



Indian River County, Florida

Indian River County
Administration Complex
1801 27th Street
Vero Beach, Florida 32960
indianriver.gov

Meeting Minutes - Final

Board of County Commissioners

Joseph Flescher, District 2, Chairman

Deryl Loar, District 4, Vice Chairman

Susan Adams, District 1

Joseph H. Earman, District 3

Laura Moss, District 5

John A. Titkanich, Jr., County Administrator

Jennifer W. Shuler, County Attorney

Ryan L. Butler, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller

Monday, August 11, 2025

1:00 PM

Commission Chambers

Budget Workshop re: Indian River County Sheriff's Office FY2025/2026

1. CALL TO ORDER

Present: 5 - Chairman Joseph Flescher
Vice Chairman Deryl Loar
Commissioner Susan Adams
Commissioner Joe Earman
Commissioner Laura Moss

2.A. A MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION FOR FIRST RESPONDERS AND MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES

2.B. INVOCATION

Rev. Dale Glading, Risk Takers for Christ

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Susan Adams

4. CONTINUATION OF BUDGET WORKSHOP - SHERIFF'S OFFICE BUDGET

Chairman Flescher opened the continuation of the Budget Workshop for the Sheriff's Office budget. He noted the unprecedented nature of holding a second workshop and could not recall a similar event in recent history. While the County maintained good financial standing, Chairman Flescher expressed concerns about uncertain economic challenges in the upcoming fiscal year and urged a cautious approach. He addressed the Budget Workshop meeting that took place on July 9, 2025. During the discussion, he recognized the Deputies who shared personal accounts of their financial challenges, including their experiences with government food assistance and taking home leftover school lunches to support their families. Chairman Flescher expressed concerns regarding the validity of these claims. He maintained that while law enforcement officers deserved fair compensation, budget limitations had to be considered. Chairman Flescher stated that it was implied that the County Commissioners were unsympathetic to law enforcement. The Chairman noted his colleagues' backgrounds in Law Enforcement and Fire Services, asserting that everyone on the Board valued and supported law enforcement. He rejected the notion that the Commissioners did not favor law enforcement. He emphasized the need to balance obligations to taxpayers and the larger community of over 170,000 citizens who faced financial hardships.

A letter received from Sheriff Flowers before the start of the meeting was read into the record by Chairman Flescher. He acknowledged the Sheriff's absence from the workshop but conveyed his respect for the Sheriff's prior commitments.

[Clerk's note: the letter from Sheriff Flowers is on file in the Clerk to the Board office.]

County Administrator John Titkanich summarized the Budget Workshop with a PowerPoint presentation. The proposed budget for the Sheriff's Office totaled \$83,646,672, reflecting a \$4,734,717 or 6% increase from the previous year. He emphasized that the discussion today was focused on managing the proposed increase rather than reducing the Sheriff's budget. During the July 9, 2025, meeting, the Board directed the Administrator to identify additional funding for the Sheriff's Office without raising the millage rate. The Sheriff's Office had initially requested a \$14.6 million increase, which would have resulted in a total budget of \$93.5 million.

Administrator Titkanich reported on ongoing efforts to address budgetary constraints. In a recent meeting, the Sheriff and Administrator discussed a revised budget increase of approximately \$6 million, compared to the earlier proposal of \$4.7 million. On July 23, 2025, the Sheriff submitted a \$91.1 million budget, representing a \$12.2 million or

15.5% increase.

Administrator Titkanich identified sources of additional funding through proposed reductions, including eliminating a full-time Parks Department position, reducing Conservation Lands staff, and converting a Guest Services Attendant position to part-time. The Facilities Master Plan would be managed internally by the Facilities Manager and two directors. Funding for the Humane Society would also be reduced, as the County anticipated that the animal sheltering contract might not require payment for the entire year in full.

Administrator Titkanich reported that funds were allocated to entities such as the Courts and Mental Health Services to support individuals with mental health needs, including those requiring hospitalization under the Baker Act. The Court Administration requested nearly \$151,994 in revised budget funding. The Hospital District was still preparing to vote on its budget for Mental Health Services related to the Mental Health Court. He noted that the Sheriff's Department accounted for 52.3% of the budget. His presentation compared budget requests over the past four years, with \$21.8 million in approved funding. He cited previous years with limited budgets, such as 2022, when \$2.9 million was allocated, and an additional \$7.3 million was provided, including funds from the Emergency Relief Package. He stated that the Board consistently prioritized public safety, particularly support for the Sheriff's office. He also provided an overview of salary increases for Civilian Staff and Law Enforcement Officers over the past three years.

Vice Chairman Loar requested clarification regarding the potential outcomes if the Sheriff did not receive the requested funding, highlighting uncertainty in the decision-making process. Administrator Titkanich agreed to draft a formal letter but stated that providing specific information was premature because the Board had not yet approved of the budget. The review of the proposed budget and millage rate was scheduled for September 10, 2025, with final approval planned for September 17, 2025. Following approval, a letter would be prepared based on the finalized funding details for the Sheriff's office, which currently did not meet the requirements specified by Florida Statute 30.49, Chapter 4.

Chairman Flescher and Administrator Titkanich discussed proposed salary increases for the Sheriff's department staff, with estimates of \$9,000 for deputies and \$3,500 for civilian employees. The discussion addressed concerns regarding potential deputy departures, although the Sheriff had asserted that the department maintained adequate staffing levels. Chairman Flescher supported implementing gradual salary increases to promote safety and minimize taxpayer burden. In contrast, reports indicated that the Sheriff opposed a phased approach. This exchange highlighted uncertainties regarding

the financial implications of increased personnel costs for taxpayers.

Vice Chairman Loar emphasized that it was misleading to assert that the Board was cutting the Sheriff's budget. He explained that although the Board was reducing the Sheriff's initial request, the overall budget was increasing by more than 6%. To clarify, the Board was not cutting the Sheriff's budget; it was merely adjusting his request. He pointed out that the Board was making a significant increase from last year's budget.

Chairman Flescher stressed the need to meet ad valorem tax revenue targets to ensure adequate funding for services. He noted that the Sheriff's request of over \$12 million would significantly impact the overall budget. He also underscored the responsibility to serve more than 170,000 residents and support over 1,000 County employees. He requested that the Administrator clarify the budget figures for the upcoming year in comparison to last year.

Administrator Titkanich cautioned that fully funding the Sheriff's budget request could reduce support for other essential services, including Natural Resources, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Community Services, and Libraries. With a \$3.6 million shortfall, these areas faced potential layoffs and service reductions. The discussion also addressed the 2030 mandate to transition from septic to sewer systems, which was expected to cost the County approximately \$500 million in public infrastructure. About 70% of the General Fund was already committed to mandatory expenses for Constitutional Offices and State Agencies, underscoring the need for careful financial planning.

Commissioner Earman commended the County Administrator and Budget Director for their management of the Sheriff's office and Emergency Services during periods of financial constraint. He criticized the Sheriff for presenting budget reductions in a misleading manner, clarifying that the actual budget was \$78 million. Commissioner Earman questioned the necessity of zero-based budgeting to ensure adequate funding for essential services while also noting his preference for incremental budgeting based on historical financial data. Administrator Titkanich indicated that zero-based budgeting would be implemented selectively in response to current economic challenges. Commissioner Earman raised concerns regarding the proposed \$12 million budget increase by the Sheriff, characterizing it as excessive in the absence of prior consultation. He recommended a budget increase of \$6 to \$7 million and emphasized the need for transparent communication to prevent the spread of misinformation. Although he supported salary increases for Deputies, he advocated for a phased implementation. Commissioner Earman further stated that if the Sheriff persisted with the higher budget proposal, the issue would require escalation to State Authorities in Tallahassee.

Chairman Flescher stated he had not had a private meeting with the Sheriff about his budget, which was unusual. He addressed concerns about misinformation, saying many comments at the Budget Workshop meeting were not true. He commented that there were no Deputies at the UP Center and no significant movement of officers to other jurisdictions, contrary to reports. Regarding the claim that school lunches were being taken for families, it was not happening. He added that while this might have sounded good for media stories, it did not reflect the actual situation.

Commissioner Adams stated that the additional funding proposed by Administrator Titkanich for the Sheriff's budget would enable a targeted focus on payroll increases. This allocation constituted a significant increase compared to the current budget and was expected to facilitate the Sheriff's ability to address primary operational priorities. The increased resources would provide the Sheriff with flexibility to allocate funds toward employee salaries, technology upgrades, or other essential departmental needs.

Commissioner Moss emphasized that the Sheriff's request aimed to serve the community. She advocated on behalf of the deputies. Although a 6% budget increase was proposed, this amount would not meet the Sheriff's original request. She stressed the foundational role of law and order in supporting governmental operations and cultural institutions. Commissioner Moss indicated a willingness to consider additional budget reductions to achieve a 6.852% increase.

Chairman Flescher and Administrator Titkanich discussed budget cuts affecting various services, especially funding for the Mental Health Court and Animal Services. They raised concerns that reduced staffing and resources could harm community services, including Animal Control and Road Maintenance. Administrator Titkanich noted the lack of a Master Plan for County facilities but said specific responsibilities would be managed in-house to reduce costs. Administrator Titkanich also warned that delaying road resurfacing could result in significantly higher repair costs in the future.

The Chairman opened the floor for public comment.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Miguel Duran, of International Consultant & Representative, Inc., emphasized the importance of safety, security, and essential resources for survival. He highlighted the urgent need to develop infrastructure to maintain a reliable water supply, warning that current wells were depleting and that drilling new ones could cost \$20 million if the aquifer wasn't replenished. Mr. Duran mentioned modern technology that could connect properties to water systems without the need to remove septic tanks, making access more feasible for property owners. He also warned that neglecting infrastructure needs could lead to catastrophic failures.

Retired Captain with the Indian River County Sheriff's office, Tony Consalo, raised concerns about the rising taxes that residents have faced over the years, emphasizing the need for transparency and accountability in the Sheriff's budget. He pointed out specific areas where he believed cuts could be made, such as a \$50,000 request for surveillance cameras at the Oslo Interchange that would not be completed until 2027, and a \$1.2 million budget for inmate food that he argued could be reduced based on comparisons with other counties.

Mr. Consalo addressed Chairman Flescher regarding remarks made at the beginning of the meeting. He conveyed his discontent with the Chairman's decision to bring up the issue of food stamps, clarifying that those comments had originated from a Deputy with a disabled child, not from the Sheriff. Mr. Consalo highlighted that the Chairman's insinuation of doubt surrounding those statements suggested that the Law Enforcement Officer might not have been truthful. He also referenced another comment regarding someone taking food home from school. Mr. Consalo expressed his worries about the Chairman's assertion that such occurrences were not happening, explaining that when the Chairman made claims like these, it diminished the credibility of those who had come forward to report their experiences. He cautioned that this could establish a hazardous precedent and emphasized that discussions of this nature should be handled with more sensitivity. He expressed his gratitude for the support law enforcement received and highlighted the Board's dedication to the community. He stressed the importance of acknowledging law enforcement's role in maintaining community safety and fostering understanding, which in turn strengthened community ties.

Chairman Flescher addressed Mr. Consalo's accusations, stating that he never claimed they had lied, nor did he suggest that the Sheriff made certain statements. Chairman Flescher expressed that there was no intent to cast aspersions and apologized if it seemed that way.

Chairman Flescher inquired whether the Board had reached a consensus. to maintain the current budget request, or consider the proposed increase, which required reductions in other areas.

Administrator Titkanich recommended maintaining the \$6 million budget, a 7.6% increase and \$1,265,283 more than his initial proposal. Commissioner Moss supported a higher increase of \$6,861,517, or 8.7%. Commissioners Adams, Commissioner Earman, Vice Chairman Loar, and Chairman Flescher all supported the County Administrator's recommendation.

Administrator Titkanich stated that the preliminary Budget Hearing, where the Board would set the millage rate, would be held on September 10, 2025, at 5:01 p.m.

6. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 2:36 p.m.