

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA
WORKSHOP
Workshop Addressing Homelessness
Tuesday, May 23, 2023
1:00 p.m.**

The Leon County Board of County Commissioners met for a Budget Workshop on Tuesday, May 23, 2023, in the County Commissioner Chambers. Present were Chair Nick Maddox, Vice-Chair Carolyn Cummings, and Commissioners Bill Proctor, Rick Minor, Brian Welch, Christian Caban, and David T. O’Keefe. Also present were County Administrator Vincent Long, County Attorney Chasity O’Steen, Board Secretary Beryl Wood, and Wanda Hunter, Assistant County Administrator.

Vice-Chair Cummings called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the workshop.

County Administrator Long welcomed everyone. He introduced Wanda Hunter, Assistant County Administrator. As requested at the February 21, 2023, Board meeting and in partnership with the Big Bend Continuum of Care, Ms. Hunter introduced a comprehensive report on homelessness in Leon County, including the CoC 2023 Point-In-Time Count on the homeless population. The item also presented the Big Bend Continuum of Care’s five-year 2021-2025 Strategic Plan to address homelessness; detailed the County’s roles, partnerships, and investments; and provided recommendations that would build on efforts to reduce homelessness and its impact on the community. The Workshop involved participation from various organizations, including the Big Bend Continuum of Care, Leon County Sheriff’s Office, and local homeless service providers such as CESC Kearney Center, Family Promise (formerly Big Bend Homeless Coalition), Capital City Youth Services, Refuge House, Brehon Family Services, and Ability 1st.

Various individuals from different organizations were present during the round table. Ms. Hunter acknowledged the attendees, which included the Assistant Sheriff of Leon County, Argatha Gilmore, Mandy Bianchi from Ability 1st, Gwynn Virostek from Capital City Youth Services, Emily Mitchem from Refuge House, Sherlyn Gier from Brehon Family Services, Timika Gilliam from Family Promise of the Big Bend, Vicki Butler from The Kearney Center, and Johnna Coleman from BBCOC (Big Bend Continuum of Care).

Johnna Coleman provided explanation regarding the demographics of the homeless population, including local data and trends. Overall there was a 22% increase compared to 2022, and an increase of 60% compared to 2022 for Unsheltered. The BBCOC Strategic Plan, which was adopted in 2021 consisted of seven (7) priorities, four objectives, 16 strategic actions, and seven (7) performance metrics approved by HUD.

Priorities: Homeless Programs and Services

- Homelessness Prevention
- Diversion
- Street Outreach
- Emergency Shelter Operation
- Rapid Rehousing
- Transitional Housing
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Housing Choice Vouchers

Shington Lamy commented on the partnership with BBCOC. He discussed the recent County investments:

- \$32.5 million investment to prevent and reduce homelessness
- \$6.272 million in ARPA funding, which to-date has resulted in the following:
 - Connect and refer more than 489 unsheltered homeless individuals to services
 - Permanent housing for 51 formerly chronic homeless families
 - Facilitated the return of 116 homeless individuals and families to their home community by paying for transportation costs
- Adopt Strategic Initiatives and Bold Goals to reduce homelessness
- Consideration of \$500,021 from Federal Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency

Challenges: Unsheltered homelessness.

Mr. Lamy presented:

Strategy 1: Enhance public engagement, awareness, and safety to address homelessness better

Strategy 2: Strengthen the capacity of homelessness service providers to reduce homelessness and connect clients to housing

- Allocate \$500,021 in Consistency Funding to providers of emergency homelessness shelter services that reduce unsheltered homelessness and loitering in the community.
- Evaluate options for dedicated line-item funding for emergency homelessness shelters.
- Continue to fund capacity building for nonprofits and faith-based organizations to expand homeless services through Neighborhood Capacity Building Program.

Strategy 3: Increase the stock of affordable housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness

- Continue to fund Permanent Supportive Housing to connect homeless individuals and families to housing.
- Consider a Policy to require affordable rental developments seeking County funding or bond authorization to set aside units for households exiting homelessness.

Staff Recommendation:

Option #1: Accept the report on homelessness in Leon County.

Option #2: In partnership with the City of Tallahassee, amend the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding Agreement with Big Bend Continuum of Care to extend the term and amend the exhibits in the amount of \$345,000 in previously allocated County ARPA funding to the organization, and authorize the County Administrator to execute the amended agreement, subject to legal review by the County Attorney, for the following:

- *The establishment of the Big Bend Continuum of Care Community Engagement Liaison position to regularly engage and educate the community and key stakeholders, such as faith-based organizations, on homelessness.*
- *Continue funding the Street Outreach Program to engage unsheltered homeless individuals and families.*
- *Continue funding Permanent Supportive Housing to place homeless individuals and families in housing.*
- *Continue funding to provide training and technical support to nonprofit and faith-based organizations to expand the local homeless services through the Neighborhood Based Partner Capacity Building.*

Option #3: Continue to support the Sheriff's HOST Deputies with County ARPA funding previously allocated to the Sheriff's Office for the positions.

Option #4: Direct staff to develop a countywide ordinance to make it unlawful to hold a sign or display an advertisement in the median of a road for any reason.

Option #5: Adopt a community campaign to reduce panhandling that includes the establishment signs developed in partnership with the City of Tallahassee and Big Bend Continuum of Care to be placed at medians on select County roads.

Option #6: Allocate an additional \$500,021 in Federal Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency Funding to providers of emergency homeless shelter services that reduce unsheltered homelessness and loitering in the community, and authorize the County Administrator to execute the agreements, subject to legal review by the County Attorney.

Option #7: Direct staff to bring back an agenda item to explore options for long-term and dedicated line-item funding for emergency homeless shelters for FY 2025.

Option #8: Direct staff to develop a draft policy to require affordable rental developments seeking County funding or bond authorization to set aside a portion of the units for individuals or families exiting homelessness.

Chair Maddox discussed the importance of this workshop by the number of people in the room.

Commissioner Minor moved, seconded by Commissioner Caban, to waive the rule for this workshop.

The motion carried 7-0.

Commissioner Caban expressed concerns about two pressing issues that are affecting the public today: public safety and homelessness. He highlighted the increasing number of people relocating to Florida and emphasized the need to explore alternative approaches to address these challenges. Commissioner Caban emphasized the importance of constructing additional housing units and expressed interest in formulating a comprehensive policy that addressed both public safety and homelessness.

Commissioner Welch acknowledged the presence of everyone in the meeting and expressed gratitude to the staff for organizing the agenda and the meeting. He raised a question regarding the PIT count numbers, and Ms. Coleman responded that there were approximately 720 homeless individuals in Leon County. Commissioner Welch further inquired about unsheltered and chronic homelessness, to which Ms. Coleman explained that unsheltered refers to individuals living in cars. Commissioner Welch acknowledged the importance of the recommendations and brought up the issue of response time, expressing a desire for improvement. He suggested that having a designated point of contact would be beneficial in addressing this concern.

Mr. Lamy agreed with Commissioner Welch's concern and emphasized the critical nature of the designated point of contact position. Commissioner Welch clarified that the issue of response time does not apply to sidewalks and highlighted that many panhandlers in the area are not actually homeless but rather transient individuals. He inquired about the enforcement of the City Ordinance on panhandling. County Attorney O'Steen responded that she was unaware of its current enforcement status. Commissioner Welch also raised the topic of affordable housing and suggested expanding the HOST Program by adding more sheriff deputies to provide assistance.

Commissioner Proctor highlighted the recommendations presented by the staff, referring to allocating 1% of the budget to address the homelessness crisis. He mentioned specific figures related to homelessness from both the City and County. Commissioner Proctor requested that the County Government consider establishing a fixed or target number related to addressing homelessness. He mentioned the visit of the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to Tallahassee and characterized homelessness as a racial issue. He raised questions about individuals who are unable to reside on federal property, noting that only Native Americans have that privilege. Additionally, Commissioner Proctor pointed out that organizations had submitted letters addressing the issue of homelessness.

Chair Maddox acknowledged the significant presence of visitors and County officials in the meeting. He recognized that homelessness is a complex issue that extends beyond the purview of a single entity and requires the collaboration of the County and the City. Chair Maddox suggested that allocating additional funds could be a potential solution and emphasized the need to establish measures to address homelessness effectively. He emphasized the importance of a partnership between the County and the City to tackle this issue collectively.

Commissioner Caban referred to the data regarding the Leon County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) receiving approximately 400 calls related to homelessness.

Commissioner Minor expressed gratitude to everyone at the round table and acknowledged their dedicated work, day in and day out. He specifically thanked the City of Tallahassee for their efforts. Commissioner Minor addressed recommendations 6 and 7, emphasizing that their success is crucial in the short term. He highlighted the importance of finding the right funding and suggested that signs could be useful in raising public awareness. He proposed utilizing public service announcements (PSAs) to create awareness to discuss the issue of mental health, expressing a desire to see more creative approaches to addressing it. Commissioner Minor suggested collaborating with the Apalachee Center and exploring the possibility of telehealth appointments.

Mr. Lamy responded positively, stating that they could look into it and mentioned that the City already has a partnership with the Apalachee Center and is currently utilizing existing resources.

Assistant Sheriff Argatha Gilmore stated that they have a holistic approach and a mental health team.

Commissioner Minor commented on recommendation #4 and shared his issue with how it was written on medians. He stated that the key issue is public safety. He asked the County Attorney if data was needed on traffic volumes for an ordinance.

County Attorney O'Steen stated yes, that it is really important to frame this particular issue given the first amendment issue of regulating activity in medians or speech. She commented on the previous ordinance on the books and why they weren't enforcing it. She shared that the answer was because it was unconstitutional, given the U.S. Supreme Court Case, Reed v. Town of Gilbert. The Board previously decided not to move forward with an ordinance because of the HOST deputies and other alternatives the Board wanted to explore. People have associated panhandling with homelessness, and that is why it was included in the agenda material. She clarified that activity in the medians does not correlate to homelessness and, instead, is a public safety issue. As previously stated, most of the people who are panhandling are not homeless. Public safety is the way discussion of any potential ordinance must be framed. It is not to address panhandling. She stated it is public safety, people being prevalent in medians, and they are very narrow. There is a concern about danger. She noted that any ordinance the

Board would adopt would have to be content-neutral. She reiterated that the Board would be regulating speech of any kind in medians. The other issue is that there has to be an in-depth analysis of those public safety concerns, which would require a lot of work from staff to determine and bring back. She stated that if the Board moves with Option 4, part of that would be a deep dive into data associated with medians, use, and accidents.

Chair Maddox recalled panhandlers standing in medians to receive donations and the risk and accidents involved. He shared a story about a person who was asking for money being hit.

Commissioner Cummings addressed the issue of homelessness, specifically focusing on youth and the rapid increase in unsheltered homelessness among them. Mr. Lamy acknowledged the significant nature of the issue and highlighted the challenge of providing resources to this population, emphasizing its criticality. Commissioner Cummings inquired about the priority of allocating half a million dollars to assist children in need. Mr. Lamy explained that these funds would expand the available resources in the community, particularly targeting those who are the first point of contact for homeless individuals and have the necessary expertise to assist them. The ultimate goal is to transition the homeless population into permanent housing. Commissioner Cummings also discussed the matter of panhandling and the relevant ordinance. Mr. Lamy mentioned collaborating with the Continuum of Care (COC) on corridor plans. Commissioner Cummings supported the recommendations, recognizing the need to address this massive problem.

Commissioner O'Keefe expressed gratitude towards the staff and service providers. He specifically mentioned the report's focus on children and the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Ms. Coleman responded by stating that their approach is not to separate families and that they work closely and effectively with service providers to address the needs of homeless individuals and families.

Commissioner O'Keefe acknowledged the significant investment made by the County in public housing and expressed appreciation for the actionable items provided in the report. He raised a question about housing vouchers, specifically referring to the 66 individuals who were currently utilizing such vouchers. Ms. Coleman explained that these were temporary vouchers, and the hope was to convert them into permanent vouchers. Commissioner O'Keefe then brought up the topic of cold night vouchers. He mentioned individuals who face challenges due to poor credit, eviction records, and low income. He inquired about the County's authority to remove or expunge eviction records. Ms. Coleman stated that they have 32 families on the waitlist and 99 individuals on the individual waitlist for housing. Commissioner O'Keefe further discussed the landlord mitigation fund and asked about the willingness of landlords to accept high-risk tenants. Mr. Lamy clarified that this is precisely what the program aims to achieve. Commissioner O'Keefe also mentioned the numbers related to the HOST program and highlighted the challenges outlined in the report, including issues such as public defecation and complaints. He suggested the addition of another HOST Deputy to address these concerns effectively.

Mr. Lamy stated that the extension of the contract with the additional deputy for the HOST program would be possible with the allocation of additional funds.

Chair Maddox addressed the issue of affordable housing, expressing concern. Mr. Lamy said that approximately \$233,000 is allocated for affordable housing. He further emphasized the need for housing units that cater to individuals earning 50% or less of the median income. Chair Maddox agreed and added that wages need to reflect the housing affordability challenges the community faces.

Mr. Lamy addressed the issue of unwanted individuals on private properties, stating that they would be removed. Chair Maddox then shifted the discussion to mental health services, suggesting that incentives could be provided to encourage individuals to take their medications. Ms. Coleman acknowledged the challenges of managing mental health medications and emphasized the importance of long-term housing solutions. Chair Maddox expressed the need for collaboration between housing and mental health services, emphasizing that there is never enough funding to fully address the issue of homelessness.

Commissioner Proctor asked if the round table participants could weigh in on the conversation.

Emily Mitchem highlighted the importance of providing safe and affordable housing options for families transitioning from emergency shelters into permanent housing.

Gwynn Virostek emphasized the need to prioritize the protection of children and acknowledged the existing gap between immediate shelter solutions and affordable housing options. She stressed the importance of focusing on supporting families in finding suitable housing options.

Mandy Bianchi highlighted Ability 1st's focus on assisting individuals, particularly women, women with children, and pregnant women, in finding housing solutions. The dedication lies in supporting these specific populations and helping them secure stable housing.

Assistant Sheriff Gilmore thanked the Sheriff, Walt McNeil, and the HOST Deputies, who were in attendance. She stated the need for more deputies. She reported that the other deputies are now also assisting and reporting to help with the homeless need. She commented that Hope Community and the Big Bend Homeless Coalition are full every night, with a waiting list of 50-70. She stated that anything that the Board could do is appreciated to house families in Leon County.

Vicki Butler, CESC-Kearney Center, talked about balancing ideas. She agreed with the recommendations. She stated they serve those that are 18 and above and protect them.

Commissioner Proctor asked where we go from here. He suggested a referendum item to address the issues with 1% of the County Budget of the public dollar. He congratulated the HOST Deputy units.

Vice Chair Cummings thanked Mr. Lamy, the staff, and partners for the information. She recommended meeting with the City.

County Administrator Long commented that the timing is good. He stated they are currently very close to that number, and ratification could occur.

Commissioner Caban explained his stance on the importance of awareness regarding homelessness and the effects of individuals sleeping on sidewalks. He shared one of his concerns about a child being hit by a car while walking in the road due to individuals sleeping on sidewalks. He stated they are obligated to all Leon County residents to provide basic care and shelter, including the youth and individuals who are camping. Commissioner Caban included, as an additional option, a complete staff analysis for alternative sleeping locations for people who are sleeping in public places and what that fiscal impact would be.

Commissioner Caban moved for a staff analysis of alternative sleeping locations for people who are sleeping in public places and what that fiscal impact would be.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Proctor.

Vice Chair Cummings clarified with Commissioner Caban that he was moving Options 1-8 and adding Option 9.

Commissioner Caban shared it was Board direction but included staff recommendations 1- 8, with an additional item added to it.

County Administrator Long inquired where it was a policy recommendation.

Commissioner Caban explained he wanted staff to run staff analysis for alternative sleeping locations for people sleeping in public spaces and what the fiscal impact would be.

Commissioner Minor added a friendly amendment to Option 4 that it should include supporting data for traffic safety from the ordinance we are trying to pass that it is justified. He explained they could have a legal challenge to an ordinance that we adopt, so we need data justifying what the ordinance is about. He stated he is asking for supportive data to support the ordinance they are contemplating.

Commissioner Caban shared that he would accept that amendment. He provided information from the LCSO that in 2020 overall vehicle crashes involving pedestrians were 205, 2021- 185, and 2022-209, a total of over 600 crashes.

Commissioner Minor conveyed that they had heard some of the information and would still be interested in a breakdown and look at intersections. He shared that the friendly amendment would be for Option number 4, keeping the title the same but added to that some supportive data on traffic safety and traffic volume to help justify the ordinance that we are contemplating.

It was accepted by Commissioner Caban and Commissioner Proctor.

Option #6: Commissioner Minor mentioned the 1% guideline and if it's the most amounts to fund, maybe it is more or less. He recognized that the lack of funding was the main issue. He commented on FRS legislation that didn't pass. He shared the one that did pass would cost the County 3 million dollars. He noted it would be a difficult budget year coming up. He shared the fact reasons to reduce homelessness in Leon County is dependent upon funding. He stated on Option #6 to ask County staff to look at additional options to increase the funding from \$500,000 to another amount; given the County Staff the ability to take a look at what flexibility might be to increase that amount in FY24. He stated for FY25 which is Option #7, they should think about the need going forward.

Commissioner Minor shared his friendly amendment was for Option #6 to ask County Staff inconjunction with budget reviews to what could be done to increase funding for FY24 for merchant services.

Vice-Chair Cummings added the amendment to Commissioner Minor's amendment. Commissioner Proctor commented that he would like that option to be added with two facts: the first being consider an referendum for the public to vote on 1% and the second being an arrangement that they place housing (homelessness) under the Board of County Commission and what that would look like in emphasis in ending human desperation..

Commissioner Minor asked that the motions be kept separate and taken one at a time. Commissioner Caban agreed that the motion had a lot of moving parts and needed to be fine-tuned.

Vice Chair Cummings added that they could take Commissioner Proctor's motion under Board Direction as an item by itself.

The motion returned to the original motion made by Commissioner Caban and seconded by Commissioner Proctor with the amendments made by Commissioner Minor. Then they would entertain Commissioner Proctor's motion as a separate motion.

Commissioner Minor clarified that Commissioner Caban accepted his friendly amendment on Option #4. He still needed to decide whether he would accept Option #6. Commissioner Caban asked for clarity.

Commissioner Minor clarified with Option #6, which deals with funding from the County for Emergency Services Operations. He asked if they could have an agenda item come back during the budget review process or whatever is convenient for staff to look at other options and additional funding to the \$500,000 to allow us to have more resources for the Emergency Service Operations to support the Big Bend CoC Partners and other non- profits. He stated it was just an agenda item that could be in conjunction with the next budget review.

Commissioner Caban agreed to accept both friendly amendments to his motion.

Substitute Motion:

Commissioner O'Keefe offered a substitute motion. He noted the items staff has provided are all actionable items. He stated he was in favor of voting on staff items and then they add additional items. He shared he would not like to sink the great work staff has already complied. Commissioner O'Keefe made a substitute motion that they accept staff recommendations with the exception of modifying Option #6 to have staff bring back more funding that was allocated. He also added in Option #4: to bring back data to support lawfully the ordinance. Commissioner O'Keefe's recommendation was all of staff recommendations with no additions and Commissioner Minors bring data on Option #4 and on Option #6 ask staff to offer more funds if they could find it.

Vice Chair Cummings called for a second and it died for a lack of second.

Commissioner Proctor stated that they don't have to accept the staff recommendations. He shared they had the right to tweak recommendations from the staff and added he felt their views were valued. The lack of funding is still the problem.

The main motion carried 5-1. (Commissioner O'Keefe opposed the motion, and Chair Maddox was out of chambers).

Commissioner Proctor commented that the Presbyterian Church proposed a plan and would like to ask staff to accommodate to expand the reach for homelessness.

Commissioner Minor stated it is worthy, but he is not in favor of recreating the wheel.

Commissioner O'Keefe commented on considering a task force and a 10-year plan.

Commissioner Proctor motioned, seconded by Commissioner Welch, to have staff look at the Presbyterian Church's proposed 10 year plan. The motion carried 5-1. (Commissioner O'Keefe opposed the motion, and Chair Maddox was out of chambers).

Commissioner Proctor motioned, seconded by Commissioner O'Keefe, for the County to dedicate 1% of the County budget to homelessness. He asked staff to draft a voter referendum for 2024, asking the community if homelessness is a big deal to them to commit 1%.

Commissioner Caban clarified if would be an allocation of moving funds in the budget instead of a tax increase.

Commissioner Proctor responded no, it's merely the monies received, that 1% of the already allocated existing funds.

Commissioner Welch inquired if they were asking for an agenda item to come back analyzing what they are already spending and what approximates 1%. He asked if that is something that could be placed on a ballot.

County Administrator Long shared that they are bringing information back to the Board. He stated they have various substantial recommendations that are approaching two million dollars. He shared that they have the additional direction relative to Option 6, relative to a referendum issue. He reiterated that you would generally go to the voters with a referendum to identify a dedicated funding source available to you as a local option in the statute. He stated that was not the case here; there was no available local option. County Administrator Long stated he believed what Commissioner Proctor alluded to was a temperature check with the voters on something that they are already authorized to do without voter approval. He stated that this Board has all the authority to dedicate whatever percentage of reference it determines is appropriate without a referendum or voter authorization. He commented on various recommendations. He stated it sounded like a non-binding referendum. He stated that to go with the referendum, normally, you are seeking bond financing, a general application bond, and you would be seeking local option dedicated revenue. He clarified that none of them were on the table at this point. He clarified that it sounded like you were trying to put something on a referendum the Board already has the authority to do.

Commissioner Proctor shared that he wanted the voters to tell them to proceed. They would not like to do it themselves. We want it justified.

Vice Chair Cummings shared that part of the analysis from staff would be addressing those options.

County Administrator Long noted they already have the option to bring back a budget discussion item, which, combined with the authorization they have received today, including line item funding they are very close to that number. He shared that he is happy to receive any additional direction the Board may have.

The motion carried 6-0. (Chair Maddox out of chambers).

Commissioner O'Keefe discussed an agenda item to create a method to expunge eviction records for citizens in Leon County. He moved for a motion.

Commissioner O'Keefe motioned, seconded by Commissioner Proctor, to have staff bring back an agenda item regarding a method to expunge evictions from citizen's records in Leon County.

Commissioner Minor offered a friendly amendment to include examples that are already in place from around the state.

County Attorney O'Steen stated they would need to explore due to evictions being a civil matter, not a criminal matter, and would not fall under the State Attorney's jurisdiction. She shared that it would involve the court process, and they would need to look into what that would entail and what role the County could play in the process. She reiterated that the County would not run that process.

The motion carried 6-0. (Chair Maddox out of chambers).

Commissioner O'Keefe asked that staff bring back an agenda item converting suitable Leon County facilities that aren't being used to permanent supportive housing. He also wanted to pursue federal funding to turn vacated unused buildings, such as hotels/retail spaces, into permanent supportive housing via seeking federal funding.

Commissioner Caban offered a friendly amendment to also include analysis of alternative housing solutions and direction to staff to further work with the City of Tallahassee to identify pieces of property in the urban services area to be rezoned for dense housing.

Commissioner O'Keefe motioned, seconded by Commissioner Caban, to turn to alternative housing, converting suitable Leon County facilities that aren't being used to permanent supportive housing.

Commissioner Caban offered a substitute motion, seconded by Commissioner O'Keefe, to look into alternative housing solutions and redirect staff to further work with the City of Tallahassee to identify pieces of property in the urban services area to be rezoned for dense housing.

The motion carried 5-0. (Commissioner Proctor and Chair Maddox out of chambers).


Vice Chair Cummings thanked all for their participation and attendance.

Adjourn:


There being no further business to come before the Board, the workshop was adjourned at 4:21 p.m.



BY: _____


Gwendolyn Marshall Knight, Clerk of Court
& Comptroller, Leon County, Florida

BY: _____


Nick Maddox, Chairman
Board of County Commissioners