

**Budget Hearings #42 - 2025**  
**Fairfield County Commissioners' Office**  
**October 13, 2026**

Commissioner Davis called the Budget Hearing Session to order at 11:00 a.m. with the following Commissioners also in attendance: David Levacy and Steve Davis. Also present: Aundrea Cordle, Jeff Porter, Rochelle Menningen, Bennett Niceswanger, Bart Hampson, Staci Knisley, Taylor Forquer, and Jon Kochis. Attendees of specific hearings are listed in their respective section of the minutes.

Each hearing has a corresponding Budget Summary and Excel spreadsheet that are included with the minutes.

**Budget Hearing, Board of Elections, 11:00 a.m.**

Jane Hanley and Tara Graham were also in attendance for the Board of Elections Budget Hearing.

Commissioner Davis explained the budget hearing process, noting that Budget Director Bart Hampson would provide a budget overview, each agency would have an opportunity to explain its proposed budget, and Deputy County Administrator Jeff Porter would review merit increases and insurance.

Bart Hampson discussed raises for part-time employees that were not included in the merit-based increases, as well as unemployment and election and precinct costs.

Deputy County Administrator and HR Director Jeff Porter reviewed performance evaluations and merit-based pay increases, providing supervisors with reference material for their evaluations.

Commissioner Levacy questioned the overall budget increase of 7.9% and asked for an explanation of the increase in advertising costs.

Jane Hanley explained that 10 employees would meet the requirements for the fifth election in 2027 and that the Ohio Revised Code establishes the applicable rate. She also noted that statutory advertising requirements contribute to the costs.

Commissioner Levacy spoke about a needed reevaluation of the advertisement requirement in the R.C.

Hanley noted that advertising in *The Columbus Dispatch* costs approximately three times as much as the *Lancaster Eagle Gazette*.

Commissioner Davis stated that the increase needed to be 12% and could be adjusted administratively.

**Budget Hearing, Engineer, 11:15 a.m.**

Engineer Jeremiah Upp was also in attendance for the Engineer Budget Hearing.

Hampson reported slight increases in the budget related to the Transportation Improvement District (TID) and carpeting needed at the Engineer's Office.

Engineer Upp added that there was also a discussion on tile on the side of the building.

Porter reviewed performance evaluations and merit-based pay increase information.

Aundrea Cordle stated that HR staff is a great resource for the performance evaluation process.

Engineer Upp thanked everyone for their support through the budget process.

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Commissioner Levacy expressed appreciation for the maintenance of county roads and asked about the decision to install carpeting.

Engineer Upp stated that he and Jon Kochis would discuss carpeting versus hard flooring.

Commissioner Fix expressed appreciation for the Engineer's Office and its assistance to villages and townships.

Commissioner Davis asked whether the suspension of the gas tax would directly affect funding for the Engineer's Office and whether additional funding would be available to maintain current funding levels.

Engineer Upp stated that the Ohio Department of Transportation's (ODOT) funding should remain whole.

**Budget Hearing, Common Pleas Court, 11:30 a.m.**

Joshua Horachek and Brian Wolfe were also in attendance at the Common Pleas Court Budget Hearing.

Hampson expressed appreciation for Horachek and Wolfe and their work on the budget. He discussed TCAP funding costs and anticipated vacation payouts for 2027.

Porter reviewed performance evaluations and merit-based pay increase information.

Commissioner Levacy asked whether civil filings had increased significantly.

Horachek reported that civil cases had increased by 14%, criminal cases by 10%, and protection orders by 13%.

Commissioner Levacy noted that the increase was below the established parameters.

Horachek thanked the Commissioners for their assistance and explained that civil cases and protection orders continue to increase. He noted that the Court may need to consider adding a magistrate in the future, potentially by eliminating an existing position and replacing it with a magistrate position.

Commissioner Davis asked the Court to continue working with the Administration on budget matters.

**Budget Hearing, Regional Planning Commission, 11:45 a.m.**

Holly Mattei and Kelsey Miller were also in attendance for the Regional Planning Commission Budget Hearing.

Hampson reported that the Regional Planning Commission's base budget would remain unchanged at \$200,000. The Commission requested that an additional \$75,000 be included in the 2027 budget for the housing study.

Cordle asked Mattei whether she had considered how long she planned to remain in her current position.

Mattei stated that bringing Miller onto the team had been beneficial and that she would like to reevaluate the situation at the end of 2027.

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Cordle also asked about the status of the artificial intelligence (AI) contract.

Mattei reported that progress had been hindered by the vendor's lack of availability to work with Regional Planning.

Commissioner Fix asked whether the primary challenge was the time required to review plans.

Cordle explained that the program is intended to review plans before submission so that potential issues can be addressed in advance. However, the vendor has delayed ensuring that the system functions as intended. She added that the County had considered hiring someone in-house but had been unable to do so.

Mattei noted that plans for current development would be increasing, making the technology an even greater priority.

Porter reviewed performance evaluations and merit-based pay increase information.

**Recess**

With no further business, on the motion of Steve Davis and the second of David Levacy, the Board of Commissioners voted to move to recess at 11:57 p.m.

Roll call vote of the motion resulted as follows:

Voting aye thereon:

**Budget Hearing, Recorder, 12:30 p.m.**

Recorder Lisa McKenzie was also in attendance for the Recorder Budget Hearing.

Hampson reported that the proposed budget was 18.5% higher than the 2026 budget due to changes in vacation payouts, a position description change, and health insurance costs.

Recorder McKenzie discussed the new Preservation Fund and proposed hiring a part-time employee to scan additional documents and books. The position would be funded entirely through the Preservation Fund. She also noted that she had recently promoted an employee to a supervisory role and was considering restructuring the position in the future to establish a Chief Deputy Recorder role.

Hampson added that a report was available detailing revenue and expenses associated with the Preservation Fund.

Commissioner Davis thanked Recorder McKenzie and asked that she keep in contact with administration.

Porter reviewed performance evaluations and merit-based pay increase information.

**Budget Hearing, Clerk of Courts, 12:45 p.m.**

Clerk of Courts Branden Meyer was also in attendance for the Clerk of Courts Budget Hearing.

Hampson discussed salaries, Records Center staff, Title Office vacation payouts, anticipated retirements, and health insurance changes and elections. He also noted an increase in copier expenses and an anticipated Title Office surplus of \$150,000.

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Clerk of Courts Meyer reported that passport activity was slowing. The Title Office collects approximately \$65 million annually. Driver's examination collections had decreased because an examiner was not available. The Legal Help Center was experiencing a significant number of family-related matters. Meyer noted that no significant operational changes were anticipated for 2027.

Porter reviewed performance evaluations and merit-based pay increase information.

Commissioner Fix expressed appreciation for the proposed transfer of \$150,000 and asked Meyer whether he would be comfortable increasing the amount to \$250,000.

Commissioner Davis asked how retained funds were identified and distinguished from surplus funds.

Clerk of Courts Meyer stated that he would meet with Staci to discuss the surplus and the use of the law library for meeting space.

**Budget Hearing, Information Technology, 1:00 p.m.**

Daniel Neeley was also in attendance for the Information Technology Budget Hearing.

Hampson reviewed the proposed IT budget increases, which were primarily driven by the addition of a Deputy Director position. Other increases included technology upgrades and fuel costs for the department's newly acquired vehicle.

Neeley stated that the new Deputy Director had been an instrumental addition to the team and had strengthened the management of the IT Department. He also expressed support for Joe Neibert's continued professional growth, particularly in security.

Porter reviewed performance evaluations and merit-based pay increase information.

**Budget Hearing, Safety & Security, 1:45 p.m.**

Daniel Neeley, Garrett Blevins, and Jason Grubb were also in attendance for the Safety & Security Budget Hearing.

Hampson discussed a year-over-year decrease in the budget.

Cordle spoke about importance of taking a comprehensive rather than piecemeal approach to security planning.

Commissioner Davis asked whether access to the security systems was controlled and if security footage was retained.

Neeley indicated that full access was limited to law enforcement personnel and staff who required it for their duties. The discussion indicated that footage was generally retained for 30 days.

Kochis explained that footage flagged within that 30-day period could be retained in the system.

Porter reviewed performance evaluations and merit-based pay increase information.

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**Budget Hearing, Emergency Management Agency, 1:15 p.m.**

Garrett Blevins, Daniel Neeley, and Jason Grubb were also in attendance for the Emergency Management Agency Budget Hearing.

Kochis explained that the budget includes an allocation to provide matching funds for grants. He noted that this would be the first year the agency was projected to operate at a deficit, which reflected federal grant funding rather than a reduction in the County's contribution.

Kochis also provided an update on the new mobile command unit, which was nearing completion. He emphasized that the ability to accommodate a conference area within the unit remained an important component of EMA operations.

Blevins reported that EMA had worked with the Engineer's Office to pursue a grant for a large pump, but the grant application was unsuccessful. He added that EMA frequently receives requests from other entities to borrow equipment and attempts to accommodate those requests when possible.

Porter reviewed performance evaluations and merit-based pay increase information.

**Budget Hearing, Facilities, 1:30 p.m.**

Jason Grubb was also in attendance for the Facilities Budget Hearing.

Hampson discussed increases in materials and supplies, TAXCLOTH expenses, and fuel costs.

Commissioner Davis discussed attending an electric aggregation meeting in Newark and the ability of eligible participants to opt out of the aggregation program.

Cordle explained that Palmer Energy is willing to handle calls related to the community aggregation program, which is available to certain villages and townships. She noted that the program applies only to some communities because certain cities operate their own aggregation programs.

Kochis discussed upcoming capital projects and potential programming costs at the Workforce Center (WFC). He also noted that evaluations were underway for the Records Center and Hall of Justice, with the Baldwin building also being evaluated. The DACO building requires an elevator and foundation repairs estimated to cost more than \$30,000. Additional requests at the DACO building were also discussed.

Cordle stated that \$32,500 would be included in the capital budget. She added that she had reviewed with Jon Kopchis anticipated needs over the next five years, including paving and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) projects. She estimated that approximately \$1 million would be needed for capital projects over the next three years.

Discussion followed regarding how much funding should be allocated to capital projects versus budget stabilization. Cordle noted that a process is available for transferring funds out of the capital fund.

Porter reviewed performance evaluations and merit-based pay increase information.

The Commissioners accepted the actuarial derived rates for health insurance for 2027.

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**Adjournment**

With no further business, on the motion of Steve Davis and the second of David Levacy, the Board of Commissioners voted to adjourn at 1:38 p.m.

Roll call vote of the motion resulted as follows:

Voting aye thereon: Jeff Fix, David Levacy and Steve Davis

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Motion by: Jeff Fix

Seconded by: David Levacy

To approve the October 13, 2026, Budget Hearing minutes by the following vote:

YEAS: Jeff Fix, David Levacy and Steve Davis

NAYS: None

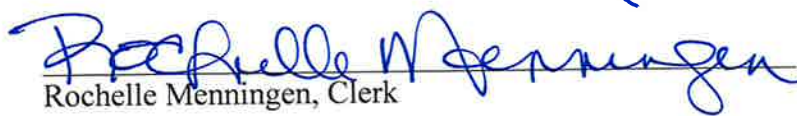
ABSTENTIONS: None

\*Approved on October 20, 2026

  
Jeff Fix  
Commissioner

  
Steve Davis  
Commissioner

  
David Levacy  
Commissioner

  
Rochelle Menningen, Clerk

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