

# **WAKULLA COUNTY**

## **FISCAL YEAR 2011 TENTATIVE BUDGET**

### INTRODUCTION

**W**akulla County is located in the North Central part of Florida and, according to the 2008 US Census, has a population of 31,791 people with 97% living in the unincorporated area of the County, and 3% within the City limits. The only ‘urbanized area’ is Crawfordville, which is located within the unincorporated area of the County. Crawfordville is centrally located within the County, along a main arterial route (US 319) and continues to be the fastest growing urbanized area in the County. The County’s growth is expected to occur primarily in this area, which is bound by the Apalachicola National Forest to the west, the St. Marks Wildlife Area and large wetland tracts to the east, Leon County to the North and US 98 to the South. There are 607 square miles within the jurisdictional limits of the county. The county has two municipalities, the City of St. Marks and the City of Sopchoppy. The traditional view of the County as a “rural” County can no longer be held. The recent population growth and development that have occurred have somewhat changed this traditional view. The urbanization of Crawfordville is due primarily to its proximity to areas that have long been transitioning. In recent years, downtown Crawfordville, the City of St. Marks and Panacea, have been the major focal points of development for commercial revitalization, economic development, tourist attraction and neighborhood improvement efforts. Through the adoption of special rezoning designation, business tax revenues and grant and loan resources, the County has made major progress in improving the roadways and infrastructure, beautification of parks and recreation areas, expansion of educational facilities, stimulate the real estate and construction markets. The County has managed to maintain a low unemployment rate of 3.7% to 4.4% over the past several years. In comparison, the State unemployment rate for May 2009 was 10.2% and the National unemployment rate was 9.4%.

Wakulla County is linked to the Interstate highway system for I-10, US-98 and US-319. The nearest airport with scheduled commercial airline service is the Tallahassee Regional Airport with 2 runways the longest is 8,000 feet. The deepest water port nearest to Crawfordville is Port St. Marks, which is located 24 miles away.

#### County Charter

At the General Election held on November 4, 2008, a majority of Wakulla voters approved for Wakulla County to be a Charter County. The Charter became effective on January 1, 2009 making Wakulla County the smallest Charter County out of twenty in the State of Florida. In 1968, the electors of Florida granted local voters the power to adopt charters to govern their counties. Charters are formal written documents that confer powers, duties, or privileges on the county. They resemble state or federal constitutions and they must be approved, along with any amendments, by the voters of a county. Under a charter form of government, the county has all the authorized powers of self-

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government except those specifically prohibited or pre-empted by the State. The charter approved by the people does the following:

- maintains the pre-existing government structure,
- encourages citizen participation,
- allows for the county to self govern itself on issues of local concern at the local level,
- provides additional power to the people to propose ordinances and charter amendments by the public petition process by obtaining 30% of the votes in each of the five commissioner districts to be voted on by the people
- allows for a charter review every 8 years

### **County Population**

In 2000 the US Census Bureau estimated the county population at 22,863. By the year 2009, the population growth was projected to reach 31,791 an estimated growth rate of 39.0% as compared to 17.7 % for the State of Florida. The 2000 U.S. Census estimated that in 2007, 21.8% of the population was at age 18 or younger and 11.9% were age 65 or over and the medium age was 39.5. The county ranks 49 most populous in the state of Florida and there is one person for every 51 square miles. Source: Florida Legislature, Office of Economic and Demographic Research, Tallahassee, FL.

### **County Services**

Crawfordville, the county seat is located approximately 24 miles from Tallahassee, the Capital of Florida. Wakulla County provides a wide range of services to its residents through the operations of the Board of County Commissioners, the Sheriff, the Clerk of the Courts, the Property Appraiser, the Tax Collector, the Supervisor of Elections, Judiciary, State Attorney and Public Defender, such as:

Public Roads	Animal Shelters
Court Services	Law Enforcement
Tax Collection	Libraries
Tourist Development Council	Parks, Recreation and Beaches
Property Appraisals	Growth Management
Election Supervision	Land Authority
Solid Waste	Facilities Management
Wakulla Airport	Capital Projects
Fire and Ambulance Services	Extension Services
Veteran's Affairs	Social Services
Planning and Community Development	Road & Bridges
Building Permits	County Jail
Emergency Management	Homeland Security

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The County emergency responses to citizen needs are accessed through an Enhanced 9-1-1 System (E 911). Emergency calls are channeled to the appropriate agency for response. Emergency Medical Services provides Advanced Life Support and Basic Life Support responses. Fire Services are provided through a network of both, volunteer and paid departments. The Sheriff, who is a Constitutional Officer, provides police response to emergency situations, as well as, providing crime detection, crime prevention, detention and correction services. Additionally, the Sheriff's Office manages the Emergency Management preparedness and response unit for the county.

The County maintains a fully staffed and highly functional library system that has many of the modern-day amenities for all age groups, that includes 10 or more computers with full-access to the World Wide Web for all age students and citizens. This system provides for storytelling, music appreciation for children and elderly, computer literacy classes, cultural and historical enrichment, consumer presentations, job skills enhancement, educational and job opportunities information.

### **County Government**

The County, a political subdivision of the State of Florida is guided by an elected five member Board of County Commissioners, each elected on an at large basis for terms of four years to serve specific districts. Florida Statutes, Chapter 125 and Article VIII Section I (e) of the Florida Constitution, and various other chapters, establish the powers and duties of the Board of County Commissioners. The Board elects a Chairman in November of each year who serves as presiding officer. The current Board of County Commissioners and the years in which their terms expire are as follows:

<u>Commissioners</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Term Expires</u>
Alan Brock	1	2012
George Green	2	2010
Mike Stewart, Vice Chairman	3	2012
Dr. Howard Kessler, Chairman	4	2010
Lynn Artz	5	2012

The County Administrator, the chief administrative official of the County, is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Board. Florida Statutes, Chapter 125 establishes the powers and duties of the County Administrator. The County Administrator is responsible to the Board for administrative, operations and management of all operating departments of the County. The County Administrator is also responsible to the Board for the execution of all Board policies and the preparation of the annual operating and capital improvement program budget for the County. The County Administrator is supported by two administrators that provide day-to-day administrative and management oversight and for numerous county departments under the direct administrative responsibility of the County Administrator. These Departments house various programs, such as the Office of Public Coordination and Public Information includes the programs of agenda and policy coordination, public information coordination, the Department of Planning and

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Community Development includes Building Inspection, Planning and Zoning, Code Enforcement, Comprehensive Planning, Concurrence Management, Environmental Planning, and Housing Services; the Department of Public Safety includes, Fire Services, Animal Control and EMS; Department of Public Services includes, Probation Services, Library Services, Airport Services, Veterans Services, Parks and Recreation and Facilities Management and Office of Management and Budget includes Budget Coordination, Grants Coordination, Human Resources and Purchasing.

### **Constitutional Officers**

Other elected officials of Wakulla County include the Judiciary, State Attorney, Public Defender and five Constitutional Officers: the Clerk of the Court, the Property Appraiser, the Sheriff, the Supervisor of Elections, and the Tax Collector.

The Sheriff is a Constitutional Officer under Article VIII Section 1 (d) of the Florida Constitution. The Sheriff operates under Chapter 30, and other various chapters of the Florida Statutes.

#### **Sheriff**

David F. Harvey  
Wakulla County Sheriff's Office  
15 Oak Street  
Crawfordville, Florida 32327  
Phone: (850) 926-0800

The Property Appraiser is a Constitutional Officer under Article VIII Section 1 (d) of the Florida Constitution. The Property Appraiser operates under Chapter 195 and various other chapters of the Florida Statutes.

#### **Property Appraiser**

Donnie R. Sparkman  
3115-A Crawfordville Highway  
Crawfordville, Florida 32327  
Phone: (850) 926-0500

The Tax Collector is a Constitutional Officer under Article VIII Section 1 (d) of the Florida Constitution. The Tax Collector operates under Chapter 197 and various other chapters of the Florida Statutes.

#### **Tax Collector**

Cheryll Olah  
202 Ochlocknee Street  
Crawfordville, Florida 32327  
Phone: (850) 926-3371

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The Clerk of the Court is a Constitutional Officer under Article VIII 1 (d) and Article V, Section 16 of the Florida Constitution and operates under Chapter 28, and various other chapters of the Florida Statutes.

### **Clerk of the Circuit Clerk**

Brent X. Thurmond  
3056 Crawfordville Highway  
Crawfordville, Florida 32327  
Phone: (850) 926-0905

The Supervisor of Elections is a Constitutional Officer under Article VII, Section 1 (d) of the Florida Constitution and operates under Chapter 98 and various other chapters of the Florida Statutes.

### **Supervisor of Elections**

Henry (Buddy) Wells  
3115-B Crawfordville Highway  
Crawfordville, Florida 32327  
Phone: (850) 926-7575

All of the Constitutional Officers prepare and file an annual report pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 218.36 of the Florida Statutes.

### **Private and Public Employers**

The largest major private employer in Wakulla County is the St. Marks Powder Plant (Ordinance, aerospace products) employing 350 people. The next largest major employer is the Wal-Mart Super Center employing 335 people and North CSG Systems (computerized billing) with 200 employees.

The major public employer is the School Board with 713 employees followed by Wakulla County with 381.

### **Public Education Providers**

Public education in the county is provided by the Wakulla County District School Board, which is a separate reporting entity. The School Board has tax levying authority independent of the Wakulla County Board of Commissioners. There is currently 1 high school, 2 middle schools, 4 elementary schools, one charter school, a district Drop Out Prevention Program and a district Pre-K Program. In 2009, employees of the School Board totaled 713. Of the 713 employees, 29 were administrative, 340 certified instructional, 96 Para-professionals, 52 clerical/secretarial, 171 service workers and 25 other professional. The overall student enrollment for the 2008-2009 school year was 5092.

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Florida State University, Florida A&M University, Tallahassee Community College, Keiser College, Lively Vocational and Technical Institute, Taylor Technical Institute and the Wakulla Adult Education Center, serve the post-secondary educational needs of Wakulla County.

### **Tourism and County Attractions**

Tourism provides a major boost to the County's economy on a year round basis. Wakulla County is a highly attractive location for Florida visitors based on its abundance of recreational, historical, and cultural attractions. The infusion of tourism tax dollars is vital to the service industries of the County.

Recreational highlights of Wakulla County include: the Apalachicola National Forest; golfing, hunting, camping, hiking, bird watching, bicycling, crystal clear lakes, beaches, rivers and springs, sailing, diving, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, picnicking, and scenic trails and byways.

Historical Points of Interest include: San Marcos de Appalachia (St. Marks Fort); St. Marks Historical Trail; St. Marks Wildlife Refuge and Lighthouse; Wakulla Chamber of Commerce (old courthouse) and Wakulla Springs State Park and Lodge.

Cultural Events and Festivals: Big Bend Sanctuary Classic Fishing Tournament; Blue Crab Festival; Chamber of Commerce Annual Trade Show; Earth Day Celebration; Natural Bridge Re-enactment; Veterans Day Parade; Rotary Club Valentine's Day Parade; Shell Point Sailboat Regatta; City of Sopchoppy Fourth of July Celebration; Worm Gruntin' Festival; and St. Marks Humantee Celebration.

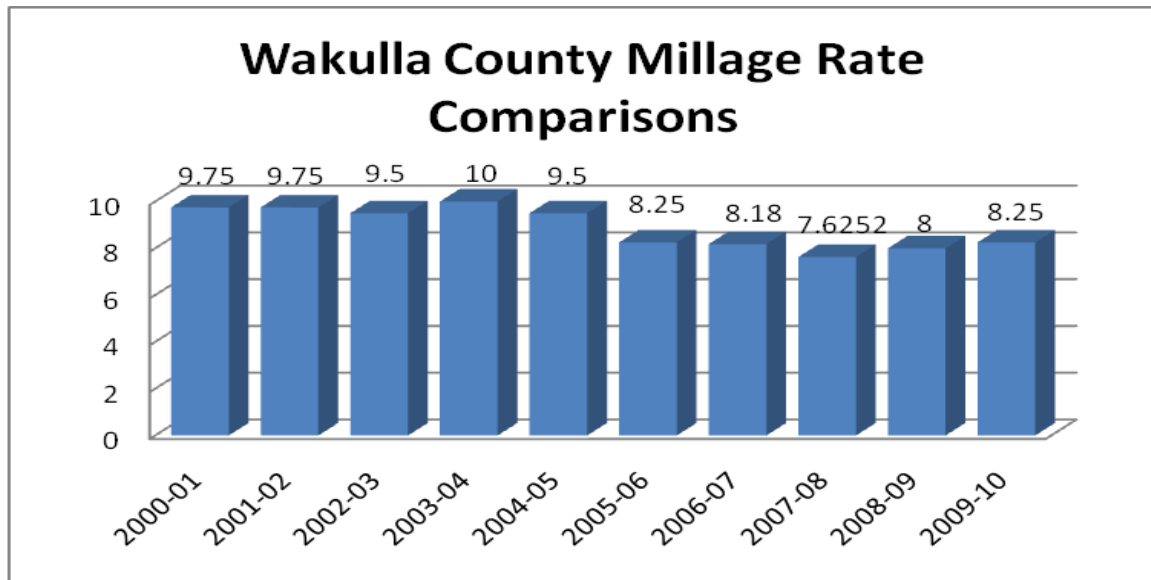
The Florida Legislature's adoption of the Growth Management Act mandates that all 67 Florida counties develop a comprehensive plan to manage growth within its boundaries. The Wakulla County comprehensive plan has been granted approval by the Florida Department of Community Affairs.

### **Taxation**

Local and ad valorem property taxes are levied by the application of the millage rate to the assessed valuation of non-exempt property within Wakulla County. Under the laws of the State of Florida, the assessment of all properties and the collection of all county, municipal and school district property taxes are consolidated in the office of the County Property Appraiser and County Tax Collector.

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Pursuant to the laws of the State of Florida, all taxable real and tangible personal property must be assessed at fair market value, with some exceptions. Each year, as of January 1 real and personal property valuations are determined by the County Property Appraiser's Office. The County Property Appraiser submits the tax roll to the Florida Department of Revenue for review and determination of, a variety of things, but mainly whether the tax roll meets the requirements of Florida law regarding valuation. Each taxpayer is given notice by mail of the proposed property taxes and of the assessed property value for the current year, which includes the dates, times and places for the proposed scheduled budget hearings to be held. The property owner has the right to file an appeal of the determination of assessed value with the Value Adjustment Board (VAB).

The County has successfully used a conservative approach in order to deal with the increased demand for expansion of its various public services. The general philosophy of the County is that increased revenues from existing taxes and other revenue sources must provide the base for the expansion of public expenditures. The County has demonstrated its commitment to this philosophy over the past years. While the economic and public expenditure policies are subject to change and reevaluation, it is anticipated that the County will experience continued rapid and major growth that will not be disruptive to its current financial position.