

Airports, Gas Taxes, Audits & More Discussed in May 7 Board Meeting

The Board of County Commissioners meeting on Tuesday began by highlighting Military Appreciation Month, as well as a resolution declaring May Blue Star Mothers of America (BSMA) Month. Look for **the Blue Star Mothers flag flying at county courthouses during May** in honor of the mothers who have sons and daughters in the military and help support local military. The local Northwest Florida 7 Chapter of BSMA was created in Okaloosa County in 2009.

Angela Balent, CPA for Warren Averett LLC, along with Okaloosa County Finance Director Gary Stanford, presented the county's **Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR)**. The CAFR can be accessed online as well, by following this link: <http://www.clerkofcourts.cc/forms/docs/2012CAFR.pdf>

An in depth discussion about gas taxes, franchise fees, tax increment financing and other options for meeting the needs of the citizens of Okaloosa County was discussed at Tuesday nights' meeting. Citizens attending the meeting had good ideas and offers of assistance, as well as voicing their concerns. There will be many opportunities to discuss the FY 14 budget in coming months, and **we invite citizens to participate**.

Okaloosa County has many challenges in order to be responsive to providing citizens essential services and public safety, as well as protect the quality of life we have grown to expect. Feel free to research information on Okaloosa County's website, which has a vast amount of valuable information provided on county commissioner, budget and department web pages. The information below provides some terms that may be helpful during the budget process: **Gas taxes** can only be used on roads and (road) related storm water issues. Gas taxes are shared with the cities.

Franchise fees are paid to government by utilities for use of right-of-ways, providing income to counties and cities. County fees would not impact citizens living within city limits.

Tourist taxes or bed taxes are only paid by those staying in local accommodations and in the areas that collect the tax; therefore, are generally paid by tourists versus local residents. Spending is regulated by State Statutes. Okaloosa is asking the State Legislative Delegation to readdress and broaden the use of tourist funds and statutes.

Millage increase/Ad valorem tax accounts for a small portion of general, nondiscretionary funds, and is the property tax rate multiplied per \$1,000 of a home value. **Example:** Home value is \$160,000-\$25,000 (for homestead deduction, if applies) equals \$135,000; multiply the millage rate of 3.2899 by \$135 to get ad valorem property tax. **Total county ad valorem is projected to be \$42,790,000 for FY14.** This amount is below 2005 levels due to lowering the millage and the economic downturn, in addition to budget cuts over a five-year period and rising costs. Okaloosa County will have to catch up at some point soon with the needs of the county, in equipment and personnel in order to meet the needs of its citizens.

Non-Discretionary or Enterprise Funds derive their funding from fees or revenue from costs of service provided, in which their use is also pre-determined or non-discretionary. (Example: Use of ambulance helps fund EMS, passenger fees airports, etc.)

Governmental or Discretionary funds includes ad valorem taxes and state shared revenue. An example of state shared are sales tax, health department or extension services.

MSBU—Municipal Service Benefit Unit; MSTU—Municipal Service Tax Unit for Okaloosa funds the parks and maintenance. Some neighborhoods have their own MSBU to fund street lighting or other needs.

Okaloosa County continues to implement suggested changes by auditors in all its departments and conduct risk assessments. One of the first tasks of new County Administrator Ernie Padgett is to hire an **airports director** for all three airports: Destin, Bob Sikes (Crestview) and the NWF Regional Airport. The selection committee has narrowed applicants to 10 and will conduct phone interviews soon and begin narrowing candidates further. Airports director is an important, highly visible position in the county with a significant economic impact overall.

There is still time to apply for the RESTORE Act Advisory Committee and citizens are invited to stay connected with Okaloosa County at www.okaloosafl.com:

- New **Commissioner Kelly Windes** is on the **“Okaloosa Today”** show and on **WFTW Talk Radio 7:30 show**, May 16th
- Watch BCC meetings live streaming or later, select meetings from HOME
- Public Safety, Tourist Development and Airports have a Facebook page; Follow us on Twitter: OKALOOSAEOC & OkaloosaCounty. http://www.co.okaloosa.fl.us/cc_social_media.html
- View **“Okaloosa Today”** show and interesting county videos on **YouTube**, at **CountyOkaloosaTV** or follow this link: <http://www.youtube.com/user/CountyOkaloosaTV>