

FINANCIAL FOCUS



Should you pay off debts or invest?



By Cory Taylor

Some financial decisions can be challenging — like whether to use your money to reduce your debt or to invest. If you already have a significant amount of debt and not a lot in savings or investments, it can be hard to figure out which issue should be a priority. There's no simple answer,

and everyone's situation is different, but here are a few suggestions for helping you make a good choice:

- **Evaluate your cash flow.** If you already have enough after-tax income to meet your monthly living expenses, you might lean toward investing any leftover cash, but if you are just getting by, possibly due to heavy debt payments, then you might be better off using your funds to reduce your debt load.

- **Build an emergency fund.** Paying off your debt as fast as possible may seem like the responsible thing to do, but not having an adequate emergency fund or saving for your future

could leave your finances at a permanent disadvantage. It's a good move to have an emergency fund containing three to six months' worth of living expenses, with the money kept in a liquid, low-risk account. Once you have such a fund, you could use it, instead of going into debt — or adding to your debt — to pay for unexpected costs, such as a new furnace or a major car repair.

- **Evaluate your debts.** Some of your debts are actually more "expensive" to you than others. This expense level doesn't necessarily refer to the size of the debt, however. You might have a large mortgage, for instance,

but because your interest payments are typically tax deductible, your "after-tax" interest rate may be relatively modest. Therefore, you might consider investing rather than paying down your mortgage. But if you have consumer loans or credit cards that carry a high interest rate and whose interest payments are not deductible, you might be better off paying down or refinancing this debt.

- **Take advantage of any employer match.** If your employer sponsors a retirement plan and offers a match, you will want to prioritize contributing at least what is required to receive the match. It's

essentially free money. So, if your employer matches up to 3% of your contributions, for example, you should contribute at least 3% of your income to this retirement account.

Additionally, some employers will match a portion of your contributions to a Health Savings Account.

Eventually, you'll likely want to get to a point of saving more than just the match, but you'll have to weigh the benefit of additional contributions against the cost of any debt you're carrying.

- **Make it easier on yourself.** To make achieving these goals easier,

automate as much as you can. For example, you can divert part of your paycheck into an emergency savings account or a retirement account through automatic payments for any debt reduction or savings needs.

While it may seem like a huge endeavor to pay off your debt while still saving for the future, it doesn't have to be. Taking small incremental steps is key to helping you get to where you want to go.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by local Edward Jones Financial Advisor Cory Taylor, who can be reached by calling (850) 223-0999.

On Tuesday, July 29

Commission will set proposed millage rates at special meeting

BALANCES

Continued from page 1

reduction of \$200,000 for the Taylor County Sheriff's Office (TCSO) -- a swing of \$486,000 (see related story).

The commission also took back \$120,000 currently in the TCSO's proposed budget for inmate work crews after Padgett said he would cut those services if his budget was reduced from the level he requested.

However, since the commission will still need to fund that work, it did not reduce the overall deficit in the general fund.

Coupled with a \$10,000 reduction in the budget request from the Florida Department of Health in Taylor County, the TCSO budget reduction leaves the county with a temporary operating budget surplus of around \$300,000.

However, the general fund budget is far from finalized, as the commission is set to receive bids on Aug. 4 for

a new emergency medical services (EMS) contract to start Jan. 1, 2026, as well as several of the county's insurance policies, most notably its property insurance coverage.

County officials are expecting the new EMS contract will be more expensive than the current one with Century Ambulance, which is around \$816,000 annually -- half of which is covered by the general fund and half by one-cent sales tax revenues.

Meanwhile, officials hope some savings may be available from the insurance bids, especially the county's property insurance policy, which has seen significant increases after three direct hits from hurricanes over the past two years.

Importantly, the Aug. 4 meeting, when the board will receive insurance bids, comes after the July 29 special meeting during which the commission is required to set the county's proposed property tax

millage rates. While millage rates can be lowered later in September, they cannot be increased above the proposed rates.

Commissioners also expressed concerns over the \$900,000 in "emergency distribution" funding the county received this year from the state. That money went a long way toward balancing the general fund budget this year, and county officials have no guarantee they would receive it again next year, noting it was the first time they have been allocated the money since 2021.

Not receiving the allocation again would automatically put the county in a nearly \$1 million budget deficit.

As for the deficit in the MSTU fund, commissioners have fewer options due to the smaller number of departments in the fund, primarily Taylor County Fire-Rescue and Taylor County Animal Control.

The MSTU fund also supplies money to the county's building and planning departments to make up the difference between expenses and the fees collected for building and planning permits.

The board discussed increasing building permit fees, with staff noting they have not been increased since 2008. County Administrator LaWanda Pemberton said a proposal for new permit fees could be brought before the commission prior to when the budget is finalized in September.

As for the rest of the MSTU deficit, the primary options available to the board to offset the \$238,000 shortfall include using MSTU reserves, which currently have around \$2 million available, using the county's one-cent sales tax revenues or raising the MSTU millage rate.

According to County Finance Director Dannielle Welch, raising the additional \$238,000 needed to balance

the MSTU fund would require a millage increase of 0.1710 mill from the current rate of 1.2250 mills to 1.3960 mills.

For a homesteaded property valued at \$100,000 with \$50,000 in homestead exemptions, the millage increase would add around \$8.55 to the owner's annual tax bill.

If commissioners wish to keep that option available, they will need to set the proposed MSTU millage at the higher rate during the July 29 special meeting. If the board did so, it could lower the rate when the final millage rates are approved in September.

However, commissioners indicated at Thursday's workshop that they supported using one-cent sales tax revenues to balance the deficit in the MSTU rather than a millage increase or using reserves.

However, using sales tax revenues for MSTU operations will require amending the county ordinance governing the

use of those funds, which is currently limited to capital purchases and EMS operational expenses.

That will require a public hearing be held to consider amending the ordinance, which was last amended in 2020 to add EMS operational expenses as an allowable use of the funds.

Looking ahead, the board kept the final budget workshop set for Thursday, July 24, on the schedule in case any new issues arose that needed to be addressed. The commission was expected to decide whether or not to hold the workshop during its regular meeting on Tuesday, July 22, which began after press time.

The special meeting to set the proposed millage rates will be held Tuesday, July 29, at 5:30 at the Taylor County Administrative Complex.

The 2025-26 budget will be finalized during two public hearings in September.

LEGALS

(Continued from page 9)

Clerk of Circuit Court
Taylor County, Florida BOCC 8/6

NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED TDA 25-029

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that Taylor County, FL, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number, year of issuance, description of the property and the names in which the property was assessed are as follows:
Certificate Number 15
Year of Issuance 2020
Description of Property:
Parcel Number: R01098-155
Described as:
LEG 0000.29 ACRES - D H PADGETT
URS - LOT 104 - OR 160-312 TC
SECTION 08 TOWNSHIP 04 RANGE 04
Name in which assessed: Jesse M. Hogan, Lyn Knowles, Leonard Cooke & Sonny Hood

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

Unless such certificate is redeemed according to law, the property described shall be sold to the highest bidder in the Courtroom on the 2nd floor in the Taylor County, FL Courthouse on the 18th day of August 2025 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.

** To participate in the bidding, you must be prepared to pay a NON-REFUNDABLE \$200.00 CASH deposit immediately following the sale of each parcel in which you are the highest bidder. **
Dated this 11th day of July 2025.
Gary Knowles
Clerk of Circuit Court
Taylor County, Florida BOCC 8/6

NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED TDA 25-031

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that Taylor County, FL, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number, year of issuance, description of the property and the names in which the property was assessed are as follows:
Certificate Number 40
Year of Issuance 2022
Description of Property:
Parcel Number: R01754-030
Described as: LEG 0001.00 ACRES - COM SE COR SECT 20 E 291.47 FT N01D - W 257.64 FT E 473.92 FT FOR POB N1D - W 275.82 FT E 157.97 FT S1DE 275.82 - FT W 157.97 FT TO POB - SUBJ TO & TOGETHER WITH ESMTS - OR 603-285 - SECTION 21 TOWNSHIP 02 RANGE 07
Name in which assessed: Jean J. Decembre

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

Unless such certificate is redeemed according to law, the property described shall be sold to the highest bidder in the Courtroom on the 2nd floor in the Taylor County, FL Courthouse on the 18th day of August 2025 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.

** To participate in the bidding, you must be prepared to pay a NON-REFUNDABLE \$200.00 CASH deposit immediately following the sale of each parcel in which you are the highest bidder. **
Dated this 11th day of July 2025.
Gary Knowles
Clerk of Circuit Court
Taylor County, Florida BOCC 8/6

NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED TDA 25-030

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that Taylor County, FL, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number, year of issuance, description of the property and the names in which the property was assessed are as follows:
Certificate Number 604

Year of Issuance 2023
Description of Property:
Parcel Number: R05487-010
Described as: LEG 0000.03 ACRES - J H PARKER SUB - W 15 FT OF N 84.5 FT LOT 3 BLK 5 - DB 72-238 DC 690-519 SECTION 26 TOWNSHIP 04 RANGE 07
Name in which assessed: Iris Jackson Estate c/o Shan Jackson

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

Unless such certificate is redeemed according to law, the property described shall be sold to the highest bidder in the Courtroom on the 2nd floor in the Taylor County, FL Courthouse on the 18th day of August 2025 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.

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Gary Knowles
Clerk of Circuit Court
Taylor County, Florida BOCC 8/6

NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED TDA 25-032

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that Taylor County, FL, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number, year of issuance, description of the property and the names in which the property was assessed are as follows:
Certificate Number 938
Year of Issuance 2023
Description of Property:
Parcel Number: R07807-100
Described as: LEG 0000.10 ACRES - COM SW COR OF SW 1/4 OF SW 1/4 RUN - N 7 FT TH E 578.5 FT TO W RW US 19 - TH SELY TO S LN SECT TH W TO POB - OR 43-50 SECTION 31 TOWNSHIP 04 RANGE 08
Name in which assessed: Johnnie Faulkner

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

Unless such certificate is redeemed according to law, the property described shall be sold to the highest bidder in the Courtroom on the 2nd floor in the Taylor County, FL Courthouse on the 18th day of August 2025 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.

** To participate in the bidding, you must be prepared to pay a NON-REFUNDABLE \$200.00 CASH deposit immediately following the sale of each parcel in which you are the highest bidder. **
Dated this 11th day of July 2025.
Gary Knowles
Clerk of Circuit Court
Taylor County, Florida BOCC 8/6

NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED TDA 25-034

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that Taylor County, FL, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number, year of issuance, description of the property and the names in which the property was assessed are as follows:
Certificate Number 914
Year of Issuance 2023
Description of Property:
Parcel Number: R07506-000

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

Unless such certificate is redeemed according to law, the property described shall be sold to the highest bidder in the Courtroom on the 2nd floor in the Taylor County, FL Courthouse on the 18th day of August 2025 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.

** To participate in the bidding, you must be prepared to pay a NON-REFUNDABLE \$200.00 CASH deposit immediately following the sale of each parcel in which you are the highest bidder. **
Dated this 11th day of July 2025.
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Taylor County, Florida BOCC 8/6

bidder in the Courtroom on the 2nd floor in the Taylor County, FL Courthouse on the 18th day of August 2025 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.

** To participate in the bidding, you must be prepared to pay a NON-REFUNDABLE \$200.00 CASH deposit immediately following the sale of each parcel in which you are the highest bidder. **
Dated this 11th day of July 2025.
Gary Knowles
Clerk of Circuit Court
Taylor County, Florida BOCC 8/6

NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED TDA 25-033

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that Taylor County, FL, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number, year of issuance, description of the property and the names in which the property was assessed are as follows:
Certificate Number 332
Year of Issuance 2023
Description of Property:
Parcel Number: R03700-000
Described as: LEG 0000.05 ACRES - COM SE COR OF NE 1/4 OF NW 1/4 RUN - N 16 YDS W 175 YDS N 38 1/3 YDS - FOR POB TH W 105 FT N 45 FT E 105 - FT S 45 FT TO POB - LESS RW - DB V PG 410 SECTION 24 TOWNSHIP 04 RANGE 07
Name in which assessed: Will McRae

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

Unless such certificate is redeemed according to law, the property described shall be sold to the highest bidder in the Courtroom on the 2nd floor in the Taylor County, FL Courthouse on the 18th day of August 2025 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.

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NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED TDA 25-035

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that Taylor County, FL, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number, year of issuance, description of the property and the names in which the property was assessed are as follows:
Certificate Number 406
Year of Issuance 2023
Description of Property:
Parcel Number: R04482-000
Described as: LEG 0000.003 ACRES - COM SE COR SE 1/4 OF NW 1/4 RUN W - 32.5 FT FOR POB RUN N 31.5 FT TO E - LN OLD 19 RUN S ALG E LN OF RD TO - PI OF RD & CENTER ST TH N ALG W - SIDE OF SAID ST TO POB - OR 130-204 693-356
SECTION 25 TOWNSHIP 04 RANGE 07
Name in which assessed: D. Bruce & Elaine C. Heartsfield & Youssef A. Kassouf

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

Unless such certificate is redeemed according to law, the property described shall be sold to the highest bidder in the Courtroom on the 2nd floor in the Taylor County, FL Courthouse on the 18th day of August 2025 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.

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NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED TDA 25-036

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Certificate Number 332
Year of Issuance 2023
Description of Property:
Parcel Number: R03700-000
Described as: LEG 0000.05 ACRES - COM SE COR OF NE 1/4 OF NW 1/4 RUN - N 16 YDS W 175 YDS N 38 1/3 YDS - FOR POB TH W 105 FT N 45 FT E 105 - FT S 45 FT TO POB - LESS RW - DB V PG 410 SECTION 24 TOWNSHIP 04 RANGE 07
Name in which assessed: Will McRae

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

Unless such certificate is redeemed according to law, the property described shall be sold to the highest bidder in the Courtroom on the 2nd floor in the Taylor County, FL Courthouse on the 18th day of August 2025 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.

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NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED TDA 25-037

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that Taylor County, FL, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number, year of issuance, description of the property and the names in which the property was assessed are as follows:
Certificate Number 406
Year of Issuance 2023
Description of Property:
Parcel Number: R04482-000
Described as: LEG 0000.003 ACRES - COM SE COR SE 1/4 OF NW 1/4 RUN W - 32.5 FT FOR POB RUN N 31.5 FT TO E - LN OLD 19 RUN S ALG E LN OF RD TO - PI OF RD & CENTER ST TH N ALG W - SIDE OF SAID ST TO POB - OR 130-204 693-356
SECTION 25 TOWNSHIP 04 RANGE 07
Name in which assessed: D. Bruce & Elaine C. Heartsfield & Youssef A. Kassouf

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

Unless such certificate is redeemed according to law, the property described shall be sold to the highest bidder in the Courtroom on the 2nd floor in the Taylor County, FL Courthouse on the 18th day of August 2025 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.

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NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED TDA 25-038

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that Taylor County, FL, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number, year of issuance, description of the property and the names in which the property was assessed are as follows:
Certificate Number 914
Year of Issuance 2023
Description of Property:
Parcel Number: R07506-000

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

Described as: LEG 0000.50 ACRES - THE N 1/2 OF COM SE COR SW 1/4 OF - NW 1/4 N 210 FT W 210 FT S 210 FT E - 210 FT TO POB SUBJ TO UTIL ESMT IN - OR 174-659 - OR 536-379
SECTION 19 TOWNSHIP 04 RANGE 08
Name in which assessed: Taron Campbell c/o Joann Campbell

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

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NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED TDA 25-039

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that Taylor County, FL, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number, year of issuance, description of the property and the names in which the property was assessed are as follows:
Certificate Number 406
Year of Issuance 2023
Description of Property:
Parcel Number: R04482-000
Described as: LEG 0000.003 ACRES - COM SE COR SE 1/4 OF NW 1/4 RUN W - 32.5 FT FOR POB RUN N 31.5 FT TO E - LN OLD 19 RUN S ALG E LN OF RD TO - PI OF RD & CENTER ST TH N ALG W - SIDE OF SAID ST TO POB - OR 130-204 693-356
SECTION 25 TOWNSHIP 04 RANGE 07
Name in which assessed: D. Bruce & Elaine C. Heartsfield & Youssef A. Kassouf

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

Unless such certificate is redeemed according to law, the property described shall be sold to the highest bidder in the Courtroom on the 2nd floor in the Taylor County, FL Courthouse on the 18th day of August 2025 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.

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Taylor County, Florida BOCC 8/6

NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED TDA 25-040

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that Taylor County, FL, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number, year of issuance, description of the property and the names in which the property was assessed are as follows:
Certificate Number 1066
Year of Issuance 2023
Description of Property:
Parcel Number: R08957-300
Described as: LEG 0000.25 ACRES - COM NE COR OF W 1/2 OF NW 1/4 OF - NW 1/4 OF 6-8-8 RUN W 98.5 FT TO E - RW RD TH N ALG RW 1121 FT TO POB - TH CONT N ALG RW 110 FT TH E 100 FT - S 110 FT W 100 FT TO POB - OR 431-906
SECTION 31 TOWNSHIP 07 RANGE 08
Name in which assessed: Vinda Foster & Charles M. Foster, III

Said property being in the County of Taylor, State of Florida.

Unless such certificate is redeemed according to law, the property described shall be sold to the highest bidder in the Courtroom on the 2nd floor in the Taylor County, FL Courthouse on the 18th day of August 2025 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.

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