Budget Hearings #44 - 2026
Fairfield County Commissioners' Office
October 20, 2026

Commissioner Davis called the Budget Hearing Session to order at 11:00 a.m. with the following Commissioners also present: David Levacy and Jeff Fix. Also in attendance were Aundrea Cordle, Jeff Porter, Rochelle Menningen, Bennett Niceswanger, Bart Hampson, Staci Knisley, Taylor Forquer, and Ash Sark-Ward. 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, Auditor, 11:00 a.m.

Auditor Carri Brown was in attendance for the Auditor Budget Hearing.

Budget Director Bart Hampson highlighted specific reductions in the Auditor's proposed 2027 budget.

Auditor Brown stated there is an overall increase of $126,000 compared to the 2026 budget.

Commissioner Davis asked if the vehicle being purchased was scheduled for replacement.

Auditor Brown confirmed and stated that her office monitors an inventory of equipment for scheduled repairs and replacements. She continued to share budget highlights as well as the possibility of expanding tax services for lodging in surrounding townships.

Commissioner Fix asked if there were plans to assist townships and villages in the Hocking Hills area with their lodging taxes.

Auditor Brown stated that some have expressed interest in restricting short-term rentals.

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

Auditor Brown stated that her office holds regular supervision meetings.

Commissioner Davis shared the possibility of an audit of employee evaluations across county agencies.

Auditor Brown provided REA Fund highlights and added that increased GIS expenditure relates to public safety efforts, including the new 911 system. She gave a projection of the 2027 general fund and closed by highlighting goals.

Budget Hearing, Domestic Relations, 11:15 a.m.

Judge Laura Smith and Lori Lovas were in attendance for the Domestic Relations Budget Hearing.

Judge Smith stated that their proposed budget is within the parameters outlined by the Commissioners' Office. She highlighted the budget for the Visitation Center and stated they are hopeful they will be successful in receiving grant funding from an application they submitted.

Commissioner Davis stated that the Commission wishes to fill the gaps where grant funding is not available, but they have received many such requests from other departments and want to hold those discussions in a less hypothetical instance.

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

Commissioner Davis informed Judge Smith that he met with Medina last week to view their courthouse to consider potential options in Fairfield County.

Judge Smith stated that 7 families are on the waiting list for the Visitation Center. She stated that the families can be accommodated with additional staff and stressed the importance of the resource for the community.

Commissioner Davis proposed an undated follow-up discussion pending any updates on grant funding.

Budget Hearing, Transit, 11:30 a.m.

Aaron Kennedy and Rick Szabrak were in attendance for the Transit Budget Hearing.

Aaron Kennedy gave a brief overview of the proposed 2027 budget for Transit.

Commissioner Davis recalled an agreement with the City of Lancaster for funding contributions through the 2028 calendar year.

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

Commissioner Davis discussed the possibility of an audit of employee performance evaluations.

Kennedy reported a change in invoicing with ODOT for transportation services provided to JFS, which necessitated a budget adjustment.

Commissioner Davis thanked Aaron and his team for helping to meet the needs of the community.

Budget Hearing, Economic & Workforce Development, 11:45 a.m.

Aaron Kennedy and Rick Szabrak were in attendance for the Economic and Workforce Development Budget Hearing.

Szabrak thanked the Commission for their investment in the Workforce Center. He gave an overview of the proposed 2027 budget and mentioned contributions from the state to cover programming expenses, as well as grant funding. He expressed uncertainty about the future of state and property tax funding.

Commissioner Fix expressed appreciation for the Workforce team and Szabrak's leadership.

Commissioner Levacy stated that there are state legislators who are in support of the Workforce Center's mission and wish to provide resources.

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

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Recess

With no further business, on the motion of Jeff Fix and the second of David Levacy, the Board of Commissioners voted to move to recess at 12:02 p.m.

Roll call vote of the motion resulted as follows:
Voting aye thereon: Jeff Fix, David Levacy and Steve Davis

Budget Hearing, Municipal Judges, 12:30 p.m.

Judge James Fields, Judge Randall Ullom, Jackie Long, and Amanda Ash were in attendance for the Municipal Judges Budget Hearing.

Judge Fields spoke on a grant for the drug court, which expired in September of 2026. The court applied for the same grant for 2027 and has yet to hear of the decision.

Commissioner Davis stated that the Commission would consider how to move forward with funding for agencies who have pending grants and are requesting financial support from the Commissioners. The Commission wishes to provide a definitive answer instead of a hypothetical financial commitment.

Judge Fields stated that he is very familiar with the request for an entity to cover grant funds. He went on to detail the amount of grant funding received from the state for the drug and veterans' courts.

Commissioner Fix expressed appreciation for the understanding and for Municipal Court's contribution to the community.

Commissioner Davis proposed an undated follow-up discussion pending any updates on grant funding.

Budget Hearing, Municipal Clerk, 12:45 p.m.

Valeda Sloan was in attendance for the Municipal Clerk Budget Hearing.

Bart Hampson stated that there was a slight increase in the proposed budget based on statutory requirements.

Commissioner Davis asked what happens with unspent money.

Staci Knisley stated that the money stays in the Commissioners' General Fund.

Budget Hearing, OSU Extension, 1:00 p.m.

Shannon Carter, Aubry Fowler, and Mallory Medina were in attendance for the OSU Extension Budget Hearing.

Bart Hampson highlighted an increase in the Nutrition Education program.

Commissioner Davis mentioned the large request from agencies for supplemental funding due to grant expirations. The Commission is taking a pause in committing to those funding requests until a more accurate prediction can be made on which programs will be funded and which will not.

Carter provided a report on the impact of the Commissioners' funding including new programming for the Nutrition Education program in 2026.

Commissioner Davis asked how Commissioner funding compares to surrounding counties.

Carter stated that Fairfield County provides more funding per capita.

Commissioner Fix stated that the programming the OSU Extension offers is important to the community.

Commissioner Levacy asked if they collaborated with other local agencies on affordable housing.

Carter stated that they partner with several area agencies.

Commissioner Davis expressed a need for a tentative follow-up hearing to discuss the nutrition program funding.

Carter mentioned that their office is working on a new program which focuses on the quality of meat through the junior fair livestock sale.

Budget Hearing, Family and Children First Council, 1:15 p.m.

Shavonda Green, Corey Clark, Sarah Fortner, Elyssa Wanosik, Brandi Downhour and Joe Ebel were in attendance for the Family and Children First Council Budget Hearing.

Bart Hampson stated that the allocation for FCFC will hold flat. The cost for JFS to administer FCFC financials is being increased for 2027 due to the additional activities required.

County Administrator Cordle stated that Tiffany Wilson previously handled the financials, but they are back to the model that was initially intended with the new council manager, Shavonda.

Shavonda Green summarized the origin of the agency's funding. She provided an example of a child transferred from Franklin County, who was able to make more progress in a shorter time in Fairfield County's care.

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

Administrator Cordle spoke on the administrative structure of FCFC. She also stated the importance of the resources the council provides to children in need.

Budget Hearing, Job and Family Services (JFS), 1:30 p.m.

Corey Clark, Sarah Fortner, Elyssa Wanosik, and Brandi Downhour were in attendance for the Job and Family Services Budget Hearing.

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

Clark offered his appreciation to the Commissioners for providing funding beyond what they are required. He began with the total projected JFS revenue for 2026 and mentioned that the federal government provides a match for funds spent on child support. He also shared the projected cash balance without a levy renewal, resulting in a negative balance possible by 2028. A renewal would result in several additional years with a positive balance.

Sarah Fortner summarized increases in child placement costs.

Commissioner Levacy mentioned a possible "cap" on costs by the state.

Commissioner Fix asked for clarification on how many children these costs covered and asked about the possibility of a new facility for housing children.

Clark spoke on a partnership with SOFA which grants priority access to member counties at their new facility. If the county were to have its own facility, it would be limited to a facility with 12 beds due to licensing. He also mentioned statewide placement costs are rising, and that it was not specific to Fairfield County.

Fortner provided an update on the Guardianship Services Board (GSB) transferring from Juvenile and Probate Court to Job and Family Services.

Commissioner Davis asked if there was a more efficient delivery model for providing this service.

Fortner stated they have been working to determine ways the program can be restructured to improve the services and added that they have been working with other counties to compare their programs.

Commissioner Davis asked if the protective services levy language amount could be altered to include Guardianship Services.

Fortner spoke on the funding of the GSB, which includes several community partners. They have accounted for a 5% increase for 2027 for the GSB budget. She highlighted several expenses that previously were unaccounted for and added that expenses are outpacing revenue. GSB is projected to have a negative cash balance by 2029.

Commissioner Davis asked for clarification on members of the board and projected vacancies.

Commissioner Fix extended his appreciation for the work that has been done for improvements.

Budget Hearing, Utilities, 1:45 p.m.

Tony Vogel was in attendance for the Utilities Budget Hearing.

Vogel began with the evaluation of expected expenditures by category.

Commissioner Fix asked about the consistency in tap fees with municipalities.

Vogel confirmed fees are consistent.

Commissioner Fix stated he would be in favor of an increase in tap fees.

Vogel stated that they lose money in the administration of the sewer fee due to purchasing water from the City of Lancaster. He went on to describe the progression of the Vantage Data Center and the investments in the Village of Millersport. He moved on to describe the other projects they are assisting with across the county and summarized the projects that his department is currently undertaking. Lastly, he evaluated the electric vehicles the department purchased.

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

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Executive Session

On the motion of Steve Davis and the second of Jeff Fix, the Board of Commissioners voted to enter executive session to discuss employee compensation at 2:25 p.m. Commissioner Davis requested that the following people be in attendance: County Administrator Aundrea Cordle, Deputy County Administrator Jeff Porter, Budget Director Bart Hampson, Budget Officer Staci Knisley, Financial Analyst Taylor Forquer, Communications and Information Coordinator Bennett Niceswanger, Records Center Clerk Ash Sark-Ward, and Commissioners' Clerk Rochelle Menningen.

Roll call vote of the motion resulted as follows:
Voting aye thereon: Steve Davis, Jeff Fix and David Levacy

On the motion of Steve Davis and the second of Jeff Fix, the Board of Commissioners voted to leave executive session at 2:35 p.m.

Roll call vote of the motion resulted as follows:
Voting aye thereon: Steve Davis, Jeff Fix and David Levacy

Adjournment

With no further business, on the motion of Jeff Fix and the second of David Levacy, the Board of Commissioners voted to adjourn at 2:35 p.m.

Roll call vote of the motion resulted as follows:
Voting aye thereon: Jeff Fix, David Levacy and Steve Davis

Motion by: Jeff Fix Seconded by: David Levacy
To approve the October 20, 2026, Budget Hearing minutes by the following vote:

YEAS: Jeff Fix, David Levacy and Steve Davis NAYS: None
ABSTENTIONS: None

*Approved on October 27, 2026

Jeff Fix
Commissioner

Steve Davis
Commissioner

David Levacy
Commissioner

Bennett Niceswanger, Asst. Clerk