

The Brooks County Board of Commissioners met for a Special Called Meeting/Work Session and the FY2026-2027 Budget Retreat, April 28, 2026, at 10:09 a.m., at the Brooks County Ag Building, in the Ag Venue, located at 400 East Courtland Avenue, Quitman, GA. Commissioners present were: Mrs. Myra Exum, Chairman; Mr. James Maxwell, Vice Chairman; Mr. Patrick Folsom; Mr. Willie Cody; and Mr. Lee Larko. Others present were Mr. Buddy Johnson, County Administrator; Ms. Patricia Williams, County Clerk; Ms. Kim Daniels, Human Resources; Ms. Janice Jarvis, Finance Director; Ms. Leslie Hall; Mr. Jason Kemp, County Attorney; Mr. James Warren; Mr. Kyle Christian, Road Department; and various residents.

I. Call to Order

_____ A. Prayer & Pledge – Mr. Larko led all in attendance in prayer and pledge of allegiance.

FY2026-2027 Budget Retreat

County Administrator gave an overview of the day's purpose: to review departmental budget requests, discuss potential changes, and allow department heads to present needs and answer questions. Emphasis was placed on the informal nature of the session; no final decisions would be made; but input will be gathered for further budget planning.

I. Elections Department – Discussion of previous and current spending on equipment repair and maintenance, including calibration, hardware warranty, and rental of polling locations. Noted was the planned increase in rental costs for polling locations, especially the fire station, and need for adjustments in budget lines. Salary changes were requested for increase in temporary poll workers' pay (managers, assistants, clerks) to attract and retain workers. Specific pay rates and challenges with current staffing were discussed.

Requested additional funds for computer maintenance and replacement, and for scanners to facilitate check-in during elections. Evaluated rental/lease of vehicles for election operations, clarified vehicle ownership and use among departments. Phones and internet service cost were discussed, including the transition to VOIP systems and the requirement for fax machines. Questions were asked as to what caused increase in repair/maintenance costs? Should landline requirements persist? How to allocate rental costs for polling places? The budget lines for rentals and salaries; coordinate with tech support for computer/tech needs, confirm phone system requirements. The total budget amount requested is \$391,100.00 minus \$3,000.00 deducted, totaling \$388,100.00.

II. Tax Commissioner – The Tax Commissioner presented minimal changes to the budget. Requesting a new computer and noting future cost savings from new software. An increase in postage/printing costs and need to ensure budget lines are adequate. Staffing challenges were highlighted due to increased call volume and insufficient personnel, plans to hire an additional staff member. The Tax Commissioner's budget will be reviewed and adjusted as needed after further analysis; and will proceed with hiring to ensure adequate staffing.

III. Tax Assessors – No major changes requested ; department contracts with external firm for property data collection due to legislative mandate for triennial reviews. Cost effectiveness of contracting versus hiring additional staff was discussed. The need for minor security upgrades was

noted (cameras, half-door) and discussed building renovations for improved security and workflow. Permission was granted to research and propose security improvements; consider minor renovations for security enhancements.

IV. Governing Body & Administration Budgets – The budget line items for the Governing Body and Administration noted minor increases and clarifying how salaries are tracked in the budget documents. Discussed timing and calculation discrepancies in budget software; action items to resolve inconsistencies and ensure accurate reporting. The need to streamline cell phone and landline contracts to save costs was highlighted. Once the outstanding telecom issues are resolved, there will be an action item to address the same. The \$600,000.00 will remain in budget for the fire fee settlement.

V. Sheriff's Office: Uniform Patrol - Staffing & Compensation – The Sheriff emphasized the critical staffing shortages due to uncompetitive pay. He compared Brooks County pay rates to surrounding counties: Quitman starting pay is \$21.50; Thomasville is \$20.45; Valdosta is \$24.03; and Moultrie is \$23.00. Sheriff Dewey is requesting four new positions; and requesting \$27.00 for starting pay. Discussion centered on raising starting pay for deputies at \$23.00/hour as a compromise, with all current staff also receiving proportional increases, and adding four additional deputy positions. Emphasis was placed on public safety concerns with current staffing levels and the importance of pay parity to recruit and retain quality staff. Funding from traffic citations and fines were discussed; and ensuring that related revenue is properly tracked and allocated. Human Resources and Finance will analyze the budget impact of increased pay and new positions. There will be further discussion and decision at future meetings.

VI. Jail Operations: Staffing & Compensation – Jail Operations is also facing severe understaffing and low pay, currently at \$12.84/hour for Jailers. The proposal was presented to increase starting pay to \$16.00/hour and add four positions. Compared local and regional pay rates for Jailers. Requested \$15.00/hour and additional four new hires. Quitman salary is \$18.00/hour up to \$20.00/hour with experience. Human Resources and Finance will review impact of proposed increases; and focus on filling vacant positions to reduce overtime. Madam Chair stated the Board will look at \$16.00/hour and four additional new hires.

VII. Sheriff's Office: Vehicles & Fleet Management – The costs and challenges of the current vehicle leasing program with Enterprise was discussed. The Administrator's recommendation is to transition away from fleet management, purchase vehicles using S PLOST funds, and prioritize trucks for repurposing across departments. The need for a centralized fleet manager/purchasing agent to oversee acquisitions, maintenance, and insurance was discussed. The Board agreed with transitioning away from leasing; budget for vehicle purchases; and explore hiring a fleet manager.

VIII. Narcotics - Sheriff requesting a 5% increase in salaries for the department.

IX. Law Enforcement – Requesting hiring a full-time receptionist.

Mrs. Myra Exum, Chair
Mr. Buddy Johnson, County Administrator
Ms. Patricia Williams, County Clerk

