AI Summary in a Minute:
Suwannee Valley Transit Authority Approves 2% Salary Increase
Finance Director Lights Up Against Suw Cnty Commissioner & Administrator, Finance Director, Attorney Ignore the Law

The Suwannee Valley Transit Authority (SVTA) met to approve its FY27 budget, but the process revealed significant compliance issues and internal tensions. The Authority, serving Columbia, Hamilton, and Suwannee counties and faces criticism for failing to follow state law and fostering poor communication.

Legal Compliance Failures

The SVTA has violated Florida law by not posting required documents on its website. As an Independent Special District under Chapter 189 of Florida Statutes, the Authority must formally adopt its budget by resolution before October 1, yet had not scheduled the required public hearing as of September 14. Under Administrator Candice Kennon's leadership, last year's budget was also not approved through the legally mandated process. Neither the North Central Planning Council (paid consultants) nor the Florida Department of Transportation attends SVTA meetings to provide oversight.

Salary Dispute and Misunderstandings

The meeting became contentious when Finance Director Monica Marquardt criticized Commissioner Leo Mobley based on misinterpreting his prior comments. In August, Mobley had expressed concern about 5% raises, stating: "It gets out of hand. Especially when you're at the top end getting the 5% and settin' at the low end get the 5%." He explained, "I wanted to be fair, make sure everybody got taken care of, where it ain't somebody in the clique getting more than [others]."

Marquardt took this personally, speaking for 8 minutes despite a 3-minute limit, saying: "When I heard that statement, my first thought was, 'If after only six years I am already considered up there, then what future do I have here?'" She had previously stated: "I can leave and double my salary anywhere - in finance - in grants, but I like what we do here. But I mean, I'm here for the paycheck."

The article notes that "Administrator Kennon sat quietly letting misunderstandings take flight" rather than clarifying that raises were never proposed only for drivers.

Final Decision

Commissioner Rocky Ford proposed a compromise: 2% across-the-board raises with 1% reserved for merit increases. He stated: "I would expect her (Administrator Kennon) to give the lowest-paid people [the merit raises] to try to get them up. "If she wants to retain employees. That's where she's going to spend most of the money." The motion passed unanimously, excluding the administrator from raises pending her evaluation—which has never been conducted.