

The Brooks County Board of Commissioners met for a Special Called Meeting/Work Session and the FY2026-2027 Budget Retreat, April 29, 2026, at 10:00 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, Chair; Mr. James Maxwell, Vice Chairman; Mr. Patrick Folsom; and Mr. Lee Larko. Mr. Willie Cody was not present. 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. Robert Vann; and various residents.

## **I. Call to Order**

\_\_\_\_\_ A. Prayer & Pledge – Mr. Folsom led all in attendance in prayer and pledge of allegiance.

## **II. 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. The meeting is a candid collaborative budget workshop for county departments; it is not adversarial. Department heads are encouraged to clearly state needs and justify requests, especially for capital expenses and salary increases. 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. Commissioners stressed that while asking for needs is encouraged, overall budget cuts are likely due to revenue shortfalls.

There is a strong intent not to raise taxes unless necessary. Focus is on significant changes from last year, not line-by-line reviews unless major shifts are involved. Departments should prioritize significant requests and be prepared to explain increases, particularly in terms of salaries and capital. There were general instructions to avoid excessive requests for large salary increases (5-20%) as these are unlikely to be approved.

**I. Mowing Department** – The main request is increase in maintenance and repairs budget due to rising costs, and a cautionary proposal to replace aging flex-wing mower, \$25,000 to be funded through capital, not the general fund. The fuel budget was discussed; the actual usage is lower than budgeted; the fuel line item was reduced from \$76,000 to \$40,000. Request for a salary increase for employee from \$18.73/hour to \$21.00 to retain talent. The fuel budget was adjusted downwards and shifted savings toward equipment replacement.

**II. Landfill & Recycling Centers** – Discussed EPA/EPD compliance regarding debris piles and storm debris. There is a funding concern with the City of Quitman they are \$500,000+ behind in reimbursement for landfill operations. Conversation will continue regarding the landfill, the contract, and reimbursement.

**III. Magistrate Court** – The technology fee will be implemented upon the Governor's signature. Legislation passed to add a \$10.00 technology fee per case; pending the Governor's signature. The jurisdictional limit increased to \$25,000 from \$15,000. Requested pay increase of \$1.00/hour for one Clerk; and \$.50/hour for another Clerk. Proposing to eliminate an unused part-time position to offset cost of raises. Discussed updating and enforcing county ordinances and use community service as an alternative to sentencing.

**IV. Emergency Management & 911** – EMA requests: Replace outdated AV equipment after lightning strike, and either repair or replace aging response vehicle, costing more to maintain. The decision is to repair the EMA vehicle as an interim solution; and plan for future replacement.

911 Requests: increase in overtime due to anticipated staff absences, drug testing costs, and 3% salary increase to retain staff and compete regionally. Review of phone lines, eliminate unnecessary landlines in EMA, required to have ten lines. Need for uniform updates and potential future CAT mapping system replacement. Budget overtime and salary increase as justified.

**V. Senior Center** – Request for part-time assistant, justified by need for operational continuity and meal delivery support. Budgeting for two annual senior trips; using outside van services rather than purchasing new vehicle.

**Facility Needs** – Bathroom renovations are needed due to age and safety hazards. Requesting cubicles for meal/activity space, floor waxing and installation of a ramp for improved accessibility. Requesting \$2.00/hour increase for the Center Manager to bring pay in line with peers. Proceed with hiring part-time assistant and allocating funds for senior trips. Prioritize bathroom renovation, ramp installation and floor maintenance.

**VI. Victim Witness Program** – Administrator stated uncertainty about the future of the program, grant renewal not yet decided. The Sheriff's office is unwilling to continue as implementing agency. Debate about county's ongoing need for a standalone program; discussed duplicity with DA's office services. Strong support from some commissioners for maintaining local victim witness services. The decision was tabled beyond September until future of program and grant is clarified with sheriff, DA, and Board.

**VII. 4H/Extension/Youth Programs** – Discussed hiring a part-time assistant, proposing to switch mailings to text service for outreach, will be cost efficient and more effective. Updated the Board on van purchase; \$35,000 has been budgeted; but the actual cost is likely higher. Board advised getting three quotes and to consider sharing vehicle use with the senior center. Also discussed repairing and repurposing the old van for meal deliveries and commissioner road trips.

**VIII. Planning, Zoning, Code Enforcement** – Planning, Zoning, and Code Enforcement, consolidated under fire department. A new fee schedule has been implemented, revenue significantly increased, projected \$180,000 to \$210,000/year. The online permitting and code enforcement portal to launch July 1 and is expected to improve efficiency and transparency. There was discussion on enforcement, exemptions, and impacts on new construction on insurance ratings (ISO). The fire department will continue with software rollout and staff cross-training; and monitor revenue vs. expenses to further reduce county subsidies.

**IX. Fire Department: Funding & Capital Plan** – The major request is to open new (third) paid fire station (Dixid), will require six new full-time staff, and long-term funding solution for fire services after loss of fire fee.

**Funding Options:** Immediate use of 1.5 millage increase plus insurance premium tax, with possible long-term replacement by 2.5% insurance premium tax (state-collected) once in effect. Applied for SAFER grant but not guaranteed; will need plan for temporary fire millage if grant or insurance tax is

delayed. Proposal to purchase six 4,000-gallon pumper/tanker trucks to improve ISO ratings county-wide, which will potentially save residents millions in insurance costs.

**Capital Needs:** New fire station, vehicles, SCBA cascade system (grant-dependent); and long-term plan for additional infrastructure as the county grows. The decision and action plan is to support 1.5 mill fire tax, communicated to the public as a replacement for the eliminated fire fee. Continue grant applications for equipment and facilities; and explore state/federal funding for capital outlay.

The Board had general discussion on the challenges of raising taxes, need for transparency, and balancing public communication with governance responsibilities. Also reiterated the need to prepare clear, unified talking points for all commissioners for public outreach.

Key questions raised: How to fund public safety and critical infrastructure given revenue constraints and legal changes? Should the county continue to subsidize the city's landfill obligations? How to structure and communicate tax/free changes to minimize backlash and increase understanding?

All departments are to provide follow-up documentation on specific requests (quotes, justifications, alternatives). Commissioners and finance team to+ finalize budget adjustments based on workshop input. Legal review of landfill contract, victim witness program status, and fire tax/millage cap issues.

The budget retreat adjourned at 3:05pm.

Mrs. Myra Exum, Chair

Mr. Buddy Johnson, County Administrator

Ms. Patricia Williams, County Clerk