

**Regular Meeting Approved Minutes
Commission Board Room
Dixie County Courthouse
214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628
January 08, 2026 – 10:00 AM**

The Board meetings are audio recorded. The public can hear and participate in the meeting via conference call by dialing 1(917)900-1022 and enter code 32628.

COMMISSIONERS

Mark Hatch, District 3, Chairman
Jody Stephenson, District 1 – (Not present)
Daniel Wood, District 2
Jamie Storey, District 4, Vice Chairman
David Osteen, District 5

STAFF

John Jenkins, County Manager
Roy Bass, Assistant County Manager
Martha McCaskill, Administrative Asst/Grant Coordinator - (Not present)
Chana Watson, County Attorney
Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court
Brenda Royal, Chief Financial Officer – (Not present)
Christie Zander, Deputy Clerk

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Hatch called the meeting to order.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE AMERICAN FLAG

Commissioner Storey led the Invocation and Commissioner Wood led the Pledge to the American Flag.

APPROVAL OF COMMISSION MINUTES

12/18/2025 Regular BOCC Minutes

Motion to approve the vouchers made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved.

VOUCHER APPROVAL

Motion to table the vouchers made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Board approved.

CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS

None present

SONJA REED-DISCUSSION REGARDING RIGHT-OF-WAY

Not present

KATRINA VANAERNAM AND SHEILA FRIERSON, DIXIE COUNTY ANTI-DRUG COALITION

Sheila Frierson, Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition, informed the Board that:

- The Coalition will implement the “Know the Law” curriculum in 4th and 5th grade classrooms this year and continue it in future years.
- The program has been in use since 2014 and has been updated to reflect changes in state laws.
- It is a curriculum-based, evidence-based program designed to educate students early about legal consequences, including situations where they may be in “the wrong place at the wrong time.”
- The Coalition is partnering with the Dixie County Sheriff’s Office, which will provide a trained officer to teach the course in classrooms, increasing student engagement.
- Students who complete the course will receive a T-shirt and certificate.
- Mrs. Frierson noted one example from the curriculum: a DUI can remain on a driver’s record for 75 years.
- Each Board member received a copy of the material, and students will be encouraged to share the book with their parents.

She thanked the Board for their support.

KAY MCCALLISTER, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Mrs. McCallister reported that:

- The Parks program is progressing well; most work is complete and the online setup is ready, with a few remaining county-level details to finalize before full implementation.
- An event is scheduled for January 31, 2026 – the Suwannee Chili Cook-Off at Salt Creek Restaurant, with live music all afternoon. More details will be provided at the next meeting.
- Mrs. McCallister is entering her trade show season and may miss a few meetings.

Upcoming events include:

- Rural County Days January 21 – 22, 2026

- Atlanta RV & Camping Show (late January)
- Visit Florida International Show in Orlando (early February)
- Fish-a-Rama in Perry, Georgia
- For Rural County Days, the county will showcase local products by serving:
 - Smoked mullet dip from Jana Lou's (Cross City and Horseshoe Beach)
 - Crab dip from Salt Creek Restaurant (Suwannee)
 to represent businesses from across the county.

Additional parks/recreation notes:

- Work has begun on the walking path at D-TRAC; Mrs. McCallister will report back when it is complete.
- Frisbee (disc) golf has been installed at D-TRAC using donated equipment from the Gainesville Frisbee Golf organization. The course is now listed on their Facebook page and online course map; it is expected to be a new, all-ages recreation option.
- Mrs. McCallister is still working to obtain playground equipment; availability may be limited because charter schools receive priority for relocated equipment, but she will continue efforts.
- It was also noted that there will be a Martin Luther King Parade on January 19, 2026, to be held in Dixie County (Chiefland–Dixie event).

GREG BAILEY, NORTH FLORIDA PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Fire Stations and Road Projects

- Fire Station Projects
 - Report given that Fire Station #3 metal building is scheduled for delivery next week, after which construction progress is expected to accelerate.
 - Fire Station #6 contractor plans to mobilize the week of January 19.
 - Presenter requested Board approval to issue a Notice to Proceed so Station #6 work can begin.
- Road Projects (DOT)
 - No new updates on SR 19, 55, and 97.
 - CR 351: Paving is complete; crews are working on shoulders, and grassing is scheduled for next week. Project should be wrapped up by this month at the latest.
 - Plan is to finish CR 351 and CR 349, then move into town for further work.
- Horseshoe Beach Working Waterfront

- Pre-application meetings for the Horseshoe Beach Working Waterfront project are scheduled (one this week, one next week).
- Staff will report back on their findings and aim to submit formal applications promptly once meetings are complete.
- RESTORE / BP Oil Spill Projects
 - County has three approved RESTORE projects:
 1. Shired Island Park Beach
 2. Suwannee Town Seawall
 3. Jena Highway Bridge Replacement
 - Next step is to submit full applications and obtain draft agreements; similar agreements (e.g., Horseshoe Beach) have taken 3–6 months to execute.
 - Presenter requested the Board prioritize the three projects.
- Board Discussion & Action on RESTORE Priorities
 - Commissioners emphasized that all three projects are important, with particular urgency for the Jena Highway bridge and Suwannee seawall.
 - Noted that Jena Highway bridge can likely be placed on the FDOT 5-year plan, with discussion of running the RESTORE bridge work in parallel.
 - ERC submittals for the bridge replacement have been received; final plan review is underway, and the bridge shutdown/replacement is still scheduled for March (24–32-month window).
 - Concern expressed that starting Shired Island immediately may conflict with other ongoing EOC efforts there; preference stated to begin with two projects (bridge and seawall) first.

Motions passed:

Commissioner Osteen made a Motion to proceed with the Jena Highway bridge RESTORE project. Seconded by Commissioner Wood – Board approved.

Commissioner Storey made a Motion to proceed with the Suwannee Town seawall RESTORE project. Seconded by Commissioner Wood – Board approved.

- Clarification: Staff directed to “get the ball rolling” on agreements for both the bridge and seawall, with the understanding it may take 3–6 months to fully execute agreements.

- Board also requested that, once more is known about scope of work for Shired Island and the two active projects, staff bring back information so the Board can consider timing and potential phasing of Shired Island.

JOHN LOCKLEAR, LOCKLEAR AND ASSOCIATES

Purchasing Policy Manual & Dredging Advertisement

- Revised Purchasing Policy Manual
 - Mr. Roy Bass (Assistant County Manager) distributed the revised county purchasing policy manual, fulfilling one of the two assignments given at the prior meeting.
 - Revisions:
 - Address all items flagged by FEMA and FDEM, as well as comments from Attorney Chana Watson.
 - Reviewed by Mr. Bass and Mr. John Jenkins (County Manager).
 - Certain provisions from the model policy (based on Suwannee County's policy) were removed as not applicable to a county of Dixie's size.
 - Purpose: Adoption was strongly recommended to support eligibility and documentation for future federal reimbursement funding.
 - Key discussion points:
 - Draft language currently allows authorized field personnel to make purchases for supplies/parts up to \$2,500.00 for operational needs; Board discussed that this figure may be too high.
 - Intention is to restrict purchasing authority to specified individuals (primarily department heads) and eliminate "everyone can buy" practices, while still allowing small, routine purchases (e.g., small parts) without delay.
 - Board discussed possibly setting a very low cap (e.g., under \$100.00) for general staff and requiring higher amounts (e.g., over \$500.00) to go through department heads/Board approval.
 - General staff would not have independent purchasing authority under the final structure.
 - Next steps:

- Staff will work with Mr. Bass and commissioners on any verbiage changes.
- Operational details for department heads will be addressed in a separate written guideline, not in the main policy.
- Target is to bring back a revised purchasing policy for Board adoption at the next meeting (next Thursday).
- Horseshoe Beach Dredging Advertisement / Permit
 - Second assignment: ensure advertisement for Horseshoe Beach dredging is published for 2026.
 - Advertisement is running now and must run for 30 days; there is still time left in the advertisement window.
 - The final required letter for the dredging permit was received yesterday; thanks were given to Roy for obtaining it.
 - The permit application package has been sent; bids were advertised with work contingent on permit approval.
 - Depending on agency timing, bids may need to remain sealed until the permit is issued; legal guidance will be followed to ensure compliance.
 - No additional items were reported under this agenda segment.

CINDY BELLOT, LIBRARY DIRECTOR

Library Report

- Mrs. Bellot reported operations are running smoothly.
- Planning is underway for the Lower Suwannee Art & Nature Festival, to be held Saturday, March 14, 2026, at Glen Dyals (Glen Dyals) Park; this will be the 9th annual event, originally started by Jane, who continues to help and “do a wonderful job.”
- Sewing classes are going well, with strong and in some cases surprising participation; classes are helping residents build life skills.
- Additional life-skills classes are being planned, though it has been challenging to get responses from potential instructors, but staff expect these offerings will benefit the entire county.

RAELYNN BROWNELL, SUWANNEE WATER AND SEWER

Not present

STEVE FREMEN, CODE ENFORCEMENT & VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

Mr. Fremen stated that the next Code Enforcement Hearing will be held February 5, 2026, at 1:00 p.m. in a Courtroom to be determined.

MICHAEL GAINY, COUNTY ROAD SUPERINTENDENT

Advertising & Material Handling

- Board revisited an item previously discussed regarding advertising (context: disposition/transfer of material).

Commissioner Osteen made a Motion to advertise. Seconded by Commissioner Wood.

Board approved unanimously.

- It was noted there are approximately 100–150 loads of material currently being moved using an old track hoe, which is being heavily strained.
- Board/Staff discussion:
 - Direction to contact Bobby VanAernam to see what kind of arrangement can be worked out to assist with moving/hauling these loads.
 - Mr. Tim Johnson and another staff members will put a proposal together by next week regarding transfer/handling of the material.

TIM JOHNSON, SOLID WASTE DIRECTOR

Solid Waste / Rock Pit Power & Equipment

- Rock Pit Power & Compactor
 - Mr. Johnson reported he spoke with Eddie Ruth of Central Florida Electric about providing power at the Rock Pit.
 - There will be no cost for the power line, only an application/permit fee.
 - The new compactor itself will be 3 phase, eliminating the need for the previously discussed inverter.

The item had been tabled at the last meeting; after confirming with Ms. Brenda Royal that everything is acceptable.

Commissioner Storey made a Motion to proceed with the Rock Pit power/compactor plan.

Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Board approved.

Direction from the Board to Mr. Johnson: prepare the compactor pit, coordinate with Central Florida Electric on all connections, and pour a slab to handle compactor weight. Permit has been applied for; expected 6–8-week timeline, allowing time to have the site ready.

- Holiday & Maintenance Staffing Concerns
 - Discussion that on holidays, when most staff are off but Solid Waste is still working, additional help is needed for tire changes, hydraulic line repairs, and general mechanical work.
 - Current mechanic is heavily burdened keeping older trucks and equipment operating; when he works on Solid Waste trucks, other needed work is delayed.
 - Board/Chair suggested considering in the future hiring a part-time mechanic dedicated to Solid Waste, to assist on busy days/holidays (tire changes, minor repairs, etc.).
- Truck Damage and Repairs
 - Mr. Johnson noted ongoing issues from a recent accident:
 - Still awaiting insurance estimate to repair the damaged hood; truck is drivable but has only one headlight.
 - Another truck is completely down due to a failed homemade torque system; repair parts have been picked up and work is underway.
 - Road Department's bucket truck is being used as needed to keep operations going.
 - Board thanked Tim for his efforts in keeping Solid Waste operating under difficult equipment conditions.

LEON WRIGHT, BUILDING AND ZONING OFFICIAL

No scheduled LPA items at this time.

SCOTT PENDARVIS, 911 COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

& I.T. ADMINISTRATOR

IT / Cybersecurity & Meeting Call-In System

- IT Staffing & Risk
 - Mr. Pendarvis reported that with current budget constraints, a planned second IT position was cut; he reiterated concern that loss/unavailability of the sole IT staffer could shut down county operations (single-point-of-failure risk).
- Courthouse Wi-Fi / Compliance Upgrades
 - Plans to upgrade courthouse network/Wi-Fi equipment to meet newer WPA3 and cell carrier compliance requirements.

- Existing equipment was lower-cost hardware purchased years ago; upgrades will bring the county into alignment with IT and cybersecurity standards previously adopted by the county.
- Cybersecurity Standards & Training
 - A department head workshop is anticipated in February.
 - By March, according to cybersecurity standards, IT will:
 - Review and renew cybersecurity policies and the Incident Response Plan (annual requirement).
 - Work with Ms. Denise (FACT) to organize a tabletop cyber incident exercise involving key staff.
 - Updated policies and a few new policies for the binder will be brought back to the Board at that time.
- Change of Board Meeting Call-In System to Microsoft Teams
 - Mr. Pendarvis reviewed current practice: meetings are being recorded in Microsoft Teams (including AI transcription), but public call-in is still via the old Free Conference line.
 - Proposed and received consensus to switch the official call-in platform to Microsoft Teams for future meetings:
 - Each meeting (day and evening) will have a fixed Teams meeting ID/number that does not change from month to month.
 - Teams offers better audio quality, built-in recording and transcription, and a service level agreement (SLA), unlike the free service which has recently dropped calls with no support or guarantees.
 - No video will be enabled for callers, audio only.
 - Implementation details:
 - The next published agenda will be updated with the new Teams call-in information and clearer public instructions.
 - The county website and any other public notices (e.g., newspaper agenda notice) will be updated to reflect the new number.
 - For a transition period, both systems may be run in parallel, but Teams will be treated as the primary call-in method.
 - Mr. Pendarvis will look into changing the recorded message/voice prompt associated with the old number (where possible) to direct callers to the new Teams number.

DARIAN BROWN, DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Lt. Jason Lemmermen had nothing to present on behalf of Chief Brown.

GAIL CARTER, INDIGENT CARE

Not present

HOLLY HOUGHTON, COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT

Not present

ANGIE CROWLEY, HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATOR

Nothing to present at this time, however Ms. Crowley thanked everyone for the prayers lifted for her mother.

JOHN JENKINS, COUNTY MANAGER

SHIP / Consultant / Interlocal Agreement

- SHIP Down Payment Assistance

Mr. Jenkins Request Board approval of the SHIP down payment for Franciso Lopez in the amount of \$20,000.00.

Commissioner Wood made a Motion to approve the SHIP down payment request for Franciso Lopez in the amount of \$20,000.00. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved

- Final SHIP Payment – Showcase Home
 - Request for Board approval of final payment to Showcase Home in the amount of \$83,823.67 for the elevated home of Mr. Peter Bregenzer in Horseshoe Beach.

Commissioner Storey made a Motion to approve the final payment to Showcase Home in the amount of \$83,823.67 for the elevated home of Mr. Peter Bregenzer in Horseshoe Beach. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Board approved

- Consultant for Project Worksheets (Disaster/FEMA Project Worksheets)
 - Request for Board approval to advertise hiring a consultant to assist with Project Worksheets from past events.

Commissioner Storey made a Motion to approve advertising hiring a consultant to assist with Project Worksheets from past events. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved

- First Amendment – Interlocal Agreement with CareerSource
 - Request for Board approval of the First Amendment to the interlocal agreement with CareerSource (revising Section 6).
 - Amendment reduces required council membership from six to four so a quorum can be met more easily and business can continue.
 - Recommendation given to approve so CareerSource can continue to conduct business; each county is only allowed two members.

Commissioner Osteen made a Motion to approve the First Amendment to Interlocal agreement Section #6 with Career Source concerning meetings of the Council. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved

Information Items:

1. Reminder County Offices will be closed Monday, Jan 19, 2026, in observance of the Martin Luther King Day.
2. Reminder of the Rural County Days in Tallahassee on Wednesday January 21,2026 and Thursday January 22, 2026.

Solid Waste / Waste Pro Tipping Fee – Discussion & Action

By request of Mr. Jenkins Commissioner Storey reported that, after reviewing the 1990s solid waste ordinances with Attorney Watson, staff concluded the County is authorized to charge commercial haulers (including Waste Pro and smaller “mom and pop” haulers) a \$50/ton tipping fee when they use County solid waste facilities.

- Commissioner Storey explained that the solid waste assessment paid by residents is intended to fund the County’s solid waste facilities and disposal system—providing a place and means to dispose of garbage (including transfer to Greenville)—while it remains each resident’s responsibility to get garbage to a site. When a resident hires a hauler, the waste becomes that hauler’s commercial responsibility, and the hauler should pay the tipping fee or haul directly to Greenville at its own cost.
- Commissioner Storey noted the County paid just under \$800,000.00 in tipping fees at Greenville last year, not including County labor, fuel, and equipment, and that assessment revenue does not cover all solid-waste costs. He also cited concerns about condos, short-term rentals/Airbnbs, campgrounds, and local businesses generating large volumes of trash, and about private haulers bringing

loads without paying a fee, while the County operates with aging equipment and limited staffing.

- Commissioner Hatch questioned whether charging Waste Pro would amount to double-charging residents of Cross City, who already pay both the County assessment and a mandatory city garbage fee tied to city water. He suggested this may be a City policy issue, raised the possibility of revisiting assessments or revenue-sharing, and noted that any new cost to Waste Pro is likely to be passed through to customers.
- Former solid waste staff and others discussed the distinction between residential vs. commercial waste, road wear from commercial packer trucks, and fairness in requiring all commercial operators to pay for disposal. Some suggested a joint workshop with the City to address broader concerns, but Commissioner Storey maintained that the existing ordinance already authorizes the fee and that the County must protect its solid waste budget.
- Action:

Commissioner Storey made a Motion to begin charging Waste Pro and all commercial haulers a \$50/ton tipping fee at County solid waste facilities, effective immediately and not retroactive. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved

CHANA WATSON, COUNTY ATTORNEY

County Attorney Report – Lawsuit Update

- Attorney Watson reported receipt of a new lawsuit filed against the County.
- Claim is for loss of consortium related to a spouse injured in an accident, where a truck and trailer reportedly overturned and unloaded equipment.
- The matter has been forwarded to the Florida League of Cities for handling under the County's coverage.
- Attorney will keep the Board updated as the case progresses.
- No further items were reported.

BARBIE HIGGINBOTHAM, CLERK OF COURT

Clerk / Audit Update

- Mrs. Higginbotham reported that James Moore & Company has confirmed they are the selected audit firm, have received the contract paperwork, and are ready to begin work.

- Mrs. Higginbotham stated the firm previously advised that, because of their late start, last year's audit will again be completed later than normal, but they will work to bring the County back on schedule.
- Mrs. Higginbotham confirmed that all prior audits are completed and the County is currently up to date on its audits.

COUNTY COMMISSION ITEMS

Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Storey publicly thanked Solid Waste Director Tim Johnson and his crew for their hard work over the holidays, noting they kept the County garbage sites in good condition and received a favorable DEP report. Storey emphasized that credit for this accomplishment belongs to Tim and his staff.

Commissioner Osteen asked everyone to keep Ms. Martha McCaskill and her family in their prayers due to a recent loss. Commissioner Osteen remarked that he routinely drives county roads, including early-morning trips through Horseshoe Beach, to check on needed work. He expressed gratitude that projects there are finally moving forward so citizens can enjoy the parks and resume normal life, and he invited the public to visit D-TRAC for walking and outdoor recreation.

Commissioner Storey / Staff Comment – Future Compactor at Suwannee Site

It was noted that the Suwannee dump site already has three-phase power, which would support installation of a future compactor box. After the new compactor at the rock pit is paid off, the Board may consider purchasing an additional compactor for Suwannee. Commissioners clarified they intend to add a new unit at Suwannee, not move the one planned for the rock pit.

Chair's Closing Comments / Schedule Adjustments

Commissioner Hatch echoed Commissioner Osteen's request to keep Ms. McCaskill and Commissioner Jody Stephenson and their families in prayer. He commended Commissioner Storey for his work on his assigned issues and emphasized that, although the five commissioners may differ in opinions, they are all committed to doing what is best for the County, and that disagreements are not taken personally.

Commissioner Hatch explained that due to Rural County Days and associated scheduling conflicts, commissioners will delay reporting on their special assignments until the February Board meeting. The previously planned workshop has been rescheduled for 4:00 p.m. on January 15, 2026. The next Regular Commission Meeting will be held at 6 p.m. on the same day, January 15, 2026.

He also invited everyone to the Chamber of Commerce event at the Dixie County Library at noon, then opened the floor for public comments and concerns.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

During public comment, Mrs. Karen VanAernam highlighted that the City and County have made significant progress working together and described the Waste Pro/garbage fee dispute as a “little rub.” She noted that city residents are also county residents and should expect to pay county assessments, similar to how some jurisdictions charge both city and county fire assessments. She urged everyone to show “grace and mercy,” acknowledging some citizens will be unhappy, but stated she still supports charging Waste Pro fully under the ordinance, even if it upsets some.

Commissioners reiterated that Waste Pro is not required to use County facilities—if the company does, it must pay the tipping fee; otherwise, it can haul directly to Greenville. There was brief discussion comparing Levy and Gilchrist Counties’ fees, with a note that adopting their models (e.g., per-bag charges) might be unpopular locally and could be a subject for future review.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Storey made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Board approved.

PLEASE BE ADVISED that if a person decides to appeal any decision made by the Board with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearings, he/ she will need a record of the proceedings, and for such purpose, he/ she will need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

“Persons with disabilities requesting reasonable accommodations to participate in this proceeding should contact (352) 486-4931 (Voice & TDD) or via Florida Relay Service at (800) 955-8771.” The Board meets the first Thursday of each month at 10:00 AM and the third Thursday of each month at 6:00 PM. Individuals that would like to be placed on the agenda should call Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court, by 4:00 PM on the Friday Preceding the Board meeting, at (352) 498-1200.