Davis acknowledged previous opposition from citizens regarding the proposal. He pointed out that ~50% of the county's residents have access to curbside pickup. He emphasized the decision would need careful consideration, especially regarding those who still prefer to use waste centers. Davis indicated that if the decision were made to proceed, it wouldn't be feasible to implement curbside pickup before January 2025 due to the time needed for the RFQ/RFP process.

Commissioner Johnson expressed personal reservations about implementing curbside pickup, noting that historically, constituents in Districts 3 and 4 have voiced disapproval of such changes. She emphasized the need for extensive education and communication with the community, suggesting that residents might feel blindsided by the proposal. Johnson stated she wasn't comfortable moving forward with the plan within the next six months. However, she expressed willingness to learn more about the proposal and acknowledged the importance of ensuring thorough education and engagement with citizens before making any decisions.

Chairman Davis discussed the issue of homelessness within the county, expressing a desire to initiate a program aimed at reducing homelessness. He acknowledged that while some individuals might choose to live without a home, others genuinely need assistance. Davis emphasized the importance of offering support to those in need, particularly veterans who often face challenges accessing benefits from the VA without a fixed address. He proposed a small-scale intervention targeting veterans, as he understands their common values and believes they can benefit from supplemental income from the VA. Davis acknowledged that homelessness is a widespread issue across the nation but stressed the need for local action.

Commissioner Johnson inquired about the distribution of homelessness between the city and the county.

Commissioner Bowlden noted there are numerous homeless camps in the county, with a significant concentration along East Macintosh and near the racetrack.

Chairman Davis addressed the supplemental budget list, acknowledging the prioritization process discussed. He indicated while some items could be deferred until January or even later, others might require immediate attention. He assured the commissioners that any urgent matters would be addressed separately as they arise. He expressed satisfaction with the overall content of the list, stating that he didn't intend to propose major changes. He commended Ms. Dye for her efforts in compiling the list based on input from both the commissioners and staff, ensuring it reflects a reasonable order of priority.

Commissioner Johnson sought clarification regarding a highlighted item on the list, specifically about City Park.

TJ Imberger explained it pertained to a previous request to solicit bids for the lawn-cutting portion of the city park. Staff received bids last Friday, ranging from $37,000 to $189,000. My recommendation would be to accept the lowest bid of $37,000 and use it as a trial for FY25. If allowed, it would reduce the need for equipment listed in the supplemental budget list.

Ms. Dye clarified, "We've already removed those items from the list. That's why the landscape plan is highlighted. So, it resulted in $200,000 savings."

Ms. Windham emphasized the importance of reconsidering election buildout and addressing election security. She stressed election security as a crucial issue that needs to be addressed in the supplemental budget. She offered to discuss the reasons why renovations were necessary.

Chairman Davis responded that Dr. Ledbetter is working on plans to address these issues.

Davis stated the possibility of another SPLOST. If the Board has any thoughts on SPLOST, whether it's yes, no, or specific items, I'd be interested in hearing them.

Commissioner Johnson stated, “We just need to complete our previous SPLOST, and I'm sure that will open the door for future SPLOST initiatives.”

Chairman Davis addressed the opioid problem. These suits resulted in funds paid to the county over the last couple of years, amounting to ~$200,000. It's crucial to understand the specificity of how we can use these funds. They are designated to address the financial burden of caring for citizens struggling with opioid addiction. We can't simply redirect this money, we must distribute it according to its intended purpose. One significant allocation we've made with these funds is for Narcan distribution to the Sheriff's Office, and we'll likely prioritize this again. Once that's taken care of, any remaining funds should be directed to those in our community who are truly in need. While there may be debates over where these funds should go, my priority is to ensure it reaches those organizations and efforts that have been instrumental in supporting our citizens' health and recovery from addiction.

Chairman Davis asked the Board if there were any other items to discuss. He noted Commissioner Flowers-Taylor is aligned on our goals and the issues we're addressing. He also talked to Commissioner Dutton, who's largely in agreement with our direction. The key issue for today is to ensure we're all on the same page regarding the items to be approved on the 17th. We'll start the process of paying for the supplemental items, gym, Aquatic Center transportation, etc., by pulling money from the budget as it becomes available.

Commissioner Johnson agreed with the prioritized list of issues discussed. She emphasized the urgency of addressing these top eight to effectively conclude the year's agenda. Among these priorities, the Aquatic Center stood out, especially given the current summer season and the high demand for swimming facilities. She stressed the importance of tackling this issue promptly to meet the community's needs.

Commissioner Bowlden expressed agreement with many of the listed priorities, highlighting one item, the peace officer annuity benefit retirement. He emphasized the critical importance of participation. He underscored the long-term benefits of investing in retirement planning, especially for younger individuals who may not fully understand its significance.

Chairman Davis expressed satisfaction with the successful completion of the pay study, highlighting the challenge of securing funding. He emphasized the importance of ensuring sufficient funds in the budget for the upcoming fiscal year to maintain the progress made. Davis clarified the focus of the pay adjustments was on alleviating compression rather than pay raises. He acknowledged the significant financial investment required for this initiative but praised the collaborative effort that enabled its realization, particularly acknowledging the contributions of Ms. Dye in coordinating the process.

Davis reassured the staff that their input and feedback were valued, encouraging them to communicate any concerns or alternative perspectives directly to the management team. He reiterated the strategy of prioritizing expenses and funding them through a "pay as you go" approach rather than incorporating them into the current budget. This method allows flexibility and ensures resources are allocated efficiently as revenue becomes available. Davis emphasized the diligent review and adjustment of budget items to align with the organization's goals and financial constraints.

1. **ADJOURNMENT**

***Motion/Second by Johnson/Bowlden to adjourn the meeting at 3:35 p.m. Motion carried by a unanimous vote.***

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Clay W. Davis, Chairman Steve Ledbetter, PhD., County Clerk