SVTA Board Tables Millions in Budget Adjustments Amid Accounting Confusion, Statutory Questions

During its November 9 regular meeting, the Suwannee Valley Transit Authority (SVTA) Board of Directors abruptly tabled its fiscal year 2025–2026 budget reconciliation, forcing an unscheduled special meeting ahead of a November 30 statutory deadline. Board members balked at approving an unverified, multi-million-dollar package that lacked a formal legal resolution and contained sharp, unexplained financial swings, including total expenditures dropping from $4.8 million to $2.21 million, capital falling from $923,000 to $364,000, and federal payroll taxes plunging from $14,700 to $1,208.

Neither Finance Director Monica Marquardt, who attended by phone and relied on QuickBooks while deferring to outside auditors, nor Administrator Candice Kennon expressed confidence in the staff-generated numbers.

The stalled vote highlighted broader governance, financial, and statutory compliance struggles across the tri-county special district, with SVTA Attorney Stephen Mercer offering little legal guidance throughout the evening. Earlier, procedural confusion slowed the consent agenda over six state and federal transit grant resolutions bundled without dollar amounts or explanations. Uncertain whether Florida law required verbatim readings—which statutes governing independent special districts do not mandate—Kennon read the lengthy legal texts aloud until she ran short of breath and called for her inhaler, before the board unanimously adopted them.

Challenged repeatedly by the article's reporter, the board also confronted years-long lapses in state-mandated website transparency. Although SVTA hastily uploaded overdue audits and budgets in early November, it still failed to post tentative and final budgets online before public hearings, a violation Kennon blamed on an outside vendor. Accountability questions extended to leadership and personnel: Kennon, whom the reporter criticizes for lacking transit experience while presiding over the loss of experienced staff, has gone two years without her contractually required annual evaluation, prompting Chairman Don Hale to order a contract review. Finally, the board declined to drop an unemployment appeal involving a former nine-year employee and set an earlier 2027 budget calendar to prevent future missteps.