

**ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
COUNTY MANAGER
2015**

- **The Annual Report is required under Section 3.3 (2) of the Home Rule Charter for Columbia County.**

FY 2014 – 2015 RECOMMENDATIONS UPDATE

(*NOTE* - The proposed floor budget for FY 2015 -2016 was prepared by Ben Scott, Assistant County Manager. Ben assumed the duties of County Manager August 1, 2015. He will receive full contractual authority on 10/1/2015.)

- Continue to schedule multiple budget workshops. These workshops have proven effective by allowing multiple opportunities to discuss issues of importance.

UPDATE: The County conducted budget workshops on April 30, 2015, May 28, 2015 and June 25, 2015. In addition, the Board held a workshop on August 14, 2015 to receive the 2016 proposed floor budget.

These workshops prove to be beneficial. They allow proper time to vet and discuss issues. Furthermore, they allow time for staff to provide background and research information when requested.

- Continue discussions to find solutions for the following ongoing budget issues:

- 1.) Library Funding
- 2.) Road Improvements
- 3.) P25 (800 MHz) Communication System
- 4.) Repair/Replacement – Columbia County Detention Center

UPDATE: The proposed floor budget for FY 2015-2016 provides for the following:

- 1.) Library Funding – All three (3) branches are fully funded (subject to an increase in the Communications Services Tax)
- 2.) Road Improvements – Due to limited reserves, a number of road projects were recommended to be placed on “hold”. These included roads that were qualified to receive state participation.

Based on conversation at this time; it is likely that roads placed on “hold” will be fully funded through reserves or through refinancing the gas tax prior to budget adoption.

- 3.) A modified version of the P25 (800 MHz) Communication System is funded in the proposed FY 15-16 floor budget. The total amount of funding is \$3,852,650.
 - 4.) In accordance with Florida Statutes, a Public Safety Coordinating Council (PSCC) was appointed. Members of the PSCC were asked to identify (from their need and perspective) suggested changes to the current detention center. These suggestions have been compiled and will become the basis to develop a plan of action. No time frame or budget has been approved.
- Develop a strategy to address budget requests from Constitutional Officers. The Board of County Commissioners and the Constitutional Officers are often in disagreement regarding budget priorities.

UPDATE: The Constitutional Officer of greatest concern (due to budget amount) was that of the Sheriff. The county and the Sheriff successfully negotiated an Interlocal Agreement based on revenue sharing. It should be noted that this agreement was the first in the state; therefore, the benefit of having a history to provide guidance was not available. The agreement is effective beginning with the FY 15-16 budget. At this point, it appears the agreement is working as intended.

- Continue to pursue improvements for the U.S. 41/I-75 Interchange at Ellisville.

UPDATE: Recommendation to improve the U.S. 41/I-75 Interchange at Ellisville were revisited. These recommendations included, but were not limited to the completion of the sewer at Ellisville (including the extension of sewer to the northeast quadrant) and the creation of a Community Redevelopment Area.

- Continued policy review/development is recommended in the following areas:
 - 1.) Leave – The goal would be to create a leave policy those accomplisher’s three (3) goals:
 - a) creates an employee incentive
 - b) reduces abuse, and
 - c) reduces the county’s uncompensated absences liability.
 - 2.) Safety – The goal would be to strengthen the current policy in order to impact Workers Compensation mod rates.

- 3.) Merit Pay/Merit Bonuses – Requested by the Board of County Commissioners
- 4.) Public Buildings(s) Signage Policy – Adopt standards for the type of signage to be erected at buildings under the control of the Board of County Commissioners. The intent is to standardize and to create an identity based on buildings use.

UPDATE: The county adopted policies regulating the use of county reserves and right-of-way acquisition. Policies still under view/development include leave (conversion to paid time off), safety, merit pay/merit bonuses and the regulation of signage.

FY 2013-2014 FINANCIAL REVIEW

- **The audit for the period ending September 30, 2014 is complete.**
- **No major findings were noted in the audit and forecasted expenditures for the period did not exceed the budget. Total county indebtedness decreased. The County Auditor did note the amount of reserves used for capital projects had exceeded \$10,000,000.**

FY 2014-2015 FINANCIAL REVIEW

- **FY 2014-2015 began with \$445,000 in additional advalorem revenue over the previous year. No new taxes were adopted. The adopted millage levy represented a .63% reduction. No other fees or assessments were increased.**

FY 2015-2016 BUDGET ISSUES

- **County reserves are a concern. Revenue reductions have limited the county in its ability to “replace” spent reserves.**
- **Columbia County does not have an identified revenue source for road improvement projects. It is not likely that any fund balance can/will be appropriated for road projects during FY 2015 – 2016. Staff advises that roads in need of resurfacing have become an issue.**

- **State Aid to Libraries (Equalization) fund balance was completely expended in FY 2013-2014. An increase in revenue or a decrease in expenditures will be requested to maintain the current level of service.**
- **Insurance and retirement costs are expected to increase.**

2015 LEGISLATIVE REPORTS

Note The Florida House of Representatives adjourned the 2015 legislative session three days prior to its scheduled end. The adjournment was due to disagreements with the Florida Senate over health care and other issues. As a result, the 2015 legislative session is characterized more by bills that did not pass as opposed to bills that did pass.

Bills of importance to Columbia County that did not pass include:

- 1.) Legislation governing water and spring protection.
- 2.) Legislation implementing constitutional amendment 1.
- 3.) Changes to composition and appointment of Value Adjustment Boards.
- 4.) Shifting cost to local governments for relocation of utilities.
- 5.) Legislation reauthorizing Enterprise Zones.
- 6.) Legislation creating new Economic Development incentives.
- 7.) Legislation fixing the County Medicaid Cost-Share Formula.
- 8.) Legislation reauthorizing land application of septage.
- 9.) Legislation reducing training hours for rural volunteer firefighters.

It should be noted that Columbia County received \$750,000 in the 2015 House of Representatives budget for the Cannon Creek Aquifer Recharge Project. Other bills that passed had minor impacts on Columbia County.

FY 2015 – 2016 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following list of recommendations was prepared in cooperation with Ben Scott. As noted earlier in this report; Ben assumed the duties of County Manager on August 1, 2015 and will assume full contractual authority on October 1, 2015.

- Continue to hold multiple workshops. This practice has worked well over the past two (2) years. In addition, include strategic planning goals and objectives to the process.
- Continue to review and develop policy. This is particularly true of current leave policies. The objective is to change current leave policies to “Paid Time Off”.
- Develop and implement communication improvements. Partial funding has been appropriated in the FY 15-16 budget to begin this project.
- Develop a consensus on necessary jail improvements. This consensus should be developed in cooperation with the county’s Public Safety Coordinating Council (PSCC). Planning should include cost estimates and possible funding options.
- Review the recently implemented Insurance Servicing Organization (ISO) compliance enhancements to the Columbia County Fire/Rescue Department. The goal is to make sure all changes are working as planned and to make changes as needed to insure compliance.
- Develop procedures for evaluating economic development projects. The purpose of these procedures is allow for a proper cost-benefit review of all proposed projects.
- Develop and implement a final plan to enhance the U.S. 41/I-75 interchange at Ellisville.