Manatee County Government Efficiency Liaison Committee

Final Report

July 2026

Introduction

Manatee County continues to experience rapid population growth and shifting service demands, creating a dynamic environment for fiscal planning and operational efficiency. This report analyzes four fiscal years of county expenditures (2022–2025) alongside population changes and inflation trends to determine whether government spending is aligned with community needs and economic conditions. It incorporates departmental budget data, population statistics, inflation measures, and external factors such as hurricane response costs.

The analysis evaluates compound annual growth rates across departments and compares them to the county's combined baseline growth rate of 7.12 percent, derived from a 3 percent population CAGR and a 4 percent inflation CAGR. Attention is given to major cost drivers, including Public Safety and the Sheriff's Office, which experienced significant increases due to emergency events, judicial expansion, school growth, and rising requests for contracted services.

In addition to expenditure trends, the report examines broader government efficiency opportunities. These include coordinated purchasing across county and municipal agencies, improvements to Interlocal Agreement tracking and evaluation, strengthened oversight of capital projects, clearer governance of Tourist Development Tax uses, and more transparent reserve management.

Overall, the study finds that Manatee County's expenditure growth is largely aligned with its population and inflation pressures, while identifying several areas where enhanced coordination, stronger reporting mechanisms, and improved accountability can further promote fiscal efficiency and public value.

Members:

David Otterness, Chair
Jeff Covert, Vice Chair
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Spending Analysis

Fiscal Year	Population	Total Expenditure	Expense Growth	Population Growth	Inflation CY
2022	430,700	$740,505,485.65	--	3.03%	9.6%
2023	444,457	$804,671,090.15	8.68%	3.19%	5.2%
2024	458,352	$934,712,465.02	16.16%	3.13%	1.6%
2025	472,247	$1,164,975,248.90	24.63%	3.03%	2.7%

Methodology

1. Received County departmental budget and spending data for the past four years.
2. Downloaded the files into Google Notebook LM.
3. Added inflation and population data.
4. Prompted the AI for expense trends and anomalies.
5. Added hurricane Milton's possible impact.

Expenditure Analysis

Manatee County has experienced rapid and steady growth in recent years. Is the County government growth aligned to the population growth? Is the County efficient and well-managed? The compound annual growth rate smooths the data for the post COVID years 2022-2025.

Compound Annual Growth Rate

This study considered the last four fiscal years 2022 - 2025 expenditures. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) for each department and in total was compared to the inflation and population compound annual growth rate.

County population CAGR was 3% and the inflation CAGR was 4%. This resulted in a combined growth rate of 7.12% The County and departments with over $25M 2025 expenditures are listed below.

Department Title	FY 2022 Expenditure ($)	FY 2025 Expenditure ($)	3-Year CAGR (%)
Report Total	740,505,485.65	1,164,975,248.90	16.30%
Sheriff	176,649,386.98	241,269,773.43	10.95%
Utilities Department	142,459,720.99	220,897,013.41	15.74%
Public Safety	57,388,038.65	183,907,114.38	47.43%
Public Works (Transp/Prj Mgt)	72,860,521.43	90,771,728.59	7.60%
Human Resources	64,500,775.60	89,244,524.73	11.43%
Property Management Dept	24,899,058.40	59,553,687.41	33.73%
Community & Veterans' Services	716,313.35	38,995,418.52	278.95%
Clerk of Circuit Court	21,908,943.96	27,250,981.50	7.54%

Where to focus

Utilities is an enterprise department that charges for its services. The increase in Veterans' services was a policy priority. The large shifts were in Public Safety and the Sheriff's departments. If those departments had no growth the County would have had 8.13% expenditure growth. This is very close to the 7.12% combined inflation and population growth rate. Next, we examine Public Safety and the Sheriff's department.

Hurricanes Ian, 2022, and Milton, 2024, required a significant Public Safety response and expense. The Sheriff's department had significant increases in requested services. The County had four new judges in those years. Each judge requires eight deputies. Over 90 crossing guards are needed due to school growth. Millions have been spent on new road expansion that needs patrolling. Deputy requests for contracted services at Churches, Synagogues, Mosques, and even HOA meetings have increased. Requested services do not have linear growth rates.

This expenditure study confirmed that Manatee County's expenditure growth is aligned to the inflation and population growth.

Purchasing Synergy

Recommendation:

Request the Manatee County Purchasing Department to conduct a feasibility study to combine purchasing activities through an ILA across multiple county and city entities including:

- Manatee County School Board
- Manatee County Sherrif Department
- Manatee County Tax Collector
- Manatee County Property Appraiser
- Manatee County Circuit Court
- Manatee County Supervisor of Elections

Cities of:

- Bradenton
- Palmetto
- Anna Mria
- Bradenton Beach
- Longboat Key
- Home Beach

Coordinated purchasing among county government entities promotes fiscal efficiency, operational consistency, support consistent accountability practices, and improved public value. In an environment of increasing budget pressures and growing service demands, collaborative procurement represents a practical strategy for maximizing taxpayer resources while maintaining or improving service delivery.

Context / Advantages

County government entities can realize substantial operational and financial benefits by combining purchasing power and coordinating procurement activities through shared services, cooperative purchasing agreements, or centralized purchasing organizations. The rationale for this approach includes the following:

1. Economies of Scale
   By aggregating demand across multiple departments, agencies, or neighboring counties, governments can negotiate lower prices for goods and services. Vendors are often willing to provide volume discounts when larger purchase commitments reduce their sales and distribution costs. This can significantly reduce expenditures on common items such as vehicles, fuel, technology, office supplies, insurance, and public works materials.

2. Increased Negotiating Leverage
   A larger combined purchasing base strengthens the government's bargaining position with

suppliers. Counties acting collectively can negotiate more favorable pricing, service levels, warranties, maintenance agreements, and contract terms than individual entities operating independently.

3. Reduced Administrative Costs
   Coordinated procurement activities can further reduce duplication. Rather than multiple agencies separately issuing solicitations, evaluating bids, and administering contracts, centralized or cooperative purchasing allows these activities to occur once for the benefit of all participants. This lowers staffing burdens, legal review costs, and procurement processing time.

4. Standardization and Operational Efficiency
   Joint purchasing initiatives can promote standardization of equipment, software, and supplies across agencies. Standardization simplifies training, maintenance, inventory management, and interoperability among departments such as law enforcement, public works, emergency management, and information technology.

5. Improved Vendor Competition
   Larger procurements often attract a broader and more competitive vendor pool, including higher-quality regional or national suppliers that may not pursue smaller individual contracts. Increased competition can improve pricing, innovation, and service quality.

6. Enhanced Procurement Expertise
   Centralized or collaborative purchasing structures allow governments to leverage specialized procurement professionals with expertise in contract negotiation, compliance, strategic sourcing, and supplier management. Smaller entities particularly benefit from access to professional procurement resources that may otherwise be unavailable.

7. Better Risk Management and Compliance
   Coordinated purchasing programs can enhance consistency and compliance with procurement laws, ethical standards, and audit requirements by implementing uniform policies and procedures. Shared contracts may also reduce legal exposure and improve oversight through standardized contract language and performance monitoring.

8. Budget Predictability and Financial Stewardship
   Long-term cooperative contracts and aggregated purchasing can create more stable pricing structures and reduce exposure to market volatility. Taxpayers benefit when

governments demonstrate prudent stewardship of public funds through cost savings and operational efficiencies.

9. Expanded Access for Smaller Jurisdictions
   Smaller counties or special districts often lack the purchasing volume or administrative capacity to secure favorable contracts independently. Participation in cooperative purchasing programs enables these entities to access competitively bid contracts and pricing that would otherwise be unavailable.

10. Strategic Regional Collaboration
    Combining purchasing activities can strengthen intergovernmental relationships and encourage broader regional collaboration beyond procurement, including shared services, infrastructure planning, emergency response coordination, and technology integration.

Concerns / Complexities to overcome:
Differences in state statutes, county ordinances, charter provisions, procurement thresholds, minority-business requirements, public notice obligations, and approval authorities are often the primary challenge to collaborative purchasing among government entities. However, these complications are generally manageable if the cooperative structure is designed carefully. The issue is less “whether” governments can collaborate and more “how” the collaboration is structured to preserve legal compliance for each participant.
Collaborative purchasing often works best when:

- The scope is clearly defined
- Participation is voluntary
- Contract terms are modular enough to accommodate local variations

Several considerations are important:

1. Use of Interlocal or Cooperative Agreements to establish:
   - Which entity serves as lead procurement agency
   - Which laws govern the solicitation process
   - Responsibilities for contract administration
   - Liability allocation
   - Opt-in and opt-out provisions

   This creates a formal legal framework allowing entities with different governing rules to participate while maintaining compliance with their own statutory obligations.

2. “Lead Agency” Procurement Structures

Manatee County could evaluate serving as the lead county of the purchasing consortium to conduct the competitive solicitation process under standards that meet or exceed the strictest participating requirements.
This reduces duplication while minimizing compliance risk.

3. Different Approval Thresholds and Governance Requirements
   Some counties may require:
   - Commission approval above certain dollar thresholds
   - Public hearings
   - Local preference rules
   - MWBE/DBE participation standards
   - Separate legal review processes

   A cooperative structure should allow each entity to retain independent approval authority before participation. In practice, this means the cooperative contract creates available pricing and terms, but each participating government still independently authorizes purchases under its own rules.

Risks

Risk of Lowest-Common-Denominator Procurement

If too many differing requirements are incorporated into one process, the procurement can become cumbersome and lose efficiency advantages. Some cooperatives address this by:

- Limiting participation to similar entities
- Segmenting contracts by category
- Creating master agreements with optional local addenda

Audit and Protest Risk

Different entities may face different audit standards or bid protest procedures. A procurement that is legally valid for one county could potentially be challenged in another if local procedural requirements were not followed precisely. For that reason, legal review and standardized procurement policies are critical in regional purchasing programs.

Ultimately, the best collaborative purchasing models preserve local legal autonomy while centralizing only the portions of procurement that truly benefit from scale — such as solicitation development, vendor negotiation, and pricing leverage. If structured practically, the benefits should outweigh complexity. Cost savings and efficiency gains are often substantial enough to justify the additional coordination and legal structuring effort.

Interlocal Agreement Overview

Government Efficiency Liaison Committee (GELC)

Inter-Memo Report of Interlocal Agreements (ILAs)

Information contained herein reflects committee recommendations. Details may be incomplete or subject to change based on available documentation.

Background

Florida Statutes §163.01(2) authorizes local governmental units to cooperate with one another to make the most efficient use of their powers. The statute enables shared services and facilities that best align with geographic, economic, population, and community development needs. This statute was enacted in 1969.

Manatee County is currently utilizing this statutory authority through multiple Interlocal Agreements (ILAs).

Considerations for Review

The Committee recommends the following areas for evaluation and improvement:

1. Establish a centralized database for all ILAs to improve tracking and reporting.
2. Maintain a complete history of each ILA, including:
    - Start date
    - Amendments
    - Termination dates
3. Develop a cost and benefit summary for each jurisdiction involved in an ILA.
4. Clearly identify whether Manatee County benefits from each ILA.
5. Implement early termination reminders to allow staff adequate preparation for renegotiations and cost analysis.
6. Create balance sheets showing cumulative running costs between Manatee County and individual jurisdictions across multiple ILAs.
7. Cross-compare ILAs across County departments and consolidate agreements by jurisdiction for overall financial analysis.
8. Identify funding sources for each ILA (e.g., General Fund vs. grants) to support historical tracking and future negotiations.

Examples for Reference

1. **Utilities ILAs (Manatee County & Multiple Jurisdictions)**
    - Long-standing agreements with multiple amendments
    - Manatee County is reimbursed at state-identified rates
    - Recommendation:

    - Evaluate whether new infrastructure or facility upgrade costs are reimbursed
    - Compare these practices to impact fees charged to new businesses or residences
    - Determine whether similar cost recovery is applied to jurisdictions receiving services

2. Manatee County & Manatee School District ILAs
    - **Technology Fiber Conduit Shared-Use Agreement**
        - Significant shared asset
        - One of the few ILAs with debit/credit tracking through amendments
        - Total contributions by each institution remain difficult to determine
    - Parks and Shared-Use Agreements
        - Effective and ongoing partnerships
    - Emergency Shelter Agreements
        - Strong cooperative use of facilities
    - Future Opportunities
        - Transportation
        - Purchasing power
        - Shared staffing resources
        - Additional shared-use agreements
        - Approximately $3 billion in general funding between institutions presents opportunities for increased efficiency

3. Sarasota County & Manatee County – University Parkway Maintenance
    - Well-structured ILA
    - Recommendation:
        - Compare 1-year and 5-year cost analyses
        - Evaluate whether the agreement provides equal or improved benefit to Manatee County

4. Manatee County & Local Fire Districts
    - Fire Districts utilize County-owned technology fiber conduit at no cost to initial users
    - Manatee County pays monthly rental fees for EMS vehicle space at various locations
    - Recommendation:

        - Evaluate whether credits should be applied for County-provided assets when calculating overall cost equity

5. Manatee County & Town of Longboat Key
    - $150,000 County contribution for design services related to intersection improvements
    - Recommendation:
        - Identify funding source (grant, partnership contribution, or other)
        - Clarify justification for ILA request
        - Track this contribution in future ILA debit/credit summaries

6. Manatee County & Del Tierra HOA
    - Patrol services agreement utilizing Manatee County Sherif's Office resources
    - Recommendation:
        - Clarify why this arrangement requires an ILA rather than an alternative contractual mechanism

7. Manatee County & City of Bradenton – Shared Case Manager
    - Shared case manager with reimbursement from the city
    - Positive example of efficient shared use of taxpayer resources
    - Recommendation:
        - Explore similar staffing ILAs between the County and the School Board

Overall Procedures

Capital Projects

The DOGE Committee (the "Committee") is concerned that the Board of County Commissioners (the "Board") is not receiving sufficient information on the status and funding for capital projects, which may result in cost inefficiencies. Therefore, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. The Board (and particularly new Board members) should receive reports periodically concerning capital projects that have not been completed, including the sources of funds for such projects, and if such projects were funded with bonds, the dates such funds need to be spent in order to avoid arbitrage penalties.
2. The Board also needs to receive advice on whether the contracts for capital projects will contain non-refundable deposits and will otherwise comply with criteria that should be set by the Board.
3. As discussed in the Florida DOGE Report, the Board should consider whether the 100,000 square feet of new county office space meets (or exceeds) the county space needs, and where appropriate, consider cost effective alternatives to meet county office space needs in the future.
4. As discussed in the Florida DOGE Report, the Board should re-consider the $130 million long-term cost for the countywide trail master plan, particularly since (as the report indicates) Governor DeSantis vetoed funding that included support for this project.
5. The Board should consider appointing an individual (or team) who will have supervisory authority over each capital project and will report directly to the Board on a periodic basis as to status and funding for the project in order increase accountability for all aspects of the project.

Tourist Development Tax (TDT)

The Committee is concerned that the Board is not receiving sufficient information on the uses and potential uses of the TDT (which we understand generates approximately $40 to $50 million per year), which may result in a misallocation of funds that may be better spent on other projects. Thus, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. The Board should receive further detailed information on the spending for major capital projects out of TDT funds (like the recent renovations to the Bradenton Convention Center) to see if these projects integrate with the capital improvement plan for the county and whether these funds would be better spent elsewhere (for example, if possible, on renovation of the abandoned jail across from the county offices).
2. The Board should take legal (or other) advice on the permissible uses of TDT funds. For example, could a portion of the TDT funds have been used for the purchase of Mixon Fruit Farms since one of the initial reasons for this purchase was to promote agritourism?

3. The Board should take legal (or other) advice on the use of TDT funds to “acquire, construct, extend, enlarge, remodel, repair, improve, maintain, operate or finance public facilities” in the county as provided for in 2025 Florida Statutes 125.0104(5)(a)(6).
4. As discussed in the Florida DOGE Report, the Board should further investigate the spending on new water taxis to determine if savings could be made by, for example, reducing the number or operations of underutilized passenger boats.

Reserves

The Committee is concerned that the Board is not receiving sufficient information on the purpose of each line-item making up the reserves (which we understand approaches $1 billion) and whether some reserves could be eliminated to free up funds for property tax relief or for other purposes. As a result, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. The Board should receive reports periodically concerning each line item included in the reserves, including a detailed explanation of why a reserve is necessary, alternatives (such as insurance) that could be used to reduce or eliminate a reserve, and in the case of reserves for future capital projects, whether those projects should be completed or terminated in light of the Board’s capital project plan for the county.
2. In the case of reserve funds that are released into the general fund, the Board should then consider whether such funds should be returned to the taxpayers (for example, in the form of property tax relief), used to fill gaps in the budget, or used to fund capital projects or other needs of the county.

Conclusion

Our findings highlight that Manatee County is on a generally sound fiscal trajectory, with expenditures broadly reflecting actual community needs. However, by strengthening procurement coordination, modernizing ILA management, improving CIP and TDT oversight, and enhancing transparency on reserves, the County has a meaningful opportunity to increase efficiency, reinforce public trust, and maximize taxpayer value.

Final Government Efficiency Liaison Committee Recommendations:

- Maintain Manatee County's current expenditure growth as aligned with population growth and inflation.
- Request the Manatee County Purchasing Department to conduct a feasibility study to combine purchasing activities through an ILA across multiple county and city entities.
- Request that an ILA SharePoint site be created to house completed spreadsheet so that this information can be used when new ILAs are created.
- Request a review of all CIP projects, with funding currently in reserves, to evaluate if they are still viable.