MANATEE COUNTY GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY LIAISON COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, 5TH FLOOR, MANATEE ROOM
1112 Manatee Avenue West
Bradenton, Florida
December 09, 2025

Present were:
Mark Stanoch, Chairman (via Teams)
David Otterness, Vice-Chairman
Don Berg
John Settineri

Absent was:
Jeff Covert

Present were:
Stephanie Garrison, Government Relation Director
Brent Anderson, Government Relations Manager
Crosley Jones, Legislative Aide
Jackie Edouard, Board Records Clerk I, Clerk of the Circuit Court

AGENDA GE20251209DOC001

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Vice-Chairman Otterness called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice-Chairman Otterness, delivered the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Committee discussed whether a Member joining the meeting remotely should be considered present and be able to vote, or does the Member only listen, since there is no policy on this.

A motion was made by Member Settineri, seconded by Member Berg, and carried 3-0, with Chairman Stanoch and Member Covert absent, to allow Members to participate remotely.

(Enter Chairman Stanoch via Teams)

MINUTES

A motion was made by Member Berg, seconded by Member Settineri, and carried 4-0, with Chairman Stanoch via Teams and Member Covert absent, to approve the minutes of September 23, 2025.

2. **FLORIDA CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER LETTER**

Brent Anderson, Government Relations Manager, informed the committee that Florida Chief Financial Officer's (CFO) Office, has not responded, and the typical response time is between 30-45 days. Staff hopes to hear back before the next meeting. The Florida Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) audit of the other counties is expected to be released on January 14, after the findings are presented to the State House of Representatives. The report/audit will be made public, although there has been no reply to the letter sent to the CFO's team, there has been communication with the DOGE team about the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Pilot Program, and the documents shared this summer, and the committee will be updated as soon as there is a response.

GE20251209DOC002

3. **CHILDREN'S SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD**

Stephanie Garrison, Government Relations Director, explained Staff was asked to review a grant approved by the Children Services Advisory Board to see if there was any non-compliance. The County Attorney's Office advised the Florida Statute in question applies only to school districts; therefore, the Board of County Commissioners does not have to follow those rules. There is no conflict since the Statute does not cover local governments or municipalities, and this information will be shared with Community and Veteran Services Director, Sarah Brown, for information purposes.

4. **COUNTY DEPARTMENTS**

Corey Stutte, Deputy County Administrator, introduced Department Directors under his purview, and discussed the County's ongoing move of various Departments to 9000 Town Center Parkway, in Lakewood Ranch. He outlined significant departmental challenges, noting the need to manage 250 applications in the portfolio and over 100 current projects. Duplication of efforts has been identified across 14 departments operating independently, and staff is streamlining efforts. Budgetary concerns, specifically related to the Fleet Management Division, millage cuts, and potential legislative changes are creating uncertainty. Strong leadership and retention efforts are in place to ensure these challenges are worked through collaboratively.

Drew Richardson, Information Technology (IT) Director, presented a series of questions, and discussion focused on the County's use of AI through Microsoft products, productivity opportunities, cost savings, and strategies for inter-agency collaboration on IT infrastructure.

Question one: How can we help drive IT efficiency across the County?
Several factors influence IT efficiency across the County, and the IT team evaluates cost and need. A dedicated Return on Investment (ROI) analyst could be used in the future to review products. Some new programs may require additional systems to run smoothly, so more support and a thorough review are needed before adding new products. The goal is to measure the business benefits, and a two-page summary is prepared to keep everyone informed.

Question two: Where does the County have paper or labor-intensive processes?
The IT Department uses Business Relationship Managers (BRMs) to work with different departments and find areas that need improvement. Current and upcoming projects include travel and expense management, automating the posting of public statements, and using an AI-powered redaction tool for body-cam and phone data, which has cut work time by 90 percent, so the County can handle more requests without hiring additional staff. Other projects focus on digital workflows and using AI to boost efficiency. The County has launched CitiBot, a generative AI chatbot, that works as an advanced search tool. In the next phase, it will connect with back-end systems so citizens can open service tickets. While AI is not meant to fully replace people, IT sees it as a way to manage high-volume tasks like utility billing and identity checks, which could reduce the need for more staff. The County has also introduced Copilot to assist employees draft communications and summarize data.

Discussion ensued regarding if IT is being proactive enough about ROI and reducing staff, focus is on finding solutions and working with departments to save costs, prefer to buy existing software rather than build custom solutions, IT is now seen as a helpful partner, and encourage departments to suggest automation ideas without worrying about technical or budget limits.

Question Three: Which base expenditures have the greatest promise for increased productivity or lowered cost?
The base expenditures that have the greatest promise for increased productivity or lower costs were reiterated. The power platform, Copilot, and the front end of the call center were discussed.

Question Four: Are there opportunities for collaborative opportunities with other municipalities, Constitutional Officers, and the School Board?
Currently, the County's IT Department has 82 staff members, acts as a primary hub, provids networking for the Sheriff's Office, as well as shared financial systems for the Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller (Clerk), and a dark fiber sharing agreement with the school district to eliminate recurring internet service costs. Mr. Richardson mentioned a consolidated IT Board model used in Pinellas County, where all municipal IT is governed under one holistic group, but this could pose a difficult political challenge. For now, focus remains on leveraging the County's superior scale to provide specific services and infrastructure sharing rather than pursuing a total structural merger.

Question Five: Are there cost savings among the IT client group, Sheriff, Tax Collector and, Clerk?
There are risks and rewards of joint ventures in IT, specifically regarding shared systems like the Finance Enterprise for payroll used by both the County and the Clerk. Sharing costs is financially attractive at the start. Separating these joint systems is extremely difficult, the primary risk is dividing business needs, where one agency remains satisfied with a system while the other agency's workflows evolve, leading to a challenging separation process. Mr. Richardson supports existing shared ventures.

Sheila McLean, Chief Financial Officer, distributed an accounting of reserves. Reserve levels are influenced by bond rating considerations, long-term financial sustainability, and compliance with Florida Statute 129. The County's Internal Reserve Policy establishes a best practice target of 20 percent of operating expenditures, equivalent to approximately two months of operating costs. Major operating funds Reserves are categorized by fund type and purpose. Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) Reserves are structured to ensure the full funding of multi-year projects once approved by the Board, even though only one fiscal year is formally adopted at a time, which ensures projects remain financially sustainable throughout design, construction, and completion phases.

Ms. McLean reviewed the four primary reserve categories including contingency reserves for future initiatives or pilot programs, which may only be accessed upon Board approval, salary reserves, 20 percent operating reserves, and reserves required for capital projects and utilities. Salary reserves include components for cost-of-living adjustments and staffing fluctuations due to attrition, with funds held in reserve until Board approval and final staffing levels are confirmed. The County manages over 160 separate funds, each governed by specific Statutory regulations, including impact fees, gas taxes, tourist development taxes, infrastructure sales tax, and utility funds. Many reserves are legally restricted and may only be used for their designated purposes, with expenditures subject to Board approval, quarterly reporting, and annual audits by the Clerk's Office, Inspector General.

Mr. Stutte explained it is important to distinguish between General Fund Reserves and total reserves across all funds. Manatee County's General Fund Reserves are comparable to peer counties, and that the larger total reserve figure reflects capital projects, utility infrastructure, and enterprise fund obligations. He emphasized that the County operates in a reliability-focused environment, particularly for utilities and infrastructure, requiring sufficient reserves to respond to emergencies and maintain service continuity.

GE20251209DOC003

Members requested future reserve matrices to identify which reserve requirements are driven by State Statute versus County policy. Staff confirmed that this information is available and can be provided for clarification. Staff offered to address any additional questions individual Members may have outside the meeting due to time considerations.

5. **2026 MEETING SCHEDULE**

Crosley Jones, Legislative Aide, reviewed the next five meeting dates and times. The only scheduling conflict is in February due to the Board of County Commissioners meeting.

A motion was made by Member Settineri, seconded by Member Berg, and carried 4-0, with Member Covert absent, to approve the meeting dates and times for January through April, with May to be determined.

6. **DISCUSSION – HOW TO HANDLE PUBLIC COMMENT RESPONSES**

Mr. Anderson explained public comments are stored on SharePoint, for Members to review and comments that fall within the Committee's responsibilities are read and addressed during meetings. The number of public comments has decreased.

7. **FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR DEPARTMENTS**

Mr. Anderson noted Member Covert requested a tour of the Manatee County Jail, and recommended scheduling a discussion with Angel Colonneso, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller and the Inspector General for January, and with Ms. McLean for February, if the DOGE report is completed.

8. **CITIZEN COMMENTS**

There being no citizen comment, Vice-Chairman Otterness closed citizen comment.

9. **MEMBER COMMENTS**

Chairman Stanoch requested a meeting with Drew Richardson, IT Director.

10. **ADJOURN**

There being no further business, Vice-Chairman Otterness adjourned the meeting at 12:03 p.m.

Minutes Approved: ____________________