

County Commissioners unanimously approve tax reduction without reducing County services, projects

Budget includes largest five-year Capital Improvement Plan in Manatee County history, totaling more than \$997 million of investments in infrastructure, public safety, parks and environment over five years

MANATEE COUNTY, FL (Sept. 17, 2021) – Commissioners unanimously approved next year’s budget Tuesday, along with a plan set forth by County Administrator Dr. Scott Hopes which reduces next year’s property tax rate by .20 mills from the Recommended Budget while making significant investments in local roads, infrastructure and public safety. County Commissioners have approved a total annual budget of nearly \$2.2 Billion and net spending of more than \$923 million includes the County’s first property tax cut since 2008.

The Board of County Commissioners also approved the largest five-year Capital Improvement Plan in Manatee County’s history, totaling more than \$997 million dollars of investments in infrastructure, public safety, parks and our environment. The County Commission is investing \$350.3 million in transportation projects, \$80.3 million in parks, and \$39.1 million in public safety projects.

The millage reduction is made possible largely by another year of significant increases in local property values. Under the current tax rate, rising values would have resulted in a \$21 million increase in revenues over the current fiscal year. Instead, Commissioners unanimously approved the .2 mill

reduction which returns \$8.3 million to taxpayers.

Even with the millage reduction, the budget invests heavily in local infrastructure improvements. Nearly \$350.3 million in transportation and road projects, plus significant investments in public safety and law enforcement highlight the \$923 million budget. The adopted budget includes new investments in the County's workforce to respond to increased capital projects workloads and service level levels. Some of the new positions include:

- 14 new Sheriff's Office deputies, one Resource Assistance Program Deputy to focus on homeless issues, one Body Worn Camera Deputy to lead the education and training for new technology, one School Resource Officer for Palm View K-8 school
- 14 new positions in the Building and Development Services Department to respond to increased demand for development review and building inspection services
- 12 new paramedics, several of whom will serve at a new EMS station planned for Moccasin Wallow Road
- One new telecommunicator for 9-1-1, two Customer Services Representatives for 3-1-1 and a Customer Services Representative for 3-1-1 for data entry

"I think Dr. Hopes and (Chief Financial Officer Jan) Brewer have done a fabulous job in this budget. I've got to say thank you for realizing how important it is to make our citizens feel special and we have everything moving in the right direction," said **Commission Chair Vanessa Baugh**. "It is wonderful to be working on such a large infrastructure program to help the traffic congestion in our county because of the population growth and to give the citizens a reduction in millage for the first time since 2008."

"The exciting thing is, we're moving forward on Erie Road, Moccasin Wallow Road and Upper Manatee River Road with tens of millions of dollars of investment but we're still able to deliver a tax cut for the citizens," said District

1 **Commissioner James Satcher.** “Dr. Hopes and Jan Brewer listened to the Board and worked tirelessly to deliver a budget that puts the people’s priorities first.”

“With sidewalks planned for Memphis and Samoset, a new pool at Lincoln Park and improvements underway for Washington Park, I’m excited about all the new impact coming to District 2 through the Capital Improvement Plan,” said District 2 **Commissioner Reggie Bellamy.** “These projects are going to change the face of certain parts of our community and we’re excited about that.”

District 3 **Commissioner Van Ostenbridge** this summer called the tax cut a monumental vote. “Last November voters spoke loud and clear. They wanted traffic congestion and tax cuts to be our top priorities,” Commissioner Van Ostenbridge said. “Our new, more conservative commissioners listened to the voters and came through. We have embarked on an aggressive road improvement campaign while simultaneously cutting taxes. Major road improvements have been budgeted for District 3.”

District 4 **Commissioner Misty Servia** said, “I am pleased with this county budget which will bring stormwater, intersection and safety improvements to South County. I’m also very excited that it focuses on enhancing our quality of life with two new parks and help for the homeless.”

At-Large **Commissioner Carol Whitmore** added, “With the increase in property values, we were fortunate to have \$100 million more than we did last year. With the values on the rise and all the new construction, we were able to lower taxes and leverage a line of credit to get these roads and critical transportation needs going. This has been in our capital plan, but until values reached this level, we were unable to do that, so we are very fortunate.”

At-Large **Commissioner George Kruse** said, “I am extremely excited about this year’s budget. The Board and the

Administration gave proper attention and funding to those areas we know are critically important to the citizens of Manatee County. The substantial, and overdue, increases in public safety and infrastructure will dramatically improve the quality of life and safety of our community for many years to come.”

Some of the highlights include widening from two lanes to four lanes the following major roads across Manatee County:

- Lorraine Road from State Road 64 to 59th Avenue East (\$38.1 million)
- Canal Road from U.S. 301 to U.S. 41 (\$29 million)
- Upper Manatee River Road from State Road 64 to the Fort Hamer Bridge (\$22.7 million)
- Erie Road from Martha Road to U.S. 301 in Parrish (for \$13.1 million)
- 59th Street West from Cortez Road to Manatee Avenue (\$23.4 million)
- 63rd Avenue East from U.S. 301 to Tuttle Avenue (\$16.2 million)
- 75th Street West from 20th Avenue West to Manatee Avenue (\$11.1 million)

Also part of the adopted five-year Capital Improvement Plan is \$8.3 million to improve sidewalks in Memphis, Palma Sola and Bayshore neighborhoods and to invest \$4.2 million next year alone for new sidewalks in Samoset, along Erie Road, 75th Street West and four other new areas to improve pedestrian opportunities throughout Manatee County.

“We have spent a tremendous amount of time preparing for what we have before us both so that we can manage the projects and make constant progress towards completing them but also so we are transparent both with (the Board) and with the public about where these projects are in your districts and in the county in real time,” Dr. Hopes said. “I think you’ll be very pleased and impressed with how we intend to engage and inform

you on the progress of massive project deployment in Manatee County. You are seeing things move in the county at a rate in the county that you haven't seen in some time. We are going to get a lot of things done.”

The largest one-year investment in the budget remains in the areas of law enforcement and public safety. Manatee County Sheriff Rick Wells' annual budget will increase by \$12.6 million to cover funding for the aforementioned 14 new deputies, an additional patrol boat to expand marine responses, one Resource Assistance Program Deputy to focus on homeless issues, one Body Worn Camera Deputy to lead the education and training for new technology, one School Resource Officer for Palm View K-8 school (shared cost with the School District) and one Domestic Violence Unit Detective.

“This budget places a high priority on our citizens' and visitors' safety,” Dr. Hopes said earlier this summer. “In partnership with Sheriff Wells, we have identified an increased investment to meet the safety needs of our rapidly growing population.”



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