

Regular Meeting Minutes
Commission Board Room
Dixie County Courthouse
214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628
October 16, 2025 – 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

Jody Stephenson, District 1, Chairman
Daniel Wood, District 2
Mark Hatch, District 3, Vice Chairman
Jamie Storey, District 4,
David Osteen, District 5

STAFF

John Jenkins, County Manager
Roy Bass, Assistant County Manager
Martha McCaskill, Administrative Asst/Grant Coordinator
Chana Watson, County Attorney
Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court
Brenda Royal, Chief Financial Officer
Joannie Morse, Deputy Clerk

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Mark Hatch called the meeting to order.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE AMERICAN FLAG

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

APPROVAL OF COMMISSION MINUTES

Commissioner David Osteen made the motion to approve 09/20/2025 Regular Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Daniel Wood seconded. Board approved.

VOUCHER APPROVAL

Commissioner Osteen made the motion to approve the vouchers. Commissioner Wood seconded. Board approved.

CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS

Supervisor of Elections Darbi Chaires spoke about the ordinance the BOCC put in place in 2018 that designates areas in the community for political signs, she stated that there are a few conflicts within the ordinance and that the current ordinance needs to be revised to bring it into compliance. The law changed in 2019 and states the political signs must be 150 feet away from the entrance to polling places, there are a few areas of conflict where there are signs posted within the 150 foot rule. She listed the specific locations. Once the revisions are completed and reviewed, it will be advertised, it will be handled just like any other ordinance even though it is an amendment.

Mrs. Chaires said that every precinct and candidate would receive the updated ordinance and diagram of where the 150 feet marker is located at each polling location.

Mrs. Chaires shared that on November 4, 2025, there will be an Elections Office Open House from 11am-1pm along with a Mural Recognition Ceremony at noon. They will have light refreshments and voting equipment set up with ballots and voter registration with the goal of educating the public on the security of our voting systems and the process.

Town of Cross City Mayor Ryan Fulford shared some key points from the Commission Council meeting on Tuesday, October 14, 2025. He shared how heartwarming it was to be able to escort our own back from the hospital, talking about Officer Cody Pope coming home after being shot on a call while on duty.

Mayor Fulford mentioned shirt orders for Department Heads for Rural County Days need to be turned in soon to Mrs. Kay McCallister. The dates for the event are January 21-and 22, 2026. The Meet and Greet Reception is January 21 and 22 out at the Courtyard.

October 20 -26 is Forest City Week, unfortunately it coincides with Homecoming so the City will be hosting an Open House on Monday, October 20 at City Hall from 10am until Noon.

Hot Dogs at the Hall – Citizen Appreciation will be Tuesday, October 21 from 5-7pm, it will also be held at City Hall.

November 11-is Veterans' Day, Mr. Fulford said he spoke with Tank Lee and Tank will be setting everything up. Line-up will be at 10am, the parade will start at 10:30am and then at 11:30am the event will start at Wanda Wheeler Park.

He stated the flags will be switched out at City Hall, the Fire Department, and at the park prior to the event. The flag at the County Manager's Office needs to be switched as well.

Mayor Fulford spoke with the Legislative Aide to Jason Shoaf to confirm that Nov. 14, 2025 is Delegation Day at 10:00am in BOCC Boardroom, it was moved from Nov. 24, 2025.

Elsie Carter confirmed with Mayor Fulford that Dixie County will partner with Chiefland again on Monday, January 19, 2026, for the Martin Luther King Event.

The Economic Team will be traveling to the World Equestrian Center Nov. 19-21, 2025 for the Florida Rural Economic Development Summit.

Friday, Nov. 7th at 11am Haven Hospice Community Center will be holding a Veterans Lunch; Mayor Fulford is asking for representation from Dixie County and the BOCC to attend along with him.

Mayor Fulford stated how good the City's canals look and thanked the County Board for it.

On Nov. 6 the Economic Team will be going out to do their last Coin Challenge for the year with five local businesses.

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

Mrs. Katrina VanAernam was not present at the meeting.

KAY MCCALLISTER, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Mrs. McCallister shared that the Event Calendar on the Visit Dixie Website has been updated. Anyone who has an upcoming Event can go directly to the website and upload it for review and once approved it will be visible on the Events Calendar.

She encourages everyone to use this feature to promote local events — including those organized by churches, schools, the library, or any other community group — to help the public discover and participate in local activities and events.

GREG BAILEY, NORTH FLORIDA PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Mr. Kellan Bailey gave some updates on ongoing projects which included:

Fire Station Three (3) – Construction has begun. Grading is underway, side drains have been installed, the ditch is in place, and work on the driveway has started.

Fire Station Three (6) – The pre-bid meeting was held in Horseshoe last week for both the station and the water main extension projects. We had a great turnout, with about eight or nine contractors showing interest in each project, so we’re expecting some good, competitive bids. The bid opening will be on October 28.

Sheriff’s Evidence Building: The Water Management District permit application was submitted yesterday, and we’ll be moving forward with the process and hopefully getting the permit soon.

95th and 97th Street – The 95th and 97th Street Project preconstruction meeting was held and we have sent the Notice to Proceed to the contractor – execute.

A motion has been requested from the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) to authorize execution of the Notice to Proceed once it has been signed by the contractor. The current target date is November 3, with the next BOCC meeting scheduled for November 6.

Motion to approve the signing of the Notice to Proceed made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Board approved.

Horseshoe Beach Working Waterfront Project: The survey has been completed, and we are now working on the site plans and adding necessary details. Once those are prepared, we will either set up a meeting with County staff or submit the plans for their review. After that, we’ll move forward with the permit applications, aiming to have them submitted before the end of the year so the project can continue progressing toward completion as soon as possible.

JOHN LOCKLEAR, LOCKLEAR AND ASSOCIATES

Mr. John Locklear gave some updates on ongoing projects which included:

Horseshoe Beach Park-Got the plans back from the architect, will get them to Mr. Jenkins tomorrow and then to Mr. Wright this week.

Dredging and Shired

Shired – We have received the DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) permit, and the public notice has been issued. However, the Army Corps of Engineers has indicated that a consultation is required — not because of the beach, but due to the spoil site from which the material is being sourced. Last Friday, the Army Corps project manager advised that it may be possible to work around this requirement through the Helen Emergency Orders. We are currently working with them on this approach, which could shorten the process by about two months and allow the project to move forward sooner.

Dredging and Horseshoe

Horseshoe - The DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) requires letters of approval from the property owners — not those located along the canals, but those whose property the pipeline will cross between the canals and the spoil site — in order to move forward with the permit. Mr. Locklear will coordinate with John this week to prepare a letter for the property owners to sign.

The last step for the DEP on the Army Corps side of Horseshoe we have satisfied all of their questions and it is our understanding that it is working through internal Corps' review.

Suwannee Dredging – FDEP has everything they need and they are drafting the Exemption Letter as of Oct. 14th. Army Corps permit is already secured for Suwannee.

Mr. Locklear briefly mentioned the possibility of bringing a 14 bed Hospital to the County as there is a critical need for one. There are a lot of moving parts to a project of this kind. The project will be discussed in detail at a future BOCC meeting.

CINDY BELLOT, LIBRARY DIRECTOR

Mrs. Bellot provided the end of our fiscal year summary of Library traffic:

8,639 Registered Patrons

20,795 Visitors. However, if people do not come in and go out through the front door, they don't count. This number represents the counted patrons.

Two sources of Wi-fi are available, we do not have access to the number of log-ins on one source.

2,369 guests logged in on the public computers,

4,362 logged into our wi-fi. They do not have to come into the library to use the wi-fi.

The library has been receiving good feedback from around the state about what a great job our staff is doing. We have the books that our patrons need, we have only had to borrow (1) one book from outside our system and (52) fifty-two from inside our system.

Upcoming Events:

Suwannee Firehouse Christmas Bizarre: Sat. Nov. 22 from 10am – 3pm in Suwannee at the Suwannee Fire Station (inside) so it will be rain or shine.

Lower Suwannee Art & Nature Festival: Mar. 14, 2026

Mrs. Bellot stated that library will be closing early Friday for the Homecoming Parade.

Motion was made by Commissioner Hatch to close all County Offices at Noon for Homecoming. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved.

Previous Motion amended to use Administrative Leave for County Office Closure by Commissioner Hatch. Seconded by Commissioner O’Steen. Board approved.

DIANN JONES, SUWANNEE WATER AND SEWER

Mrs. Jones was not present at this meeting.

STEVE FREMEN, CODE ENFORCEMENT & VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

Mr. Freeman had nothing to present at this meeting.

MICHAEL GAINNEY, COUNTY ROAD SUPERINTENDENT

Mr. Gainey stated the crusher has been down for a week and they have not been able to figure out what is wrong with it. He will pull some numbers together to get it repaired and submit them to Commissioner Stephenson to see if it can help the process along.

TIM JOHNSON, SOLID WASTE DIRECTOR

Mr. Tim Johnson was not present at this meeting.

LEON WRIGHT, BUILDING AND ZONING OFFICIAL

Permit applications on the back page

The end-of-year numbers are in, and the updated graph shows an upward trend. We are now able break down the building permit numbers vs the zoning permit numbers and have a total there now, previously they were mixed together. You can see that we processed 3,017 applications this past year.

Mr. Wright said that we are going to be in uncharted territory with the new Code Enforcement here shortly.

SCOTT PENDARVIS, 911 COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR & I.T. ADMINISTRATOR

Mr. Scott Pendarvis gave a verbal presentation to introduce a new program designed to improve the accuracy and efficiency of taking meeting minutes during the BOCC Meetings.

He stated that the program:

- Records and transcribes simultaneously, providing immediate access to meeting text.
- Identifies speakers automatically through built-in voice recognition.
- Joey Lander uses the program at the local newspaper, and reports that it performs reliably and securely.
- Meets government-level data security standards, protecting the integrity of official records.
- It has a low monthly cost, making it budget-friendly

He also explained that this program will not replace our clerks' recording duties. They will continue to record meetings separately to ensure that every detail is captured and verified. The program will serve as a supplemental tool to increase speed, accuracy, and transparency — not a replacement for human oversight.

DARIAN BROWN, DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Chief Brown provided handout for last year's final budget.

He stated he moved the budget from \$800,000.00/\$850,000.00 when he first started to \$1.4 million this past year. They came within \$6,000.00 of balancing it.

He stated that Medicaid/Medicare contributed to the balancing issues. A total deposit of \$1,394,362.52 was made and they were very pleased with it. He stated that next year will be even better and that they are looking into items that may have contributed to the discrepancy including mileage cost increase and insurance billing, and going forward on how to improve tracking to ensure a balanced budget.

He provided a list of topics to discuss:

- HSB Fire Contract was up in June of this year, but services have continued without interruption. A revised draft copy was sent by Mr. Conrad and Chief Brown stated that he reviewed, and several statutory violations and issues were identified and sent back for correction. After reviewing it with Mr. Dodd, Mr. Jenkins, and Attorney Watson, most concerns were resolved and both parties are satisfied with the current version. However, the final copy is not yet ready to get a signature. Once the remaining details are confirmed with Attorney Watson, the finalized contract will be presented at the next meeting for approval and signing.
- Health Dept – They have transitioned into providing primary care services. Chief Brown stated “During a meeting a few weeks ago, it was noted they needed an x-ray machine, but a follow-up call to address that need was inadvertently missed. However, after the meeting a call was made to the State Dept. of Health, there was some movement made, I met with supervisors who are over the people that keep up with the x-ray machines and they assured me that they would have one, the next morning I was advised that the phone call had been made while they were sitting at the BOCC Board Meeting. The machine will be on its way to the Health Dept. shortly, hopefully at no cost through the FL Dept. of Health.
- Christmas in Dixie Expo the evening of Dec. 5, I believe it will still be held at the ballfield, the team is still working on the preliminary details.
- Chief Ferguson and I will be out of town Dec. 4 traveling to the Space Center, we have a presentation on our Para-medicine Program.
- The department received a Fire Act Grant from the state for new turnout gear and SCBAs totaling about \$423,000.00 – the largest amount they have ever awarded, they have asked that we show up to receive the check. Chief Garner received the final grant contract from the State Fire Marshall's Office, which will be returned for final approval before ordering the equipment. Funding is secure, and the grant is 100% reimbursable, meaning the county will be reimbursed once the purchases are made and processed. The turnaround time for the turnout gear is about 45 days and the SCBA²s is about 30 days, and reimbursement can be requested once all equipment is received and the payment has cleared the bank.

- While attending a dinner in Tampa last week, I was approached by a graduate student from Delray Beach who is completing his Master's thesis on Fire Station Resiliency in Florida. The student plans to publish an article in the International Fire Station Design Magazine and requested permission to feature Station 4 as his project. After confirming with Mr. Kellan Bailey and Mrs. Anna King, permission was granted. The student stated he was impressed by the building's straightforward metal design, has received additional photos, and is planning a site visit soon. As a result, Station 4 may be featured in an international publication.
- Mrs. Allison Stevens, who is working with the VA and other representatives, is helping develop a system to streamline veterans' medical sign-ups.
- A new facility that is being proposed includes elevated structures that highlight the county's need for an aerial fire apparatus. Current regulations limit building height to three stories, but with several multi-story units already along the coast and the new facilities planned, fire safety capabilities need to expand. The fire department currently lacks both the \$2,000,000.00 dollar funding and the staffing required for such equipment but hopes to submit an appropriations request before the Nov. 4 deadline. If not approved, alternative funding options, including grants or potential donations of used equipment from other departments, will be explored. Given the two to three-year build time for an aerial truck, planning must begin soon to meet future needs.
- We plan to gather updated numbers as we get closer to the calendar year; we track by calendar year, not fiscal year. More accurate numbers will be available around January, once we finish reviewing additional projects that were previously requested.
- Dixie County Fire Rescue Christmas party will be held at 6pm on Dec. 12 it will be held at the EOC/New Fire Station, more details to follow.

GAIL CARTER, INDIGENT CARE

Mrs. Gail Cater had nothing to present at this meeting.

HOLLY HOUGHTON, COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT

Miss Holly Houghton was not present at the meeting.

ANGIE CROWLEY, HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATOR

Mrs. Angie Crowley had nothing to present at this meeting.

JOHN JENKINS, COUNTY MANAGER

Action Items:

1. Request approval to submit the Tax Collector Expansion FY 2025 Appropriations for Design and Engineering in the amount of \$400,000.00.

Motion to request Board approval of the Tax Collector Expansion FY 2025 Appropriations for Design and Engineering in the amount of \$400,000.00 made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved 5/0

2. Request Board approval of SHIP Repair Reimbursement for Carol Tobon in the amount of \$11,472.03.

Motion to request Board approval of SHIP Repair Reimbursement for Carol Tobon in the amount of \$11,472.03 made by Commissioner Wood. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved 5/0.

3. Request Board approval to execute the contract for the Florida Opioid Allocation/Settlement Distribution between LSF (Lutheran Services of Florida, Inc.) and Dixie County Board of County Commissioners.

Motion to request Board approval to execute the contract for the Florida Opioid Allocation/Settlement Distribution between LSF (Lutheran Services of Florida, Inc.) and Dixie County Board of County Commissioners made by Commissioner Hatch. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved 5/0.

4. Request Board approval to execute the Locklear TWO for LPA0279 DCFSM Ph II for Administrative Oversight in the amount of \$115,000.00 based on SWTF recommendation.

Motion to request Board approval to execute the Locklear TWO for LPA0279 DCFSM Ph II for Administrative Oversight in the amount of \$115,000.00 based on SWTF recommendation made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved 5/0.

5. Request Board approval to move the fence on Matt Fulford's property from north side of the canal to the south side for maintenance purposes based on SWTF recommendation.

Motion to request Board approval to move the fence on Matt Fulford's property from north side of the canal to the south side for maintenance purposes based on SWTF recommendation made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved 5/0

6. Request Board approval for the DCHD (Dixie County Health Department) and North Florida Pediatrics, P.A. space sharing agreement within the Dixie County Health Department.

Motion to request Board approval for the DCHD (Dixie County Health Department) and North Florida Pediatrics, P.A. space sharing agreement within the Dixie County Health Department made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved 5/0.

Information Items:

1. Reminder County offices will be closed Nov 11, 2025, in observance of Veteran's Day.
2. Reminder that the FREDA Rural Summit will be Nov 18 – 21, 2025, in Ocala.

3. The Rural County Days Legislative Networking Reception will be held on Wednesday Jan 21, 2026, at 6:00-8:00 pm at the Doak Campbell Stadium/Dunlap Champions Club West – Level 4 in Tallahassee. Tickets for all five Commissioners, the County Manager and the Assistant County Manager can be purchased if desired for \$45.00 each. There are no room blocks. If any want to spend the night, there will be room consolidation.
4. The Rural County Showcase Expo will be held Thursday, Jan 22, 2026, at 10:00 am–2:00 pm at the Capitol Courtyard.

CHANA WATSON, COUNTY ATTORNEY

Attorney Watson performed a second reading of Noise Ordinance 2025-07.

Motion to approve Noise Ordinance 2025-07 made by Commissioner Hatch. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved 5/0.

BARBIE HIGGINBOTHAM, CLERK OF COURT

Clerk of Court Barbie Higginbotham provided an update on the Auditor situation, we have not heard from them, Attorney Watson did send a letter. A meeting with the Auditor is set for Oct. 27, the complaint is ready to file and advertised based on the outcome of the meeting on the 27. Attorney Watson spoke with a potential auditor. RFPs went out and it needs to be advertised.

COUNTY COMMISSION ITEMS

Finance Director Brenda Royal reminded everyone that this is going to be a tough budget year, and everyone has her number and is welcome to contact her with any questions or concerns.

Clerk of Court Barbie Higginbotham reminded everyone that the Chamber of Commerce will be putting up the memorial flags Nov. 3 at 7am, anyone who would like to help is invited.

Commissioner Wood - Spoke about repairs needed at the States Attorney's Office.

Commissioner Hatch -

- Impact Fees Process, a request should be written out to spend a specific dollar amount, it should go before the Managers and then the Managers will bring it to the BOCC.
- Line-item budgets for comparison – All Constitutional Officers
- EOC checks to John for coding before going to Brenda in Finance
- Hurricane related checks to go to a separate account
- The County Manager needs “view all” access with the Capital City accounts.

Motion to grant County Manager “view all” access made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Board approved.

- Proposed a workshop once a month at 4pm prior to the 6pm meeting to discuss the recommendations before the actual Board meeting to weed out any unnecessary items, there will be no voting, just discussion.

Motion to hold a 4pm meeting every 3rd Thursday prior to the 6pm BOCC Meeting made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved.

- Town of HSB wants to include the Post Office in their new building on a small piece of property, it's a Jason & Corey project that they want to combine, so Commissioner Hatch is requesting all involved parties to thoroughly review the request.

Commissioner Storey – Spoke on possibly cutting back days and closing one site down at Solid Waste, working on a plan to get things in place.

Commissioner Osteen –

- Updated us on the playground equipment and millings for walking track.
- New Mexican Restaurant opening in Jena.

Commissioner Hatch received a call from Chairman Stephenson to add a couple of items –

- A request that the Courthouse area be cleaned up prior to the upcoming Veterans Day events.
- Chairman Stephenson warned about UFO & Orb sightings in District 1.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

Red Hodge requested to be hired back stating that the investigation has concluded and there were no incriminating findings. Attorney Watson stated there are currently no jobs open and that Mr. Hodge would have to reapply for any job openings.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Storey made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Wood seconded the motion. 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.

APPLICATIONS for SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS

20250812 A petition by **Thrift Timothy** requesting a Special Exception to be granted, as provided in Section 4.3.5 SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS of the Dixie County Land Development Regulations to permit one recreational vehicle (ESA), in accordance with the petition dated 08/20/2025 to be located on the property as

described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #16-13-12-2927-0000-0820 384 SE 851 AVE, Old Town (Suwannee), FL 32680; .54 Acres. (COMMISSION DISTRICT 3 MARK HATCH)

LPA recommends approval (5-0)

Motion to approve Special Exception for Thrift Timothy made by Commissioner Hatch. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved. (5-0)

20250795 A petition by **Timothy Bishop** requesting a Special Exception to be granted, as provided in Section 4.7.5 SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS of the Dixie County Land Development Regulations to permit one recreational vehicle (RSF/MH), in accordance with the petition dated 09/12/2025 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #19-13-12-2994-0003-4130 58 SE 899 Ave, Old Town (Suwannee), FL 32680; .12 Acres. (COMMISSION DISTRICT 3 MARK HATCH)

LPA recommends approval (5-0)

Motion to approve Special Exception for Timothy Bishop made by Commissioner Hatch. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Board approved. (5-0)

20250785 A petition by **Steve and Sara Tucker** requesting a Special Exception to be granted, as provided in Section 4.7.5 SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS of the Dixie County Land Development Regulations to permit one recreational vehicle (RSF/MH), in accordance with the petition dated 09/02/2025 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #19-13-12-2952-000F-0070 64 SE 240 St, Old Town (Suwannee), FL 32680; .11 Acres. (COMMISSION DISTRICT 3 MARK HATCH)

LPA recommends approval (5-0)

Motion to approve Special Exception for Steve and Sara Tucker made by Commissioner Hatch. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Board approved. (5-0)

APPLICATIONS FOR VARIANCES

20250815 A petition by **Sheila Flowers** requesting a variance for a reduction of setback on North side of property from 10' to 6' for construction of pole barn to be granted, as provided in 4.7.7 RSF/MH subparagraph (2) of the Dixie County Land Development Regulations in accordance with section 12.3 VARIANCE PROCEDURES., in accordance with the petition dated 09/08/2025 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel # 19-13-12-2994-0000-0040 32 SE 245 ST; .12. (COMMISSION DISTRICT 3 MARK HATCH)

LPA recommends approval (4-1)

Motion to approve Variance for Sheila Flowers made by Commissioner Hatch. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved. (5-0)