

**FRANKLIN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
FINAL BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING
FORT COOMBS ARMORY
SEPTEMBER 22, 2026
5:15 PM
MINUTES**

Commissioners Present: Ricky Jones-Chairman, Jessica Ward-Vice-Chairman, Cheryl Sanders, Otice Amison, and Anthony Croom, Jr.

Others Present: Miichael Moron-County Coordinator, Michele Maxwell-Clerk of Court, Erin Griffith-Fiscal Manager/Grants Coordinator, and Linda Phillips-Finance Director

FY 2026/2027 Budget

1. Call To Order

This is the Final Budget Public Hearing to adopt the final millage levy and final budget for FY 2026-27.

2. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

3. Budget Information

Chairman Jones speaking, Franklin County Board of County Commissioners now in session for this final budget public hearing today, Tuesday, September 22. I'm going to go ahead and call the meeting to order for this public hearing. I would like to make sure you're aware from the outset. Been extremely lenient so far with the amount of time we've had people in other in the workshop and the first public hearing speak multiple times. We have another meeting scheduled behind us tonight, so we're going to try to hold it to just commenting one time. But with that, we'll go ahead and get started. If you would, let's please do the stand to do the prayer and the pledge. Chairman Jones led the Board in prayer followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mrs. Griffith speaking, all right, commissioners. At this meeting, the board must adopt the final budget and the final millage rate to be advertised according to statutory requirements. It will take 5.4109 mills to fund this budget, in the tentative budget to be adopted, the budget has been amended to include the updated allocations and additional revenues for the MSBU fund. The total of the tentative budget is now \$123,062,063. The tentative millage rate of 5.4109 mills is 12.74% greater than the rollback rate of 4.7994 mills. The tentative millage is 12.74% above the rollback rate due to an increase in the FRS retirement contribution rate for the special risk service class, as set by the Florida Legislature, an increase of 3.5% in the cost of health insurance, an increase in the cost of property insurance

premiums, increases in constitutional officers' budgets and departmental budgets due to inflationary cost increases in fuel supplies, utilities, and capital needs, increases in costs associated with additional services relative to code enforcement, legal defense, economic development, parking enforcement, and IT, and reductions in carry forward and state shared revenues, and a 4% inflationary adjustment to the wages for all employees of Franklin County. And at this point, I will, I can actually. I can either read the budget narrative that was available at the door if you all would like. The property appraiser is required to certify to the county commission the taxable value of real property by certified value basis for calculating proposed millage rate. Franklin County's gross taxable value increased by 7.47% from 2025 to 2026. In the current budget, the millage rate of 50459 generated \$19,102,706. At the budget workshop, commissioners were presented with a preliminary budget comprised of approximately \$28,134,536 in ad valorem proceeds at a proposed millage rate of 6.9152 mills. Upon conclusion of the budget workshop, commissioners cut \$5,817,335 from the proposed budget and move forward with a proposed millage rate of 5.4109, which appeared on the trim notices in August. The rollback millage rate is the rate that nets the same ad valorem proceeds that a taxing authority operated on the prior budget year. This does consider the effect of the amount transferred to the tax increment districts and omits the added value of new construction from the calculation. The rollback rate is 4.7994 and would generate \$19,526,459 in ad valorem proceeds. The tentative millage 5.4109 with \$22,014,359 in property tax proceeds is currently 12.74% over the rollback rate, or \$2,487,900 over an ad valorem proceeds. The total difference between budgeted property tax revenues from one year to the next, excluding the effects of the tax increment districts and the value of new construction, is 2 million. \$911,653. The tentative budget approved at the first public hearing totaled \$122,882,684. The change in total budget from 25-26 to 26-27 can be attributed to the increases summarized on the next page, additional grant awards, and the county's assumption of EMS services, the tentative 26-27 budget presented for adoption today totals \$123,062,063. This updated amount includes the updated allocations and additional revenues for the MSBU fund from the new rates put in place earlier this month. In 2026, homesteaded properties with just values exceeding tax increase and adjustment based on the Save Our Homes cap increase. A homeowner with a house valued at 150,000 with a \$50,000 homestead exemption would have paid \$505 in county taxes in 2025 at the proposed 2026 rate and the 2.7% adjustment to value. The 2026 homestead exemption is now valued at \$51,411. That homeowner would pay \$555 in county taxes. Items which increase the county budget, funded by property taxes, \$1,762,073, coupled with a summarized revenue losses of \$760,894 result in a net increase that is approximately the difference in ad valorem proceeds. There are also some

supplemental attachments which are also available online, and you will also see that the updated MSBU information was also available at the door. And there's also additional documentation for that. On has the new resolution and ordinance as well, and also some of the supporting documentation from the tax collector's office, which is actually how calculations work. Chairman Jones speaking, okay, so the only real difference between today and last time we met is the MSBU increase. Mrs. Griffith speaking, correct. Chairman Jones speaking, all right, commissioners, do you have any questions for Erin before we go to public comments or anything?

4. Public Comments

All right, at this time we open the floor for public comments. Do you come forward? Please state your name for the record. Three minutes.

Miss Brenda Karlin speaking, good afternoon, commissioners. I quickly looked at the attachments on this sheet, the budget information, and my eyes tend to roll with a lot of numbers going by me. But I was looking for any departments that had reduced their budget from last, and I, the building department. I don't know if that's what y'all did, because I know that you reduced what I understand, or they did it. But I wanted to commend them for that, I couldn't find any other department that had done that. I did see some things that were kind of strange to me, where budgeted over last time was \$1 less. Is there might be a reason for that? I don't know. When I looked at their actual, it was quite. It was significantly different expenses actual for the prior year to what they budgeted, so maybe they're saying we didn't spend it last time, so we're going to keep it the same. I don't know, but I had a question about that. Also, I saw several kind of seemed like duplication of services. I won't go into that right now, but I saw also there was something from the Florida Health Department, I guess, and their budget request was in two different departments. One, the same budget request was under code enforcement and health department. Is that intentional or is that a duplicate? Chairman Jones speaking, intentional. Ms. Karlin speaking, was intentional. Chairman Jones speaking, yes. So, we share an employee with the health department. Ms. Karlin speaking, but the same amount was budgeted for both categories? Chairman Jones speaking, oh, that I don't know. Mrs. Griffith speaking it should only be 49,000 for the health department primary care services, and then the other amount should be in code enforcement. Ms. Karlin speaking, it was 93 424 under both categories? That's how I noticed it. And then I was looking at in terms of like priorities, and I love the library, even though I don't use the library. I understand people use the library compared to what was budgeted for veterans, and I also looked at well, let me say that the library budget jumped from 456 194 to 523,043 year over year, that

was a 14.6 percent increase over the past five years, meaning since 2020 2021, what you showed on your worksheet, it was a 71 percent increase over the past five years for veterans. They started in 2021 with 59,323 budgeted, and they're up to 100,768, which was a 69% increase, 25% over actual, but it's a significantly lower number than what's for the library. So, I was thinking, you know, we might be able to look at that and prioritize veterans to receive more services. I really couldn't see exactly what services were being budgeted for. It seemed like a lot of it was just personnel salaries. You know, I couldn't see anything else. I had a question about Weems. They received \$303 million in as part of COVID. I didn't see anything mentioned in the history about that. Can anyone explain what happened to that \$3 million? Chairman Jones speaking, well, over a million of it was returned, but that was about five years ago, we just ran. Ms. Karlin speaking, I mean, some is very few. Some did, but that was. I didn't see that. So, my question is, what happened? What happened to that? Chairman Jones speaking, that is about five years ago, Miss Brenda. We don't. Ms. Karlin speaking, that's right. I know it's five years ago, but your that's the paperwork. The budget worksheets went back that far, so that's why I am asking. And then just overall, as you said, the current year budget. Are you all going to be voting on this today? Mrs. Griffith speaking, yes. Ms. Karlin speaking, okay. So, there's probably not going to be any change. It's just to inform people is very important to look at the individual departments. I probably got with Erin a long time ago, but I see overall it was 123 million 62 63, like you said for this year. I can only find Erin that last year's budgeted pre-budget for last year was 112 million. Mrs. Griffith speaking, that's correct. Ms. Karlin speaking, yes. Okay, and that translates to an increase, even though you all reduced the proposed budget from the previous workshops that you had of 9.3 percent, which is pretty significant. And I didn't see an answer to this in your budget, and I probably wouldn't expect it. But if others in the county are listening, I think we just have to ask ourselves: Where are we factoring in? Where are taxpayers going to get a 9.3 percent increase? Particularly if you look at how many people are actually paying the property tax to the county. So, I want to say that today. Thank you for your service, and that's it. Chairman Jones speaking, thank you, Miss Brenda.

Chairman Jones speaking, anyone else? Oh, Mr. Moron, is anybody attending by Zoom?

Mrs. Barbara Sanders speaking, good afternoon, Barbara Sanders. I'm here to ask you to budget at some point money to purchase the marina property on Saint George Island. May already have cushion in your budget. I think we came to the commissioners two years ago and asked you to try to buy it was probably worth 8 million, or that may have been what they paid for it. So if we calculate their

opportunity costs and their expenses for lawyers and experts and you know whatever their time is worth, you can probably get it for around 12. Of course, they'll be asking more. It seems to me that would be a good investment in your county. You could make a beautiful park there. You might partner with the schools or Haney to put a marine mechanics place there for your children, and not have that intensive development right as you come off across the bridge. So that's my ask. I never ask for anything in your budget. Get lots of stuff. I get trash picked up. I get police. I get MSBU. But and I like the hospital in case I get sick. But this is my big ask. Chairman Jones speaking, thank you, Mrs. Barbara. Anyone else?

Sheriff Smith speaking, hey, commissioners, I just kind of popped in first to say thank you for everything y'all do, and I know things are tough, especially with Amendment Three residing out there and all that stuff. And you know, I'm just thankful that we got a good group of men and women that really care about our county and do good things for us, and we appreciate our budget. I was at a conference, and the Orange County Sheriff was bragging. He said, "I got a \$41 million increase, and of course, it's all relative. And I'm thinking \$41 million, and you already have a billion-dollar, almost a billion-dollar budget, but I'm just like great, and I don't know how they can do that. And this Amendment Three is looming out there, but that's all. I just want to say thank you, thank you to your staff. Everybody is just a great place to work, and I'm proud to be sheriff here. I'm proud to serve y'all, and you know anything that I can do, please let me know. Or my wonderful CFO Ginger. She, I couldn't do it without her. Thank you. Chairman Jones speaking, thank you. Anyone else?

Miss Teresa Spohrer speaking, I just want to say that I agree with Barbara Sanders. I talk to a lot of people every morning when I walk the beach and ask them why they come to St. George Island, and they almost all say because it's undeveloped. And since it's the only game in town here, it's really important to keep it in that state. So, I agree with buying that property. I think we can do it. Chairman Jones speaking, thank you. Anyone else?

Jeff Betzal speaking, I appreciate you letting me get up several times while I go into your permit. Allowing someone to speak earlier, the earlier meeting, probably me, because they allowed me to speak a lot. I appreciate it. Chairman Jones speaking, well, we had workshops too, but it's all good. Mr. Betzal speaking, I have more of a question than I do. The if someone 10 years ago was paying \$550 a year in property taxes, would they be paying more today in property taxes, or would their tax bill still be the same pay? Chairman Jones speaking, depends on what the millage rate was then? You know what I'm saying? Because it goes by

millage rate and property. Well, I mean. Mr. Betzal speaking, I know it's I know it's all fair. It was probably more question for the appraiser. But it just seems to be that if someone's paying \$550 a year in property taxes 10 years ago, and everybody else's taxes have gone up and filed up, then that would have gone up as well. Chairman Jones speaking, probably so. Okay, thank you. It does both, Mr. Jeff. It uses the property value and the millage rate, both. Anyone else? When you said there's nobody attending via Zoom, Mike? Mr. Moron speaking one person now. Anyone attending on Zoom that would like to participate, please indicate by raising your hand. No hands raised.

Budget Discussion and Adoption

5. Budget Discussion

Chairman Jones speaking, all right, Mrs. Erin, I want to ask a question based on some of the feedback we've heard today, our overall budget is higher. Most of that is grants, special funds. Is it more?

Mrs. Griffith speaking, it is actually, and that was something by providing the sheet, which is actually summarized total budget by fund. You can actually view the attachment. And one change that I have made is I did highlight the funds that actually denote operational funds, which are dependent upon ad valorem proceeds. And you'll see in there that there is approximately five operational funds for the county, and that would be the general fund, fine and forfeiture, the library fund, road and bridge, and mosquito control. All of the other funds-they're kind of special purpose, or they're going to be called enterprise funds, such as Weems Hospital, where a lot of the revenues and expenses kind of wash each other out. And then also, like the ambulance fund-that's something you know-that's new. This will be the first fiscal year that the county has actually operated the EMS service in the entirety. You also have in there. You have the Housing Assistance Trust, which is your ship fund. So that's all grant funded. You also have your airport fund, which is comprised of airport revenues and a majority of grant funds. Also, in in that particular fund, the MSVU fund, which was also covered earlier with the updated rates as well, St. George Island Fishing Pier Maintenance Fund, and this is a wonderful fund to actually look at from one year to the next. If you will see, you know, the budget for 2526 versus the change in 2627, you know, you'll see a difference there at roughly \$10,500. Not much activity is happening in that fund. Granted, you know, we've had some FEMA-related expenditures and such, but for the most part, that money rolls forward year after year, and it continues to build with interest until we actually have expenditures out of it. The boating improvement funds-that's the same way we use that as grant match. LOGT road

paving-that's a lot of your road paving grant. So that's going to be CR 60 7c 30. You know, there there's several large projects coming up next year, and that actually the widening and resurfacing of Wolf Beach Drive. That's actually coming up as well. That's a \$641,000 project in the upcoming tourist development. That's extremely limited by statute on what we can actually do with the proceeds, the healthcare trust fund. You know that's comprised of the 1% tax on all taxable transactions within the county, and that goes to support the operations of Weems Hospital and also capital improvements. And actually, now that is also supporting EMS services, and that's pretty much a synopsis. So, you can kind of see the total budget of 123 million, how it's actually comprised. But when you look at the funds that are actually in the yellow highlight, those funds are going to be the ones that the county expends almost entirely each and every single year. And the general fund for to note that \$10,780,000 difference. We do have two very large projects that we're very excited about, and that's construction of the new EOC building in East Point, and also the landfill transfer station project, which is roughly \$6.2 million, which is funded by the store. So just to kind of provide a summary for you all. Chairman Jones speaking, but any and all dollars that we're receiving has to be added into this budget. Mrs. Griffith speaking, it does, yes. Chairman Jones speaking, okay. Anyone else have any questions? We are past public comment. Commissioner Ward speaking, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make a note too, Erin. If you could explain now, veteran services. I know a lot of people don't realize this. A lot of the services that we have to have that comes out of our county budget is federally or state mandated by Florida statute, correct? Is veteran service one of those, or is that? Mrs. Griffith speaking, I don't believe that one is mandated. Commissioner Ward speaking, but a lot of them are, like our guardian ad litem, domestic violence, a lot of things that we pay, that we have to pay per Florida statute, and nothing against our constitutional officer, but a lot of people don't realize this: our constitutional officer's salary comes from the state, not us. So, any raise that they get, which I think they got a raise last year, correct me if I'm wrong, they don't give us the money for that raise. We have to come up with that out of our budget, and we have no say on what the constitutionals get. I'm not saying anything bad against our constitutional. Believe me, they deserve every penny that they get. But I think the public is doesn't know that, and so I just want to make them aware that a lot of things that we can't control is based or things that we do in our budget has to be it's under Florida statute. We're required to do it by law, not because we want to. It's because we have to, right? Mrs. Griffith speaking, that is correct. And just like you know the code enforcement, that was something that the board did in response to, you know, basically public support for the program. So, you know, the code enforcement efforts. That's something new that the county's never done before. But we're not required to do that. So that's a primary example of

kind of things that you know the county trying to implement new services versus the struggle of funding things that we are required to pay. So that's just something to consider as well. Commissioner Ward speaking, and Mr. Chairman, I will make a note that we went at the beginning of this process. We this has been going. Thank you, Erin, and Miss Linda, for y'all's work on this because it's a lot. We went from 6.9 mills, 6.9-that's a lot. We cut \$5,000,005.8, million off of the budget, so we went from five 6.9 to 5.4. Now, since I've been on the board, I think we've mainly stayed around 5.0 mills. I, to my knowledge, and not we've not gone up on mills. Now this year we did, but it's from 6.9 to 5.4, which I think is pretty significant. Would I've liked to obviously have less, absolutely, but it just it didn't work out that way? I would also like to note that, and I said this at the last meeting. A lot of people talk about our county workforce and our county workforce hasn't changed much in the past 20 years. Even though our county's grown, we tried to keep the same amount of employees, and these services that are provided from sheriff's office to the road department definitely is needed. And I know a lot of people might not agree with that, but if a road's messed up or there needs to be a repair, all we have to do is pick up the phone and call our road department. They're there. Mosquito control department. I can't name all of our departments, but they all work really well together. EOC. I mean, all of our departments. I feel like I'm very, we're very thankful for our county fire departments and what they do every day. So, with that, Chairman, are we in the position to vote? Chairman Jones speaking, yeah, we're still in discussion. Close. Commissioner Croom speaking, you kind of touched on this Commissioner Ward in regard to our services. So, Erin, each department is explaining, I guess you can answer this. Yes, each department can submit, will submit their budgets, and for potential increase in their budget, correct? Mrs. Griffith speaking, correct, yes. Commissioner Croom speaking, so this line item, our Veteran Services system right here has said he doesn't need anything. I'm good. Mrs. Griffith speaking, correct. Commissioner Croom speaking, so I don't need it to be said that we do not support our veterans. So, but I want to say that each every each every one of us, I speak for this. Well, we don't speak for the board. We do board our bed for services, and I have many alts serve in the service. So that perception is incorrect. Anyways, I said I would say this: that director or director of that department of veteran services did not ask for an increase. Mrs. Griffith speaking, that is correct. Chairman Jones speaking, yeah, we actually asked him about it, and he said it didn't. Any other board discussion? All right, back to you.

Mrs. Griffith speaking, we do have two resolutions to adopt.

Chairman Jones speaking, any discussion commissioners? What is the pleasure of

the board?

6. Adoption of 2026-27 Tentative Millage Rate and Budget

- a. Board action to adopt the final 2026-27 millage levy resolution**

**RESOLUTION
FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
RESOLUTION ADOPTING MILLAGE LEVY**

A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, FLORIDA, ADOPTING THE FINAL LEVYING OF AD VALOREM TAXES FOR FRANKLIN COUNTY FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026-2027; PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners of Franklin County, Florida, on September 22, 2026, adopted Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Final Millage Rate following a public hearing as required by Florida statute 200.065, and

WHEREAS the gross taxable value for operating purposes not exempt from taxation within Franklin County has been certified by the County Property Appraiser to the Board of County Commissioners as \$4,068,520,845.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of County Commissioners of Franklin County, Florida, that:

1. The Fiscal Year 2026-2027 operating millage rate for Franklin County is **5.4109** mills, which is greater than the rollback rate of **4.7994** mills by **12.74%**.
2. This resolution shall take effect immediately upon its adoption.

This Resolution DULY ADOPTED at a public hearing this 22nd day of September 2026.

On a motion to approve by Commissioner Croom. Second by Commissioner Ward. ? Chairman Jones speaking, any discussion? All in favor? Aye. Any opposed? That's unanimous. **Motion carried 5-0.**

b. Board action to adopt the final 2026-27 budget resolution

**RESOLUTION
FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
RESOLUTION ADOPTING FINAL BUDGET**

A RESOLUTUION OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, FLORIDA, ADOPTING THE FINAL BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026/2027; PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners of Franklin County, Florida on September 22nd, 2026, held a public hearing as required by Florida Statute 200.065, and

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners of Franklin County, Florida, set forth the appropriations and revenue estimates for the Budget for Fiscal Year 2026/2027 in the amount of \$123,062.063.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of County Commissioners of Franklin County, Florida, that:

1. The Fiscal Year 2026/2027 **Final Budget** be adopted.
2. That copies of this Resolution containing the said budget be spread upon the records of Franklin County, Florida.
3. This resolution shall take effect immediately upon its adoption.

This Resolution **DULY ADOPTED** at a public hearing this 22nd day of September 2026.

On a motion to approve the resolution by Commissioner Sanders, second by Commissioner Croom. ? Chairman Jones speaking, any discussion? All in favor any opposed? It's unanimous. **Motion carried 5-0.**

7. Commissioners' Comments

Chairman Jones speaking, before we go to commissioners' comments, I do want to ask you a question in this area. With this budget, actually, from year to year, how much do we normally carry in some kind of reserve for emergencies or contingencies?

Mrs. Griffith speaking, in the general fund, we budget 1,250,000. I will say, last

year we actually came out of the gate in the first meeting in October last year. We actually came out of the gate and spent 180,000 towards the first responder emergency patch for the system, and we also have to do some amendments actually coming in the next few board meetings regarding transferring out for some of our legal services expenses and some other.

Chairman Jones speaking, the reason I'm asking that is because I know from talking to other counties that are around us, different commissioners from those counties. Watch this meeting knows that we don't have like some other counties that border us. We don't have several million dollars in contingencies. We are trying to run as lean as we can. So that's why I was asking the question.

Mrs. Griffith speaking, yeah, we are fortunate too because the state, the state does know what our economic limitations are, so we have been fortunate where they've been willing to come in and assist more than what they would for some other counties as well. Chairman Jones speaking, yes. Okay. Thank you.

Commissioner Sanders speaking, Mr. Chairman, I always like to reflect back on the story that I tell about Miami-Dade County back in 2005 and 2006 after Hurricane Dennis came through, and we were-I mean-the land burned right out the window, and everybody was all upset throughout the whole state of Florida. Where was it going to come to? Where you know what was going to happen, and all that. I remember Miss Sally Heyman, and she used to be a state representative and a commissioner, you know, down in Miami-Dade County. And she came up to me, and she knew me really well, and she still knows me. And she said, Cheryl, I can tell you, if you need any money for Franklin County, I can loan it to you. We got 175 million dollars in reserves. We don't have that kind of money. They had 100 and that was back in 2006. They had \$175 million in reserves. That's unheard of around here because there's no way that we've got that much stuff generating that much money, and I just said thank you, Miss Sally. And that's how saying the larger county can be kind of hard to deal with sometimes, but when it comes down to it, you know they're going to help you, but the real question is what this amendment three is going to be, and so like we said before, we're going to have to come back and revisit it, and all this stuff that we're looking at and fussing about and talking about now, that may be November 3, that may be a moot point, and so we just need to be mindful of what we may have to do later on, and that's not the world's best job because I've been there before. So, we just got to do what we got to do in those people.

Chairman Jones speaking, that's right. Any other commissioner comments?

Commissioner Ward speaking, Mr. Chairman? I just want to reiterate. Thanks to Erin, Linda, and Danny for getting us this information and working so diligently and hard on, I know it's not an easy task. So, thanks. Chairman Jones speaking, anyone else? Commissioner Amison speaking, I just echo what Commissioner Ward said. You all did a great job. Chairman Jones speaking, all right, Mrs. Erin, that doesn't mean you can just like take off for the next month, but I know the last two and a half have been kind of stressful when you and Linda and everybody else that might be helping and put this all together. Thank you very much. All right, meeting adjourned.

8. Adjournment

There being no further business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned.

Ricky Jones – Chairman

Attest:

Michele Maxwell – Clerk of Courts

The audio is available upon request. Please e-mail jgay@franklinclerk.com, call 850-653-8861 to speak with the Administrative Assistant, or submit a request in writing to obtain audio of this meeting.