

Kimberly Powell

From: Kristin Lortie <kristin.lortie@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 10, 2024 1:51 PM
To: District 1 Commissioner Rita Pritchett; District 2 Commissioner Tom Goodson; District 3 Commissioner John Tobia; District 4 Commissioner Rob Feltner; District 5 Commissioner Jason Steele
Cc: Abbate, Frank B; Richardson, Morris; Rachel Sadoff; Donner, Mary Ellen; Kimberly Powell
Subject: [EXTERNAL EMAIL]First Budget Hearing - September 10, 2024 - Citizen Budget Questions on FY2024-25 Proposed Brevard County Budget
Attachments: 2024.08.20 County Attorney Invoice for 48.48 ref Alcohol Consumption.png; 2022.02.22 Alcohol Bottles in District 3 Office.png; 2024.03.05 Cocoa's Special Parks Budget Priority Funding Request.png; 2024-25 District 4 Parks Project Info.png; 2024.09.09 Citizen Audit - 2024 Washington DC Travel Expenses - Jason Steele.pdf; 2023.07.13 Davis Affidavit - Commissioner Tobia very often drinks high volumes of alcohol..with dept heads.png; 2022 Abbate Audit Statement - County Atty is Ethics Officer.png

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Good Afternoon Commissioners Steele, Pritchett, Goodson, Tobia, and Feltner,

I am writing to submit the following questions on the proposed FY2024-25 budget prior to today's budget hearing:

1. County Attorney Office Records Administration

The county attorney's office reported in the proposed budget narrative that there were 1,970 records requests responded to in 2023. I am requesting to know how many of the 2023 requests were closed with responsive records provided, how many were closed without responsive records provided, how much was invoiced to requestors, and how much money the county received from requestors who opted to pay the fees? This would be useful information for taxpayers to review as a part of the county attorney's written narrative in the budget document. I am requesting a line item report that names each of the requests, their status, and/or the dollar amounts referenced.

Currently I am in receipt of an estimate for \$48.48 to review the email correspondence between Atty. Richardson and Commissioner Tobia regarding alcohol consumption (attached). Mr. Richardson's office estimates it will take 1.5 hours of staff time to fulfill my request. The inefficiency and barriers of this request leave the public uninformed on what has the optics of a county ethics scandal. Attached is a screenshot of allegations made in the July 13, 2023 signed affidavit of Christopher Davis submitted to the Brevard County Sheriff's office. As the county ethics officer should Atty. Richardson concern himself with clearing up any appearances of his covering up alleged county wrongdoing?

The frequent and expensive county invoicing makes me wonder how much money the county anticipates receiving from requestors in the current budget proposal and where the anticipated revenue information can be located in the budget documents?

2. Parks and Recreation District 4 Budget Priorities

I live in the District 4 Central Parks District. After the City of Cocoa voted to request prioritization of District 4 parks funding at their March 5th budget workshop based on a single public comment received at the workshop (made by the invited guest of a council member), I became interested to know what the parks district is anticipating spending budget dollars on this year for new projects and specifically this prioritization request.

To learn more I attended the April and July District 4 quarterly parks meetings, but was unable to learn anything about proposed funding for the Cocoa priority request at these meetings, and despite requesting information at both meetings. I was also unable to determine this information from the FY2024-25 budget proposal. The only info I was able to glean about Cocoa from the budget document is that there are open projects at Stradley Park without dollars listed (see attached), and that there is a separate list of unfunded projects. There is no info provided on Cocoa's 3/5 special budget priority request.

What parks projects and costs have been included in the FY2025-25 District 4 parks budget for the City of Cocoa? And can the county please update me on the status of the Cocoa 3/5 prioritization request? See attached for the prioritization vote that Cocoa took at their 3/5 budget workshop, and without allowing public comment prior to the council vote.

3. Millage Reduction Concerns Amidst First Responder Attrition

The county is proposing to reduce the tax rates for the 11th year. There is currently a firefighter attrition crisis occurring in the county that is regularly being reported on at county meetings, at county labor negotiations, and on social media. How can the county justify reducing taxes while public safety needs are at risk?

Can Mr. Abbate please explain this disparity to myself and other concerned taxpayers? It appears that the county manager and the commissioners are unconcerned about this important issue. How can residents be assured that there are adequate, and adequately trained, first responders available for service in the county? What is the county's plan for payment of competitive wages and retaining of firefighters over time, and to proactively and immediately cease the current attrition rates?

4. Commissioners Travel Expenses - Unable to Locate Commissioner Travel Expense Budget Line Item in Budget Document

I was unable to locate a travel expense line item in the commissioners budget. This year the commission paid \$5,729.54 in travel expenses for 6 days/nights of travel for Commissioner Steele to travel to Washington DC, and that include inflated and unjustified costs for air travel/mileage and for his 5-star hotel stay costing taxpayers \$520-\$560/might. See attached breakdown for a taxpayer review of the justified vs. unjustified spending.

- What is the FY2024-25 budget for commissioner travel, and does it include a commissioner inflation factor above the county policy for reasonable costs and least expensive methods of travel?
- Will taxpayers continue to fund commissioners' road trips to family reunions, premium airline/mileage costs, and expensive hotel stays in FY2024-25?

I would like to receive responses to my questions through the budget hearing process where taxpayers can ask questions of the county regarding the budget and prior to it's adoption. Please also consider this a records request to the county and email responses to my attention.

This statement with (6) attachments are requested to be included in the in public record for the September 10th budget hearing under public comments. I further request that the Clerk to the Commission respond that my statement has been received and that it will be included in the Public Hearing and meeting minutes for the September 10, 2024 public budget hearing.

Regards,

Kristin Lortie, Brevard County taxpayer



Public Records Request
INVOICE

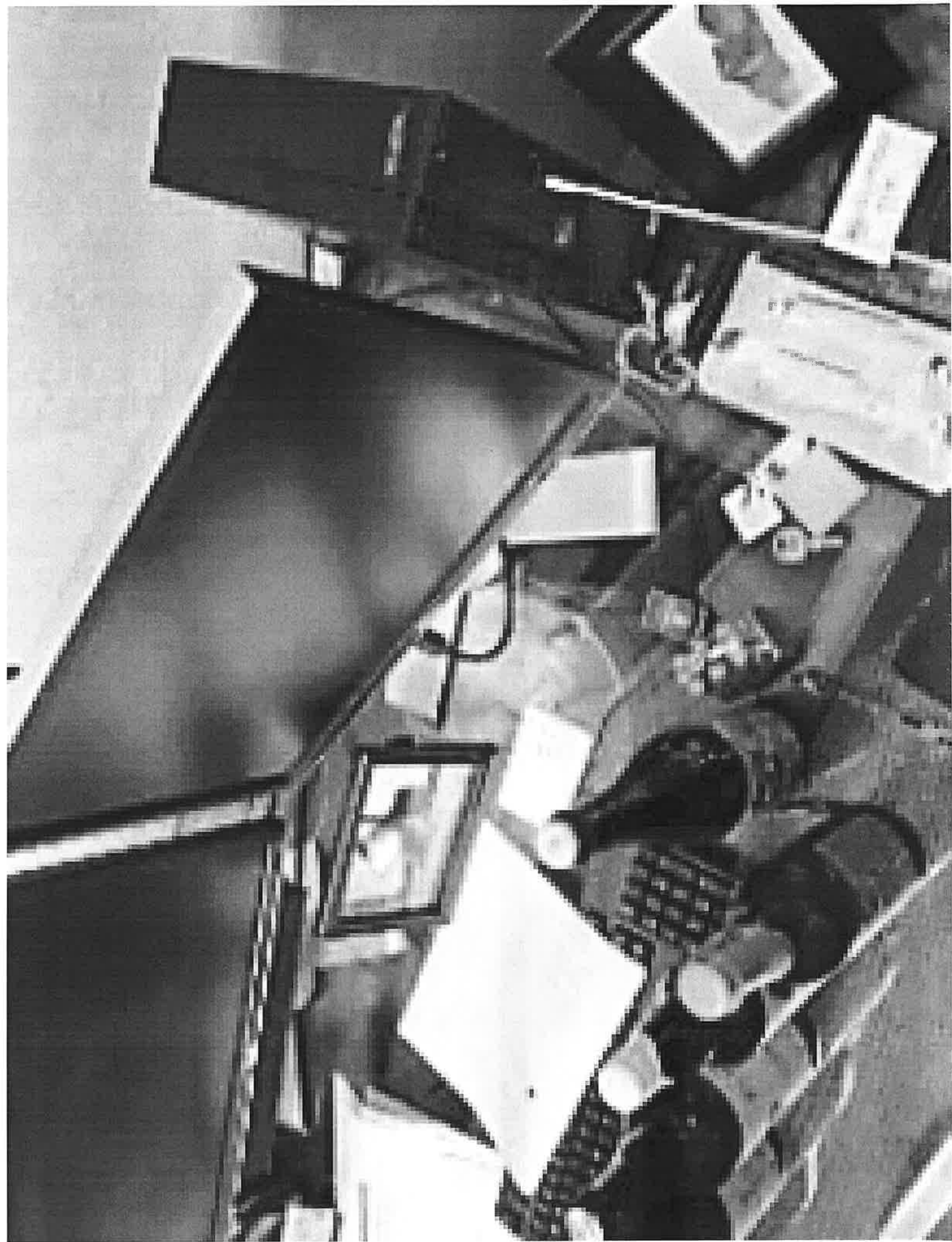
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Requestor:	Kristin Lortie	Invoice Date:	08/20/2024 11:56 AM
Request Number:	25856	Request Date:	08/15/2024 06:09 PM
Requestor Email:	brevardcareskristin@gmail.com		
Request Description:	Public Records, I am writing to request the following: 1. Documentation that could include a legal opinion, guidance and/or commentary of Mr. Richardson regarding drinking of alcoholic beverages at county and/or non-county facilities. 2. Correspondence to/from Mr. Richardson's office and Commissioner Tobia's office that references alcohol. 3. County policy on alcohol usage. Regards, Kristin Lortie, Brevard resident		

Department	Description	Amount
Staff Time		
County Attorney	1.30 hours of staff time to research, gather and review the public records request	\$60.03
	first 15 minutes expended - no charge	

Total Charges	\$60.03
	(\$11.55)
Total Due After Discount(s)	\$48.48
Payments	\$0.00
Amount Due	\$48.48

Make all checks payable to Brevard County Board of County Commissioners
2725 Judge Fran Jamieson Way, Bldg C, Ste 308, Viera, FL 32940; 321-633-2000



Denied public input



* MOTION by Mayor Blake; Seconded by Councilmember Goins, to direct staff to make accommodations for special needs equipment at the parks a budget priority with funding to come either through the District 4 Special Taxing revenues or through the General Fund.

\$5M Train Earmark

* MOTION by Mayor Blake; Seconded by Councilmember Koss, to authorize the City Manager and staff to build the earmark for five million dollars by FY25-26; to express concurrent direction to Brightline; and grant the ability to pursue grant opportunities.

Why couldn't these

* MOTION by Councilmember Goins; Seconded by Deputy Mayor Hearn, to utilize contingency funds for up to \$34,000 dollars to overlay the parking lot at Provo's park.
@ city mtgs?

Central Area Park Operations

McKnight Family Sports Complex Athletic
Facility RenovationsGeneral Fund / Recreation
District 4 Special District

Operating and Capital Budget Proposed FY 2024-2025 | BREVARD CO

BOARD AGENCIES**Parks And Recreation Department****Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Capital Improvements Program**

Program Name	Description	Funding Source
Central Area Park Operations	Woody Simpson Community Center Voice Evacuation Fire Alarm System	General Fund
Central Area Park Operations	Osteen Park Fishing Pier Renovations	General Fund / User Fees
Central Area Park Operations	McLarty Park Improvements	General Fund / User Fees / Recreation District 4 Special District
Central Area Park Operations	Riverwalk Nature Center Sewer Connection	General Fund
Central Area Park Operations	Kelly Park East Improvements	General Fund / Brevard Boating Improvement Program / Beach and Riverfront Bond
Central Area Park Operations	Manatee Cove Park Sewer Connection	General Fund
Central Area Park Operations	Rotary Park Merritt Island Sewer Connection	General Fund
Central Area Park Operations	Rotary Park Merritt Island Renovations	Merritt Island Recreation MSTU
Central Area Park Operations	Central Area Parks Parking Lot Renovations	User Fees
Central Area Park Operations	LeRoy Wright Recreation Area Pavilion	Recreation District 4 Special District
Central Area Park Operations	Don Stradley Memorial Park Softball and Baseball Concession Stand Renovations	Recreation District 4 Special District
Central Area Park Operations	Merritt Island Athletic Field Fencing Replacement	Merritt Island Recreation MSTU
Central Area Park Operations	Don Stradley Park Football Concession Renovation	Recreation District 4 Special District
Central Area Park Operations	LeRoy Wright Recreation Area Dock Replacement	Brevard Boating Improvement Program
Central Area Park Operations	James G. Bourbeau Memorial Park Floating Dock Renovation	Brevard Boating Improvement Program South Brevard Special



Brevard County Commission Expense Citizen Audit of Jason Steele Travel Expenses to/from Washington DC



Justified vs. Unjustified Brevard County Travel Expenses

Commissioner Jason Steele July 28-31, 2024 Trip to Lobby for \$49M Federal Train Grant

Date	Expenses	Cost	Justified	Unjustified	Comments
7/28/2024	Riggs Washington DC - 5-Star Hotel	\$ 520.11	\$ -	\$ 520.11	No business purpose for first night's stay
7/29/2024	Riggs Washington DC - 5-Star Hotel	\$ 520.11	\$ -	\$ 520.11	Cost incurred due to traveling by car (air travel cheaper)
7/30/2024	Riggs Washington DC - 5-Star Hotel	\$ 520.11	\$ 212.92	\$ 307.19	Cocoa officials stayed at the DC Hilton for \$212.92 per room
July 28-31	Mileage to/from DC - 1,765 miles @ .67/mile	\$ 1,182.55	\$ 325.00	\$ 857.55	Cocoa officials traveled to the same event for \$325 airfare
	Total July Travel Expense	\$ 2,742.88	\$ 537.92	\$ 2,204.96	

Commissioner Jason Steele May 20-23, 2024 Trip to Washington DC to attend Space Florida Event

Date	Expenses	Cost	Justified	Unjustified	Comments
3/20/2024	Riggs Washington DC - 5-Star Hotel	\$ 560.15	\$ 212.92	\$ 347.23	Accommodation exceeds local available rates
3/21/2024	Riggs Washington DC - 5-Star Hotel	\$ 560.15	\$ 212.92	\$ 347.23	Accommodation exceeds local available rates
3/22/2024	Riggs Washington DC - 5-Star Hotel	\$ 560.16	\$ -	\$ 560.16	No business purpose for last night's stay
July 28-31, 2024	Airfare to/from Washington DC	\$ 1,306.20	\$ 325.00	\$ 981.20	Numerous flights are available for less than \$300 for this route
	Total March Travel Expense	\$ 2,986.66	\$ 750.84	\$ 2,235.82	

TAMPERER PAYS UNJUST



Summary Jason Steele Travel Expenses - March and July 2024

Justified Expenses Claimed	\$ 1,288.76	22.49%
Unjustified Expenses Claimed	\$ 4,440.78	77.51%
Total Expenses Paid by County	\$ 5,729.54	

Citizen Audit Notes:

Brevard taxpayers spent \$4,440.78 in unjustified costs for Mr. Steele's 2024 travel expenses.

Mr. Steele should be spending his own private funds to upgrade his travel, not taxpayer funds.

The county should request reimbursement from Commissioner Steele for the unjustified spending, and provide clear direction on how future excess expenses will be avoided.

This citizen expense audit was completed by Brevard resident Kristin Lortie, founder of Brevard Cares Citizens Coalition Facebook Group, AI graphic assistance by Thomas Gaume

41. Commissioner Tobia very often drinks high volumes of alcohol while in the County office in Palm Bay and keeps a large quantity of specialty beer in the office. I told Ms.

"Commissioner Tobia very often drinks high volumes of alcohol while in the County office"....

42. When I asked Commissioner Tobia if it was even legal to be drinking in the office like this, he told me that County Attorney Richardson told him that because it's not a County building and that it's just leased by the County, Commissioner Tobia can drink in the office.

**"County Attorney Richardson told him...
Commissioner Tobia can drink in the office."**

43. County Commissioner had many department heads, lawyers, and other high-ranking people in the office, drinking in the middle of the day, while discussing County Business.

44. I was asked by Commissioner Tobia on many occasions to participate in the drinking at the office. I told Commissioner Tobia I did not want to partake, as I had a 22-mile drive home from his service.

**excerpt from the notarized Affidavit Christopher Davis,
former employee of Commissioner John Tobia
July 13, 2023 submitted to BCSO**

45. Commissioner Tobia stores all kinds of alcohol in file cabinets next to the office bathroom because the office refrigerator is not big enough to hold all of it.

appropriate action but he stated he had not ever faced that situation. Mr. Abbate stated when Mr. Darling brought his concerns to him, it was related to the value of certain items and Darling's concerns were ethical in nature so, he contacted the County Attorney, who is the ethics officer. He advised there is a county policy, which names the County Attorney as the county ethics officer. He stated when Mr. Darling came to him directly. He stated that the County Attorney happened with any particular concern.

County Manager Frank Abbate states that per county policy the County Attorney is the ethics officer for the county. from July 22, 2024 commissioner P-Card Audit