

Government Meeting Assignment

Seminar in Public Libraries

LIS 6445

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The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) meeting was held on Thursday, September 7, 2023, at 2:00 PM and a public hearing was held at 6:00 PM. The BCC consists of 7 County Commissioners, four of which are from single-member districts. In addition to the 7 County Commissioners, the County Administrator, County Attorney, and Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller were also present at the meeting. The BCC is the “elected body that oversees your Pinellas County Government” ([www.pinellas.gov](http://www.pinellas.gov)). Per the State Constitution, the board adopts local laws, approves county budgets, sets tax millage rates, and governs unincorporated areas of the county. They are not in charge of the school system’s budget or policies. I was unable to attend in person, therefore, I watched the recording of the proceedings posted on the Pinellas.gov website. Never having attended or watched a BCC meeting previously, I was not sure what to expect. The first part of the meeting was discussion of business around the county and the public hearing portion discussed proposed millage rate adjustments and budget for the Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24). Within the general meeting, no library matters were discussed. During the public hearing which discussed proposed tax millage rates and budget, the Pinellas Public Library Cooperative (PPLC) was identified as well as the East Lake Library District, which is also part of the cooperative for services but has separate funding, and Palm Harbor Community Service District.

The meeting was held in a large room within a government office building in Clearwater, FL. As I was watching a video recording, I could not tell how many constituents were present. The space was set up in a U-shaped table with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the proceedings at the base of the U-shaped table. There was a podium in the open portion of the U-shaped table for invited attendees or members of the public to speak. There were multiple occupied desks outside the U-shaped table for members of the commissioners’ staff to take notes or assist. The Chair ran the meeting agenda, presented motions, and solicited votes of the other members. The meeting started with roll call, an invocation, and pledge of allegiance. Next item on the agenda was presentation and awards. There were no awards at this meeting. A brief presentation from the General Manager of Tampa Bay Water, Charles Carden, was given. Mr. Carden discussed an overview of water services for the Tampa Bay Area, an update on water services, projected population growth, rebate programs to decrease demand, projected supply need, expansion plans, and a master water plan.

The next item on the agenda was “citizens to be heard.” This gave constituents of Pinellas County an opportunity to address the board with any issues. This can be done in person or via Zoom call. During this meeting, 2 people addressed the board. One had a grievance about a building permit and was looking for an administrative exemption. The second speaker read a constitutional article regarding water levy within the county. The speakers were given 3 minutes each to speak. The issues and comments presented were not addressed by the Commissioners. The next agenda item was “consent agenda – items 3-10”. At this point all members voted to consent to the agenda then they moved on. The next agenda items discussed and voted on were approval for placement of sidewalks and street signs in a residential subdivision; approval of Trane US Inc. for energy plant maintenance; approval of Tourist Development Council’s recommendation revisions to Capital funding; approval for Palm Harbor Historical Society funding request to install “historically appropriate front entry door and design of entry features” to the museum; approval to Palm Harbor Merchant Association to purchase generators, event

tents, barricades, storage cart, and enclosed trailer; approval of Personal Enrichment Through Mental Health (PEMHS) to support the county in mental health issues; approval of “federally funded sub-award and grant agreement with the State of Florida, Division of Emergency Management for reimbursement through FEMA for public safety costs relate to the response to Hurrigan Nicole”; and adoption of the resolution to establish Pinellas County General Fund Reserve Policy at 20.8% of recurring revenue (<https://pinellas.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>). All these items were approved and passed by a unanimous vote. The only item of discussion was the recommendation to decrease the amount of reserve funds to 16.7% to coincide with national best practices. This was more of a comment for the future as opposed to changing the current item.

The meeting continued with the Clerk of the Circuit court presenting an adoption to a change of the county’s investment policy, which passed. The County Attorney discussed proposed litigation items with required approval of the board, all of which passed. The County Commission approved appointments to the Youth Advisory Board. The final topic in the general meeting was the most interesting and timely considering the recent storm surge damage related to Hurricane Idalia. The Board was presented with not only previous erosion concerns, which has been slowly taking place on the county’s beaches (of which funding and planning had already been in place), they were also shown photographs of destroyed dunes, beaches, homes, and beachfront property related to storm surge from the recent hurricane. A lengthy discussion entailed the number of claims from homes, FEMA, the Army Corps (who help finance coastlines), and how to go about fixing the beaches. Discussion entailed not only recovery, but long-term sustainability and prevention.

This general meeting ended with each Commissioner thanking people and companies for any efforts regarding helping the county. They then discussed committee events or meetings they attended or any upcoming meetings they have scheduled with industries or organizations around the county. They then adjourned the meeting and had a break before the public hearing session regarding the tentative millage rates and budgets for FY24. Reflecting on the general meeting, I found the topics up for discussion and approval were varied. I was disappointed there were not specific topics about the libraries of the county. The closest to a library discussion was the approval of the Palm Harbour Historical Society’s appeal for funding for a “historically appropriate door.” The accurate presentation of a cultural heritage center is important for the public to get a true taste of history. The commissioners did not discuss much about the approval of agenda items except for the reserve fund amount (which was more of a comment for further discussion later) and the ways to get funding and work cooperatively with outside agencies for the repair and maintenance of our beaches. Overall, the meeting had a cooperative atmosphere, and the members were very respectful of the views and opinions of the other members.

The next part of the meeting was the Public Hearing, which proposed tentative millage rates and budgets for FY24. I am going to start off by saying there were many technical budgetary and financial terms I am not familiar with. I felt at the end I was able to follow most of what they discussed; however, I still have some unanswered questions. This meeting seemed a bit more formal than the general meeting in that there was specific verbiage which needed to be spoken by the chair and the County Administrator as per the state law. This section also started with the opportunity for citizens to speak. One woman discussed the hardships of the area due to the increase in prices with hope to maintain millage rates as they are for FY23. The Chair then discussed the MSTUs, which are funds for the county's unincorporated areas. An MSTU is defined as “geographic areas of unincorporated Pinellas County that

receive specific government services, including law enforcement, recreational services and facilities, and other essential municipal programs” ([www.pinellas.gov](http://www.pinellas.gov)). Overall, there appears to tentatively be an 8.4% increase in millage secondary to general cost of living and a rise in overall pricing. There were areas of the library system singled out for a millage rate increase. These included the PPLC, Eastlake Library Development, and the Palm Harbor Community Services District. There was much more discussion regarding the issues in this portion of the meeting. In addition to the cost of living and rising costs in general, the county was issued four unfunded mandates, totaling approximately \$21 million, from the state.

There was much discussion from the Commissioners regarding the increased millage rates and budget. Some were for the increase, but others could not support the proposed increase. The Sherriff's department had the biggest funding increase; however, most agreed with public safety being of utmost importance. There was discussion regarding transparency of the increase to the Sherriff's department with the public to help justify the need for millage rate increase. Unfortunately, one of the suggestions to help decrease the budget was to cut the funding to the PPLC, Eastlake Library Service District, and Palm Harbor Community Services District by \$15,000. At the final budget hearing, which is scheduled for Tuesday, September 19, 2023, all MSTU resolutions must be agreed upon by a unanimous vote. It is upsetting that the only place presented to cut costs was the libraries.

The county's libraries funding falls under the Pinellas Public Library Cooperative (PPLC), except Palm Harbor Community Services District and the East Lake Library Services District, which have a separate county budget line. The PPLC was founded in 1989, the first in the state. It was formed by the BCC and the 14 municipalities within the cooperative who have public libraries. “The purpose of the cooperative shall be to extend library services to unincorporated areas of the County and of participating municipalities that do not have such services, and to improve library services to citizens of municipalities and of library tax districts that have library services,”

(<https://pinellas.granicus.com/boards/w/3178b62d4a386a9d/boards/7666>). The PPLC is “funded by millage levy in a portion of unincorporated areas of the county and per capita dues paid by participating municipalities without libraries,” ([pinellas.gov/libraries/](http://pinellas.gov/libraries/)). The population service area for the PPLC is 960,794 as per 2021 data from The Insititute of Museum and Library Services ([www.ims.gov](http://www.ims.gov)). The PPLC is run by the Executive Director, who reports to the PPLC Board of Directors. The Executive Director is the liaison between the individual libraries and the county government. Together with the PPLC Board and the individual library directors, the Executive Director works with local government officials to discuss issues pertaining to libraries ([www.pplc.us/about](http://www.pplc.us/about)). The library board and PPLC have a “interlocal agreement with the government units and other appropriate providers of library services with the county in order to establish a nonprofit cooperation ("cooperative") to be created for the administration and operation of a cooperative library services system” (<https://library.municode.com/>, sec. 78-2). The PPLC does not have a Friends of the Library group, but each branch has their own Friend's group to support and advocate for their individual library. The PPLC is important to me because I live in an unincorporated Pinellas County area. I find myself going to various libraries depending on what I am looking for.

Within the county budget, the PPLC falls under the line item “support fund” or MSTU. The PPLC is funded by a millage levy in unincorporated areas of the county and per capita dues by municipalities without libraries ([pinellas.gov](http://pinellas.gov)). According to law, the millage levy for the PPLC cannot exceed 0.5 mills. In addition to the county, the PPLC receives funding from state and federal sources and is eligible to

receive State Aid to Libraries Grant Fund. As per an audit completed in 2018 by Pinellas County Auditors (Collazo, 2016), a portion of the budget goes to commissions for the Tax Collector and Property Appraiser. The PPLC is responsible for dispensing funds to the 14 participating libraries. The annual operating budget for the PPLC for FY23 was \$7,557,650. This was an increase of 11.2% over FY22. The tentative proposed budget for FY24 is \$8,685,900, an increase of 12.9%. I was able to watch the BCC public video of the adoption of the final budget which took place September 19, 2023. After much discussion on ways to cut the budget, discussions about the state mandate which added an unfunded \$21 million dollars to the budget, and opinions from citizens (many of whom reinforced the need to continue funding to the libraries), the BCC was unable to agree on where budget cuts should come from. Therefore, during the final vote, the proposed budget for not only the general fund, but for the MSTU, of which the libraries are part, was approved.

Reflecting on the meetings I viewed, I found the process surprisingly interesting, particularly the budget portion. It is a challenging task to plan funding for an entire county. The Commissioners did an excellent job of discussion of their thoughts and opinions, they took the citizens views into account, discussed their rationale for either agreeing or disagreeing with a motion, and had the county's best interests in mind including the citizens.

## References

Collazo, H. (Dec. 2018). Audit of Pinellas Public Library Cooperative Operations and Internal Controls. *Division of Inspector General: Ken Burke, CPA, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller, Pinellas County, FL.* [https://www.pinellasclerk.org/Portals/0/Inspector%20General/rpts/2018/508\\_RPT2018-33.pdf](https://www.pinellasclerk.org/Portals/0/Inspector%20General/rpts/2018/508_RPT2018-33.pdf).

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Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners Agenda (Sept. 7, 2023). County Administrator Departments. <https://pinellas.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>.

Pinellas County Website. Pinellas County Board of Commissioners. <https://pinellas.gov/pinellas-county-board-of-county-commissioners/>.

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Pinellas Public Library Cooperative. About PPLC. <https://pplc.us/about/>.

Pinellas County Library Cooperative, Inc.  
<https://pinellas.granicus.com/boards/w/3178b62d4a386a9d/boards/7666>.