



COLUMBIA COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS AGENDA ITEM REQUEST FORM

The Board of County Commissioners meets the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month in the Columbia County School Board Administrative Complex Auditorium, 372 West Duval Street, Lake City, Florida 32055. The first meeting of every month is at 9:30AM while the second meeting of every month takes place at 5:30PM. All agenda items are due in the Board's office one week prior to the meeting date.

Today's Date: 6/10/2026 Meeting Date: 6/18/2026

Department: BCC Administration

1. Nature and purpose of agenda item:

Minutes - Workshop - 5/21/2026

2. Recommended Motion/Action:

approve

3. Fiscal impact on current budget.

This item has no effect on the current budget.

THIS ITEM WAS APPROVED WITHOUT EXCEPTION BY THE BOARD OF
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ON
6/18/2026

Columbia County
Board of County Commissioners
May 21, 2026 at 2:00 P.M.

Workshop

The Columbia County Board of County Commissioners met in a scheduled workshop in the auditorium of the School Board Administrative Complex at 2:00 P.M. The meeting opened with prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America followed.

Commissioners in Attendance: Chairman, Timothy Murphy
Commissioner, Robbie Hollingsworth
Commissioner, Kevin Parnell
Commissioner, Everett Phillips
Commissioner, Rocky Ford

Others in Attendance: County Manager, David Kraus (“CM”)
Assistant County Manager Kevin Kirby (ACM)
County Attorney, Joel Foreman
County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford
Finance Officer, Amy Overstreet
Public Information Officer, Dennis Rivera
County Planner, Seth Lane
Assistant Fire Chief, Lance Hill
Deputy Clerk, Melissa Williams

Discussion Item:

County Manager, David Kraus

(1) Emergency Medical Services Update

Introduction to the EMS MSTU Funding Proposal

- MSTU Definition: A Municipal Service Taxing Unit (MSTU) is a tax levy, not a property assessment, used to fund specific services within a designated area. The EMS MSTU would function as a separate, restricted fund, similar to an enterprise or landfill fund.
- Historical Context: The county previously funded EMS from the general fund. When revenue from collection dropped, the county transitioned to private contractors. The current market has shifted, with fewer revenue-

generating inter-facility transports available to providers, making it harder to break even on 911 services.

- Funding Urgency: There's a consensus that an MSTU is the only viable alternative to a general millage rate increase or budget cuts to improve EMS. Relying on annual budget increases is considered impractical for long-term funding. The board acknowledges the MSTU is a tax and emphasizes the need for unity and public transparency.
- MSTU Process:
 - The City of Lake City and the Town of Fort White must participate by adopting ordinances via two public hearings each for the tax to be levied uniformly.
 - The county needs one public hearing to adopt its ordinance, which must be passed by July 1, 2026. A hearing is proposed for June 18, 2026.
 - Preliminary millage rates are to be adopted by July 23, 2026, with final rates set in September 2026.
 - EMS revenue from billing can offset the MSTU levy, which would be reevaluated annually.
 - Commissioner, Robby Hollingsworth spoke about no more money unless you increase.
 - Chairman, Timothy Murphy spoke about the Emergency Medical Services-MSTU will be an increase.

Assistant Fire Chief, Lance Hill

- Provider Performance: The current provider, Ameripro EMS Ambulance Service, has not met minimum contracted staffing levels since their ramp-up period ended. In April 2026, they achieved 60% urban and 63% rural response time compliance, improving slightly in May to 70% urban and 64% rural. A recent incident involved a 35+ minute response to a seizure. Fines for non-compliance begin on July 1, 2026.
- Assistant Fire Chief, Lance Hill spoke about the ambulance and calls that other counties have. Putnam has 14,000 calls and 9 units; Nassau has 9,000 and 9 units and Suwannee has 5 units.
- Commissioner, Rocky Ford what is the answer to this? Assistant Fire Chief Lance Hill stated more money.
- **Staffing Crisis:** A nationwide paramedic shortage, particularly severe in rural areas, is a critical issue. Many surrounding counties sponsor employees through EMT/paramedic school in exchange for a service commitment.
- Chairman, Timothy Murphy stated more staff.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated that EMT 1 semester. An 18-year-old in school could dual enroll and start paying them to go to college to be a paramedic. Have them sign a contract to stay for a certain amount of time. There are a lot of programs that the state offers.

- Commissioner, Robby Hollingsworth spoke about the staying local will benefit.
 - County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford spoke about hiring local people.
 - Commissioner, Rocky Ford stated that Ameripro needs help and have them work with the schools.
 - County Manager, David Kraus spoke about Dr. Lawrence Barret from the Gateway College, wanted to start a program.
 - County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated that there is already an EMT/Paramedic.
 - County Manager, David Kraus spoke about the campus in Olustee.
 - Commissioner, Kevin Parnell made a comment about partnering with the High Schools.
 - **Local Recruitment and Training Program:** A plan was discussed to create a local program to train EMTs and paramedics, potentially in partnership with the local college and hospital authority. This would involve recruiting from high schools, hiring candidates as EMTs, paying for their paramedic schooling in exchange for a service commitment for three years and using state scholarships to reduce costs. County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated that he is willing to peruse this, EMT start pay a year is \$60,000.00 a year. The amount has come up in the last 8-10 years.
 - Commissioner, Kevin Parnell stated let's peruse this with the schools.
 - Chairman, Timothy Murphy made a comment about volunteer fireman for kids.
 - County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford spoke about going through college to be a firefighter/EMT is harder to keep them on the ambulance, more than a firefighter.
 - Commissioner, Everett Phillips asked a question about grants?
 - County Manager, David Kraus, stated yes, there are scholarships.
 - County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated at the college you must apply, the money is set aside.
 - Commissioner, Everett Phillips, made a comment that a 25-year-old may not know what he wants to do.
 - Commissioner, Kevin Parnell made a comment about getting this started soon. Maybe use Career Source and the County Website.
 - Commissioner, Rocky Ford made a comment that we need to figure this out.
 - County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated that it took over a year to be fully staffed.
 - County Manager, David Kraus stated that Ameripro is very supported about getting a new ambulance.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford made a comment about Unit Shortage and Call Volume: Columbia County has an unsustainable call volume of around 2,700 calls per unit annually, far exceeding the rural benchmark of 1,500. This is attributed to having too few units and significant interstate traffic. The high volume leads to faster equipment wear and

employee burnout. Even a proposed contract with five full-time units would still result in a high call-per-unit ratio. There is a clear consensus that more ambulance units are needed.

County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford spoke about doing a plan and budget laid out.

- **Hospital Wait Times:** "On the wall" waits, where ambulances are tied up at hospitals, are a sporadic concern. Operational plans should account for occasional 15–30-minute waits.
- Discussion ensued.
- County Manager, David Kraus stated that it all comes with a cost. When they are on a call at the south end they are getting to the hospital and they are there for 25-30 minutes. That is a big issue with the lack of units in the rural area.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated that it ties up 2 ambulances, one on the north end and one in Fort White.
- **Hybrid System Proposal:** A proposal was made to create a hybrid system by adding two county-operated ambulances to supplement the current contract, increasing the total to seven. These units would be stationed in the north and south to improve rural response times, which can currently take a unit out of service for two hours. The long-term strategy is to add two ambulances per year for three years.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford spoke about Ameripro and blend with the county.
- Commissioner, Kevin Parnell asked what do we need to get this done?
- County Manager, David Kraus stated that we need to add 2 ambulances.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated that it would take 4 months to get a unit not fancy.
- County Manager, David Kraus made a comment to go to the hospital authority and ask for the 2 ambulances.
- Commissioner, Rocky Ford made the comment to get these units on the road.
- County Fire Chief stated to step into it will need 2 ambulances, billing people in place and built on it every year.
- Commissioner, Rocky Ford asked if we could try for 3?
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated getting staff for 2 now will take 12 people to run 2 units. Do it as a fire/rescue and rotate from the fire.
- Commissioner, Robby Hollingsworth made a comment that the old system is not the way to go.
- County Manager, David Kraus stated that you are looking at the cost. You are now going to collect the revenue, and it will take 6 months to show.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated to go slow, but the new way is more. Collect rate is now 70%.
- Chairman, Timothy Murphy stated he supports the 2 new ambulances – coming with a net cost and start fresh. Burn out in the EMS world, EMT needs to be separate from Fire Department major cost.

- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated that to a point they are under the same umbrella and has its own 2 legs up to 53 hours is time and a half pay.
- Commissioner, Kevin Parnell asked the question if other counties have dual assessment?
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated yes.
- Commissioner, Kevin Parnell asked if it is 100% MSTU?
- County Manager, David Kraus MSTU is like the landfill start earning money depending on how much you collect.
- County Fire Chief Jeff Crawford stated that the MSTU funds for 2 ambulances -24 hours a day. Extra money can fund the extra ambulance. Keep your money and let it grow.
- Commissioner, Robby Hollingsworth made a comment.
- Commissioner, Kevin Parnell made a comment about the funding of 2 employees and where does the funding come from?
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated to charge it to the MSTU fund.
- County Manager, David Kraus spoke about if you work for the county and you work somewhere else you get paid for that area.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated 1-truck-6 people look at your vacation hours for overtime.
- Chairman, Timothy Murphy spoke about coming from a fire track.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated to look for prn people.
- **Unified Department Structure (Fire and EMS):** A model was discussed where EMS and fire operate under one department but as two distinct "legs" with separate accounting, staffing rules, and payroll codes. This allows for flexible cross-coverage while ensuring funds are correctly allocated. Pay and overtime rules differ dual-certified staff are on a 53-hour work week, while single-certified EMTs/paramedics get overtime after 40 hours. This structure requires careful HR and finance management.
- Chairman, Timothy Murphy spoke about people leaving our county to go to other counties.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated that non-emergencies are not exciting, 911 is more exciting.
- County Manager, David Kraus more questions for the Board to move forward.
- Chairman, Timothy Murphy asked a question about without a MSTU can it be done?
- Discussion ensued
- Commissioner, Rocky Ford stated that we must take this seriously.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford made a comment about EMS Budget/same people and Fire Budget/ same people.
- County Manager, David Kraus spoke about the MSTU separate fund like enterprise.
- Chairman, Timothy Murphy asked the question how many counties do MSTU?

- County Manager, David Kraus stated none.
- Assistant Fire Chief, Lance Hill answered that Levy County does.
- Chairman, Timothy Murphy made a comment about where the money goes, rural areas need the help. Public input due to there will be a tax.
- County Manager, David Kraus talked about the extra \$2 million dollar look for funding.
- Chairman, Timothy stated that we need clear numbers.
- Commissioner, Robby Hollingsworth spoke about everything going up.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated that this is our 4th private service since 2011.
- **MSTU Financial:**
 - Covering the existing \$1.6M contract would require a 0.3645 millage rate, which could be offset by lowering the general fund rate.
 - Adding two county ambulances (excluding the contract) would cost \$3.88M and require a 0.8236 millage rate.
 - Adding two ambulances and keeping the contract would cost ~\$5.59M and require a 1.1867 millage rate, with a potential decrease in the general fund rate.
- **External Funding:** The Board unanimously supported approaching the Lakeshore Hospital Authority to request \$1.6 million to purchase three ambulances (two active, one backup). Success would significantly lower the required MSTU millage rate.
- **Revenue Collection:** The county anticipates a 60-70% collection rate for ambulance billing, based on other counties' performance. Billing services would be contracted via an RFP and typically charge a 6-7% fee.
- **Decision Path:** The Board must first decide whether to pursue the MSTU-funded expansion. If approved, staff will return with detailed plans. The MSTU is seen as a prerequisite, as existing budgets cannot absorb the costs.
- Chairman, Timothy Murphy asked if County Attorney, Joel Foreman consider the rate for the EMS MSTU?
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford are you as a Board giving permission to approach if you support. Chairman, Timothy Murphy and Commissioner, Robby Hollingsworth stated yes to save taxpayers money.
- Commissioner, Rocky Ford spoke about getting the ambulances from Lake Shore Authority.
- Discussion ensued.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford made a comment to Commissioner, Kevin Parnell that the billing is already funded by the Opiate Grant Funds.

Public Comment:

Ronald Williams made a comment that he agrees with County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford about what he wants to do. He spoke about years that the City of Lake City went broke. Lake Shore ran it for 7-8 years and is no longer running rescue. He made a comment about the special assessment

tax on EMS has gone to the Supreme Court. He agrees 100% to do it under the Fire Department and cross train. Run it yourself and save this county some money.

Commissioner, Everett Phillips made a comment to put this money back into our county.

Commissioner, Kevin Parnell stated that we have got to do better.

Commissioner Robby Hollingsworth stated that the whole county will benefit.

- **Transportation Policies:** Statutes require transport to the "closest appropriate facility." Paramedic discretion is key, especially for services not offered locally or for transport from the south end of the county, where Gainesville facilities may be more appropriate.
- Commissioner, Rocky Ford made a comment about the EMS having to wait at the hospital.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford made a comment about that does not always happen, you need to account for the extra time.
- Commissioner, Robby Hollingsworth asked the question, "do you call ahead to the hospital?"
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford answered that the hospital can divert and go to the other hospital. Emergency patients will take them now.
- Commissioner, Robby Hollingsworth made a comment if they can go to other hospitals?
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated they will do a local and off-load and then they are available.
- Commissioner, Rocky Ford made a comment about the south end of the county.
- County Fire Chief, Jeff Crawford stated that Gainesville is closer.

The Board took a 5-minute break from 03:55 P.M. to 04:00 P.M. At 4:00 P.M., the meeting was called back to order.

(2) Municipal Service Taxing Unit- Emergency Medical Services

(3) Municipal Service Taxing Unit – Law Enforcement – see attached

Proposal to Establish a Separate Law Enforcement MSTU

o Description:

- A separate MSTU for the sheriff's department is proposed, distinct from the EMS MSTU.

- It would appear as a separate line on tax bills, law enforcement or sheriff.
- The change is presented as an accounting reallocation, not adding services; the total tax burden can remain the same by lowering general fund millage while raising MSTU millage.
- Ten or eleven counties currently use similar MSTU, Citrus County was cited as supportive after implementation.
- o Conclusion:
 - Board direction favors proceeding; transparency is a key benefit (funds restricted to intended use).

Budget Figures and Millage Impact

- o Description:
 - Sheriff's total budget referenced as \$23,960,492 (also stated as-\$24 million).
 - Amount eligible for the law enforcement MSTU: approximately \$17.8-\$18 million.
 - If the Town of Fort White is included, the calculated MSTU millage is 5.0635.
 - The general fund millage would drop to 2.7515; the MSTU would cover the remainder for law enforcement.
 - Last year's ad valorem property tax collections were about \$36,649,153 (36.6 million).
 - Estimated MSTU budget cited as \$17,845,028 (subject to city participation and final calculation).
 - Commissioner, Rocky Ford is this without the city.
 - County Manager, David Kraus talked about Fort White having a new attorney.
- o Conclusion:
 - If implemented, taxpayers would see a lower general fund millage and a new law enforcement MSTU millage, with overall bills potentially unchanged.

Participation of City and Town (City of Lake City and Town of Fort White)

- o Description:
 - Assumption: the city will not participate in the law enforcement MSTU, they fund their own law enforcement.
 - Discussion indicated that Fort White is currently included in the updated draft study; earlier statements about participation were clarified.
 - Impact rates presented are "with the city not participating" and with Fort White included.
- o Conclusion:
 - Current modeling assumes non-participation by the city and inclusion of Fort White.

Public Hearings and Timeline

- o Description:

- Public hearings targeted for the 11th and the Monday before the 18th (two hearings for two ordinances).
 - The legal framework must be in place by July 1 for an effective October/November date.
 - Millage could be set at zero or at the study's recommended rate; options remain open.
 - o Conclusion:
 - The process is time-sensitive to meeting statutory deadlines; the Board may set up hearings on the same night.
- Homestead Exemption and Legislative Uncertainty
- o Description:
 - If property tax changes occur at the state level, the MSTU may face similar impacts.
 - Assumption used is a worst-case scenario where homestead-exempt properties could also be exempt from the MSTU.
 - County Manager, David Kraus made a comment about the outcomes depending on legislative action.
 - o Conclusion:
 - The team will proceed under conservative assumptions due to uncertainty.
- Alternative Funding Concepts (Sales Tax and Others)
- o Description:
 - A question was raised about using sales tax for law enforcement funding; legality needs research.
 - A prior local half-cent sales tax referendum for the sheriff's budget was noted; voters opposed the additional tax.
 - Chairman, Timothy Murphy spoke about bed tax restrictions were discussed.
 - o Conclusion:
 - Staff will research the legality of sales tax as a funding mechanism.
- Transparency and Public Understanding
- o Description:
 - The MSTU would make tax bills clearer: specific lines for EMS and the sheriff.
 - MSTU funds are restricted and cannot be spent on other purposes.
 - Commissioner, Robby Hollingsworth, made a comment about the people do not mind paying for public safety.
 - County Manager, David Kraus stated that the public believes that tax payors pay for everything and that is not true.
 - Chairman, Timothy Murphy spoke about regular grow is not accepted, they have to tell the public about the increase, and try to be transparent.
 - o Conclusion:

- Transparency is a primary rationale; the MSTU helps align public perception with actual fund usage.

Operational Considerations and Future Adjustments

o Description:

- Tax base growth (e.g., industrial development) increases both general fund and MSTU capacity proportionally.
- Next year's collections could be adjusted after a partial year ramp-up.
- Potential donations (e.g., ambulances from Lakeshore Hospital Authority) could reduce EMS MSTU needs by ~\$1.6 million.
- The sheriff may need to seek public support to raise MSTU rates if revenue growth is insufficient.

o Conclusion:

- The MSTU framework allows adaptive budgeting with clear public accountability.

Public Comment and Concerns

o Description:

- Concern raised that fast-tracking changes the county's tax structure without a referendum.
- Request to calculate county revenue loss if the city does not participate in the MSTU.
- Assertion that general fund decisions remain with the county; the MSTU could be perceived as a way to lower and later increase rates.
- Suggestion to consider county-run EMS and subsidized fire service, as done in larger counties.

o Conclusion:

- Staff acknowledged timing constraints and will provide figures; the referendum proposal was noted but not adopted.

Open Public Comments and /or Questions: 3-minute limit

Stew Lilker-Spoke about the Sheriff was not right about the 70 % going into the general fund. Made a comment to calculate county revenue loss if the city does not participate in the MSTU. There is no rush to do this change the tax. Change the tax, I support the county EMS, the county funds the sheriff's dept. Nothing changes on the sheriff let the people decide.

Commissioner, Robby Hollingsworth made a comment about getting it on there that fast.

County Manager, Davis Kraus made a comment about if you want it to go in effect October 1st, 2026 it must be done by July 1st, 2026.

Staff Comments: There we no staff comments

Commissioner Comments:

Commissioner, Rocky Ford made a comment that we have thought about this for a while, more counties are doing it.

Chairman, Timothy Murphy stated he agrees with Commissioner Rocky Ford to be transparent.

Adjournment:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 04:16 P.M.

Timothy Murphy, Chairman
Board of County Commissioners

ATTEST:

James M. Swisher, Jr.
Clerk of Circuit Court & County Comptroller

