

**Regular Meeting  
Commission Board Room  
Dixie County Courthouse  
214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628  
February 19, 2026 – 6:00 PM**

The Board meetings are audio recorded. The public can hear and participate in the meeting via conference call by dialing 1 469-551-3616 and enter code 908-825-494#

**COMMISSIONERS**

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

**STAFF**

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

02/05/2026 BOCC RM Minutes

**Motion to approve the 02/05/2026 BOCC RM Minutes made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved.**

02/09/2026 TOHB and BOCC Workshop Minutes

**Motion to approve the 02/09/2026 TOHB and BOCC Workshop Minutes made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Stephenson Wood. Board approved.**

02/10/2026 TOCC and BOCC Workshop Minutes

**Motion to approve the 02/10/2026 TOCC and BOCC Workshop Minutes made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Stephenson Wood. Board approved.**

**VOUCHER APPROVAL**

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

**CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS/ CITY OFFICIALS**

**Darbi Chaires – Supervisor of Elections**

Mrs. Chaires discussed appointments to the County Canvassing Board. It was explained that typically the Chairman serves on the Canvassing Board, and that only three commissioners may serve at a time, with alternates permitted.

**Motion to appoint Chairman Mark Hatch to serve on the Canvassing Board made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved**

- Discussion followed regarding alternates, with David and Jody identified as eligible.

**Motion to appoint David as an alternate member to the Canvassing Board made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved**

- Ms. Chaires and the Board discussed possibly naming Commissioner Stephenson as a second alternate, Ms. Chaires indicated she would confirm and follow up.

**Motion to appoint Commissioner Stephenson as a second alternate member to the Canvassing Board made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved**

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

Not present

**KAY MCCALLISTER, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

- Mrs. McCallister reported:

- Recently represented Dixie County at:
  - Rural County Days
  - Atlanta Camping and RV Show (five day; high attendance and strong interest in Dixie County)
  - VISIT FLORIDA International Trade Meeting in Orlando (on behalf of Natural North Florida)
  - Fish-a-Rama in Perry, Georgia (four-day show; local captain booked trips at the event).
- Ongoing VISIT FLORIDA advertising campaign promoting scallop season.
- Upcoming events:
  - Dixie County Bears Football Benefit Fishing Tournament – Saturday, February 28 at Suwannee Marina (Calcutta event on Friday, February. 27).
  - Lower Suwannee Art & Nature Festival – March 14.
- Mrs. McCallister reported that D-Track now has a disc golf course and walking trail, both actively used by visitors and beneficial for tourism.
- Chairman Hatch requested the Board consider sponsorship of the Dixie County Bears football team for the fishing tournament.

**Motion to approve a \$250 sponsorship made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved**

**KAREN VANAERNAM, DIXIE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Not present

**GREG BAILEY, NORTH FLORIDA PROFESSIONAL SERVICES**

**Engineering / Project Updates – Kellan Bailey**

- **Fire Station 3** – Interior framing is ongoing; project progressing.
- **Fire Station 6** – Site work underway and moving forward.
- **Sheriff’s Evidence Building** –

- Grout/injection work was advertised last Thursday.
- Pre-bid meeting held yesterday.
- Bid opening scheduled for March 5; work to begin thereafter.
- **95th & 97th Streets –**
  - Contractor expected to begin mobilization the following day; work anticipated to move quickly.
  - Commissioner Hatch noted an optional route for NE 97<sup>th</sup> Street if needed in the area and suggested opening a gated alternate route during construction to keep most residents out of the construction zone; gate to be re-locked once work is complete.
  - Mr. Bailey stated the contractor will maintain at least one lane open; will coordinate with John Jenkins and adjust traffic control if congestion arises.
- **Horseshoe Beach Working Waterfront Project –**
  - Meeting was held with county staff and Mr. Butler to finalize the site plan; site plan was agreed upon.
  - Preparing permit applications.
  - Geotechnical crew scheduled onsite the next morning to do limited work in the parking lot, John Jenkins and Roy Bass were notified.
- **CR 351 Project** – Substantially complete; only signage remains, expected to be finished soon.
- **RESTORE Projects –**
  - County has notified the RESTORE group that it will proceed with the Jena Highway bridges and the Suwannee seawall projects.
  - Agreements will be drafted and sent to the county for execution so work can begin.

**JOHN LOCKLEAR, LOCKLEAR AND ASSOCIATES**

**Additional public works / engineering update**

- **CR 349** – only a few line items remain, expected completion by end of next week.

- **Town of Suwannee & Horseshoe Beach dredging project** – four bids received, staff currently reviewing qualifications; bid recommendation will be brought to the next Board meeting.

**Class III Waste / Land Application Concern**

- Commissioner Stephenson asked if Mr. Locklear was aware of activity “up there in Tallahassee/DEP” regarding eliminating Class III waste work sites and phasing out land application over five years.
- Mr. Locklear stated he was not aware but would look into it.
- Commissioner Stephenson expressed concern that eliminating land application would force all sewage-related residuals to be hauled out-of-state (e.g., to Georgia), potentially driving the cost of routine pump-outs to over \$1,000, discouraging proper pumping and disposal, and affecting treatment plant residuals as well.

**CINDY BELLOT, LIBRARY DIRECTOR**

Not present

**RAELYNN BROWNELL, SUWANNEE WATER AND SEWER**

Reported 926 active accounts.

- Beginning the process of renewing the wastewater permit.
- FEMA / Hurricane-related projects:
  - Five projects are currently open.
  - One project (emergency protective services already paid for by the District) is obligated with FEMA and now under state audit in the amount of \$559,565.00 for reimbursement.
  - The other four projects are progressing slowly but moving forward.
- SRF Drinking Water Grant:
  - RFQs for engineering services have been issued and two firms submitted.
  - Selection of engineering firm(s) scheduled for the District’s February 24 board meeting.
- Wastewater Facility:
  - Facility still needs a major overhaul.

- District is working with the Locker team to pursue potential grant funding.
- Professional activities:
  - Attended Rural County Days and thanked the Board for the opportunity to participate.
  - Attended the FACT (Florida Association of Counties Trust) Risk Management Conference with other Dixie County employees.
  - Plans to attend upcoming Florida Rural Water Association events, including a “Focus on Change” program in March and an emergency preparedness event.

**STEVE FREMEN, CODE ENFORCEMENT & VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER**

Nothing to present at this time.

**MICHAEL GAINNEY, COUNTY ROAD SUPERINTENDENT**

**Road Department / Equipment Update**

- Mr. Gainey reported that the Charlie Kirk signs were received incorrectly and had to be returned to the vendor.
- Replacement signs are expected to arrive by Tuesday or Wednesday.
- Commissioner Hatch stated that assuming the signs arrive in time, the unveiling/dedication will be scheduled for March 5, due to public interest in attending.

**Equipment / Machinery Discussion – Mower, Grader, and Bulldozer**

- John Deere mowing tractor
  - Mr. Gainey discussed with the Board the condition of the old John Deere mowing tractor.
  - It was noted that the pump repair alone would cost approximately \$6,000, and the mowing unit is in poor condition with ongoing repair costs.
  - Mr. Gainey suggested that, possibly in a future budget year, the County should remove the mowing attachment and convert the tractor for use with a bucket rather than continue investing in the mower.

- Commissioner Stephenson clarified that the mower was designed to mow grass around box culverts, not to cut tree limbs, and that its current use for limb-cutting is causing repeated damage.
- There was a recommendation to purchase a saw attachment designed for cutting tree limbs, since the existing mower setup is not appropriate for that purpose.
- This matter was noted as part of Commissioner Stephenson’s committee assignment to be reviewed further.
- Grader and Bulldozer / insurance status
  - Mr. Gainey reported that a grader previously wrecked and burned had many of the needed parts already available in the County yard, but the insurance company had the machine hauled off and is totaling it out.
  - Commissioner Stephenson expressed interest in exploring the option of buying back the totaled grader from the insurer, noting prior experience purchasing a similar lightning-damaged machine at low cost and using its parts.
  - The status of a bulldozer was also discussed. Commissioner Hatch reported that Mr. Johnson has been in contact and plans to go down next week to address the dozer issue.
  - Commissioner Stephenson suggested that the County dispose of other similar graders currently sitting and being used for parts, as they are no longer needed.
  - Commissioner Wood stated that Mr. Johnson was going to have face-to-face next week regarding the grader and bulldozer.
  - It was noted this issue has been ongoing for over a year.

**TIM JOHNSON, SOLID WASTE DIRECTOR**

Not present

**LEON WRIGHT, BUILDING AND ZONING OFFICIAL**

**APPLICATIONS for SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS**

20260204 A petition by **JENNIFER & ALAN KINCAID** requesting a Special Exception to be granted, as provided in Section 4.4.5 SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS of the Dixie County Land Development Regulations to permit one recreational vehicle. ("AG" AGRICULTURE), in accordance with the petition dated 11/24/2025 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #21-10-13-0000-4765-0100 23064 SE HWY 19, Old Town, FL 32680; 2.20 Acres. (COMMISSION DISTRICT 3 MARK HATCH)

**LPA Recommended Denial (4-0) Two previous oppositions noted, one was rescinded and the seconded was not present or on the phone to oppose.**

- Chairman Hatch noted this is the type of case the provision was intended to help and recommended approval.

**Motion to approve Special Exception for JENNIFER & ALAN KINCAID made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved. (5-0)**

20260218 A petition by **Lofton George Lofton Shannon** 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 01/02/2026 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #22-09-13-4357-0000-0320 4 NE 415 AVE, Old Town, FL 32680; 3.00 Acres. (COMMISSION DISTRICT 2 DANIEL WOOD)

**LPA Recommended Approval (4-0) No opposition present or on the phone**

**Motion to approve Special Exception for Lofton George Lofton Shannon made by Commissioner Wood. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved. (5-0)**

20260143 A petition by **Nicholas & Leigh Walter** 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 01/09/2026 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #19-13-12-0000-3420-0100 39 SE 205 St, Old Town (Suwannee), FL 32680; .19 Acres. (COMMISSION DISTRICT 3 MARK HATCH)

**LPA Recommended Approval (4-0) No opposition present or on the phone**

**Motion to approve Special Exception for Nicholas & Leigh Walter made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved. (5-0)**

20260118 A petition by **William and Beverly Holt** 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 01/07/2026 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #30-13-12-3479-0000-0090 96 SE 195 St, Old Town (Suwannee), FL 32680; .57 Acres.

(COMMISSION DISTRICT 3 MARK HATCH)

**LPA Recommended Approval (4-0) No opposition present or on the phone**

**Motion to approve Special Exception for William and Beverly Holt made by Commissioner Stephenson. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved. (5-0)**

20260108 A petition by **Thomas & Amanda Manning** requesting a Special Exception to be granted, as provided in Section 4.4.5 SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS of the Dixie County Land Development Regulations to permit one recreational vehicle. ("AG" AGRICULTURE), in accordance with the petition dated 12/30/2025 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #04-10-13-4519-0000-0180 285 NE 543 St, Old Town, FL 32680; 2.50 Acres. (COMMISSION DISTRICT 2 DANIEL WOOD)

**LPA Recommended Approval (4-0) No opposition present or on the phone**

**Motion to approve Special Exception for Thomas & Amanda Manning made by Commissioner Wood. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved. (5-0)**

20260219 A petition by **James Dees** 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 01/07/2026 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #19-13-12-2952-000H-0050 171 SE 867th Ave, Old Town (Suwannee), FL 32680; .12 Acres.

(COMMISSION DISTRICT 3 MARK HATCH)

**LPA Recommended Approval (4-0) No opposition present or on the phone**

**Motion to approve Special Exception for James Dees made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved. (5-0)**

20260233 A petition by **William Krause C/O Mary Clark** 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 12/30/2025 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #19-13-12-2994-0002-2210 323 SE 241 ST, Old Town (Suwannee), FL 32680; .21 Acres. (COMMISSION DISTRICT 3 MARK HATCH)

**LPA Recommended Approval (4-0) No opposition present or on the phone**

**Motion to approve Special Exception for William Krause C/O Mary Clark made by Commissioner Wood. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved. (5-0)**

20260237 A petition by **Karen Mowrey** 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 12/16/2025 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #30-13-12-3479-0000-0101 21 SE 195 ST, Old Town (Suwannee), FL 32680; .28 Acres. (COMMISSION DISTRICT 3 MARK HATCH)

**LPA Recommended Approval (4-0) No opposition present or on the phone**

**Motion to approve Special Exception for Karen Mowrey made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved. (5-0)**

20260245 A petition by **David and Kathy Johnson** 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 01/03/2026 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #35-09-13-4498-000C-0120 2398 NE 272nd Ave, Old Town, FL 32680; 2.31 Acres.(COMMISSION DISTRICT 2 DANIEL WOOD)

**LPA Recommended Approval (4-0) No opposition present or on the phone**

**Motion to approve Special Exception for David and Kathy Johnson made by Commissioner Wood. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved. (5-0)**

Mr. Wright added that the resolution/ordinances implementing these changes have been reviewed by legal and will be advertised, go back to LPA, then return to the Board at the second April meeting, which should close out that chapter of the process.

#### **Commissioner Hatch Comment on Process**

- Commissioner Hatch stated he kept all the special exception items together and later in the agenda so that the larger audience could see the broader range of serious county business conducted at Board meetings, beyond their individual items, and thanked the public for staying.

#### **APPLICATIONS FOR VARIANCES**

NA

#### **SCOTT PNDARVIS, CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER**

Nothing to present at this time.

**DARIAN BROWN, DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES**

**Fire/EMS Report –**

- Chief Brown reported on recent recognition and awards:
  - Department received a Pediatric Readiness Award, ranking 11th in the State of Florida.
  - Award recognizes that policies, procedures, protocols, equipment, and training are in place to provide a high level of pediatric care.
  - Noted these awards will be published in local media.
- Drought and Burn Ban Discussion:
  - County has been moved into an extreme drought, trending toward exceptional drought.
  - Neighboring counties Levy, Gilchrist, and Lafayette currently have burn bans; Taylor and Madison do not (Madison has the most escaped/large fires).
  - Forest Service is still issuing burn permits; after consulting with Dusty from the Forest Service, Chief recommended not enacting a county burn ban yet to avoid conflicts with state-issued permits and enforcement issues.
  - Chief requested Board guidance/authority to act quickly in coordination with Forest Service if wildfire activity increases.
- Board Action – Burn Ban Authority:
  - Chairman moved to follow the Florida Forest Service’s lead regarding any future burn ban.

**Motion to authorize following Forest Service guidance on burn restrictions made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved**

- Chief Brown explained that enforcement is difficult, penalties are limited, and bans can be hard on citizens needing to burn; however, if fires increase, some restrictions may be necessary. He will update the Board if conditions worsen.
- Grants and Legislative Visit:

- Chief Brown attended Fire Chiefs’ Day at the Capitol; described it as a good event.
- Reported progress on a potential ~\$500,000.00 grant for departmental equipment/needs and was told he is likely “in the running.”
- Fire Station Construction Updates:
  - Station 3 (First District):
    - Many stud walls are up; project is moving along well.
    - Chief Brown has not visited this week due to the holiday schedule but plans to go tomorrow.
  - Station 6:
    - Plumber scheduled to be on site tomorrow to start work on utilities/footers.
  - Commissioner Stephenson indicated willingness to meet Chief on site depending on schedule.
- Office Closure Notice:
  - Chief Brown advised that the Fire/EMS office will be closed the next day for Tina’s (Tina Keen) grandmother’s (Romie Faye Davis) funeral (services at 11:30 a.m.).
  - Staff will return and reopen in the afternoon.

**GAIL CARTER, INDIGENT CARE**

Not present

**HOLLY HOUGHTON, COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT**

Not present

**ANGIE CROWLEY, HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATOR**

Ms. Crowley states the Board of County Commissioner’s office will also be closed for Teresa Folwer’s mother’s funeral (Romie Faye Davis) from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**JOHN JENKINS, COUNTY MANAGER**

1. Request Board approval of the SHIP HHRP Demo Reconstruction Reimbursement for Darlene Powell in the amount of \$154,664.00.

**Motion to approve the SHIP HHRP Demo Reconstruction Reimbursement for Darlene Powell in the amount of \$154,664.00 made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved**

2. Request Board approval of the SHIP Down Payment assistance for Jordan Leavitt in the amount of \$20,000.00

**Motion to approve the SHIP Rehab SHIP Down Payment assistance for Jordan Leavitt in the amount of \$20,000.00 made by Commissioner Stephenson. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved**

3. Request Board approval of the Title VI Nondiscrimination Assurance 2026-2028.

**Motion to approve the Title VI Nondiscrimination Assurance 2026-2028 made by Commissioner Stephenson. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved**

4. Request Board approval of the Notice of Award to the lowest bidder, VanAernam Timber Management, for the Lime Rock Purchase in the amount of \$11.00 per ton.

**Motion to approve the Notice of Award to the lowest bidder, VanAernam Timber Management, for the Lime Rock Purchase in the amount of \$11.00 per ton made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved**

5. Request Board approval of the VanAernam Timber Management Lime Rock Purchase Agreement.

**Motion to approve the VanAernam Timber Management Lime Rock Purchase Agreement made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved**

6. Request Board approval of the Air Methods, LLC Lease Agreement in the amount of \$3,602.00 per month beginning Feb 19, 2026, ending Feb 18, 2027.

**Motion to approve the Air Methods, LLC Lease Agreement in the amount of \$3,602.00 per month beginning Feb 19, 2026, ending Feb 18, 2027, made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved**

7. Request Board approval of Resolution 2026-12 for the Dixie County Employee Policy and Procedure Manual.

**Motion to approve Resolution 2026-12 for the Dixie County Employee Policy and Procedure Manual made by Commissioner Stephenson. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved**

**8. Mulch & Soil / Dixie Dumpster Billing Clarification**

- Discussion revisiting prior action regarding Mulch & Soil plant's C&D and metal removal by Dixie Dumpster:
- Original full disposal/hauling total was approximately \$20,000+, but only \$14,406.00 attributable to this specific Board action required adjustment.
- Prior motion did not name Dixie Dumpster in a way suitable for audit; current action clarifies and limits county responsibility.
- Request to "cut that bill in half" to \$7,203.00 on the \$14,406.00 portion.
- Commissioner Hatch emphasized this is the last such reduction and is being done mainly for auditing/record purposes, not as new relief beyond what was previously voted.

**Motion to approve paying \$7,203 (half of the \$14,406) to Dixie Dumpster made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey; approved, with note on the record that this is the final such concession.**

**Information item:**

FACT (Florida Association of Counties Trust) Conference in June; registration opens March 2, 2026.

- Discussion that if a commissioner signs up for full conference lodging but leaves early, the person that leaves early will pay for the unused room; members asked to coordinate stay length in advance.
- Ethics training requirements were briefly referenced; commissioners encouraged them to attend and ensure necessary annual training is completed.

**CHANA WATSON, COUNTY ATTORNEY**

**RV Park Denial – Mediation under Land Use Act**

Attorney Watson reported on Susan Boell RV Park matter (previously denied by Board):

- Property owner has invoked procedures under Florida Land Use and Environmental Dispute Resolution Act (FLUEDRA), requesting mediation instead of going directly to court.
- County had previously indicated lack of interest in mediation, preferring to stand on the Board’s denial; however, under the Act, the property owner controls whether mediation is pursued.
- County must:
  1. Participate in mediation with a special magistrate experienced in land use.
  2. Designate a Board representative with authority to make a binding decision on behalf of the Board (may step out to consult but must be able to agree or decline proposed settlements).
- Both sides must mutually agree on a special magistrate; neither County nor property owner counsel had a ready list, so options are still being identified.
- Discussion:
  - Commissioner Hatch emphasized preference for an independent magistrate not closely affiliated with the County.
  - Commissioner Stephenson suggested consulting Tallahassee attorneys associated with the Board (e.g., statewide counsel frequently used by counties) to determine how similar cases have been handled and learn best practices.

- Commissioner Stephenson raised concern about expending significant funds on a case the County might not ultimately be able to defend successfully; suggestion that legal research clarify what is legally defensible before committing large resources.
- Attorney Watson will:
  - Seek names of qualified magistrates (including from neighboring counties such as Gilchrist, and from state-level contacts).
  - Provide Board with a brief overview of procedural steps (handout referenced).
  - Return with recommended mediator and request Board appointment of a representative.
- Target: Attorney Watson requested names by early the following week to keep the process moving.

### **Opioid Settlement Funds**

- County Attorney reported receipt of Year 4 opioid settlement distribution:
  - Distributors – \$8,757.56
  - Johnson & Johnson – \$8,774.27
  - Teva – \$543.07
  - Allergan – \$1,457.46
  - CVS – \$2,916.90
  - Walgreens – \$4,115.31
  - Total – \$26,564.57
- Attorney Watson noted:
  - Additional minor payments from other groups may follow, but overall yearly amounts are decreasing as the multi-year settlement progresses.
  - It is anticipated that the local coalition (e.g., Brown and related stakeholders) will soon approach the Board to discuss allocation of these funds.
- Funds are (or will be) received by wire transfer and deposited to county accounts.

### **Additional Legal/Administrative Clarifications**

- Attorney Watson confirmed:
  - Current Air Methods arrangement is consistent with Board direction and cost-effective compared to constructing new facilities; it includes spare space the County may lease out later.

No additional Board action required beyond adopted motions.

### **BARBIE HIGGINBOTHAM, CLERK OF COURT**

Nothing to present at this time.

### **COUNTY COMMISSION ITEMS**

- Commissioners collectively asked the community to keep the Pinner family, the Bouie Langford family, and all first responders, law enforcement, and EMS personnel in their thoughts and prayers, noting the emotional toll of responding to tragic incidents, especially those involving children.
- Commissioner Storey announced a gospel singing benefit for the Pinner family on Saturday, February 28, around 4:00 p.m. at Jessie Swails' place off Spillers Highway (Hill Heritage):
  - Food will be served; donations accepted.
  - All proceeds will go to the Pinner family.
- The Board noted an additional large benefit dinner at Wandle Wheeler Park next Friday for the Pinner family:
  - A very high number of plates are expected to be sold.
  - An account has been established at Capital City Bank for anyone wishing to donate directly.
  - A dessert/cake auction and other fundraisers are also planned.
- Commissioner Stephenson reported staying an extra day at Rural County Days (at his own expense) to:
  - Meet with DEP and connect them with Steve on tire disposal issues.

- Discuss concerns about nitrogen in waterways, suggesting that long-acting herbicide spraying in ditches may be killing vegetation that would otherwise absorb nitrogen, potentially contributing to algae problems.
- Mentioned plans for future water testing once conditions are less dry.
- Also asked staff about progress on speed/safety signage and road markings on CR 351.
- Commissioners reiterated that Dixie County residents and neighboring counties have strongly rallied around the affected families, reflecting the county's tradition of coming together in times of need despite everyday disagreements.
- The Chairman shared that:
  - He visited Ms. Diane Pinner and emphasized how horrific the situation is, asking for continued prayers for the family and first responders.
  - Chief Brown asked for prayers for Chief Ferguson who has been out all week with his father who is battling severe cancer and recently underwent procedures.
  - Attorney Watson noted that coordinating arrangements for multiple deceased family members is overwhelming and encouraged support through the various benefits and verified online efforts.
- Commissioners closed by urging everyone to keep all affected families and responders lifted up in prayer and to support the ongoing benefit efforts in whatever way they are able.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS**

##### **Presentation by Victor Blanco (UF/IFAS Marine Extension, Taylor County)**

- Mr. Blanco reminded the Board that he appeared three years ago seeking support for:
  - A Taylor County grant to construct a new artificial reef (approved and completed), and
  - A monitoring grant for the Horseshoe Beach artificial reef in Dixie County (also completed to the Board's satisfaction).
- In 2024, the Dixie County BOCC supported an application for grant funding to construct an artificial reef at the Anderson Columbia reef site (approx. 60+ miles

offshore). That application was denied by FWC due to lack of bottom and biological data for the site.

- Current request:
  - Mr. Blanco met with FWC and CCA (Coastal Conservation Association); rising costs mean a single-county award of \$60,000 is often insufficient because much of it is consumed by deployment logistics, leaving less for reef structure.
  - Proposed a multi-county grant application with Taylor County as lead:
    - FWC cap: \$60,000 per county.
    - CCA has offered a 100% match on Taylor's \$60,000.
    - Victor asked Dixie County to provide a letter of support for Taylor County's BOCC reef application for 2027, making it a multi-county project.
    - All financial administration and a match would be handled by Taylor County, with no direct cost to Dixie.
  - Separately, he suggested Dixie County apply this year for a small monitoring grant ( $\approx$  \$6,000) to:
    - Conduct bottom/biological surveys at the Anderson Columbia reef site in Dixie.
    - Gather the data FWC requires to consider a future Dixie construction grant at that site.
- Clarifications:
  - The requested letter of support is for the BOCC reef site (approx. 22 miles east of Steinhatchee River), not for Anderson Columbia this year.
  - Both Anderson Columbia sites (Dixie and Taylor) remain permitted for several more years (7–8 years left), providing time to develop a long-term strategy.
  - FWC has signaled interest in keeping a role in the construction of the Anderson Columbia sites, but Victor believes Keith Milling (FWC) is open to discussion if the counties engage.

### **Board Questions, Concerns, and Direction**

- Commissioners expressed frustration and skepticism based on past experiences:
  - Recalled prior situations (e.g., bridge waterline project) where Dixie’s numbers were used but perceived benefits did not fully materialize locally; concerned about “riding in the back seat” again while another county advanced its projects.
  - Questioned whether supporting Taylor’s BOCC reef might tie up Dixie’s chances or priority for future reef construction funding at Anderson Columbia.
- **Mr. Blanco’s responses:**
  - The BOCC reef and Anderson Columbia are separate sites; supporting BOCC does not preclude later funding for Anderson Columbia.
  - FWC’s reef funds are drawn from a pooled pot (federal + state + license plate funds) and awarded each cycle; one county’s award does not automatically block another’s in a different cycle.
  - Dixie’s 2024 Anderson Columbia application was denied only because it lacked detailed site data, not because of any support given to Taylor.
  - For this year, Dixie’s Anderson Columbia construction grant would likely be denied again for the same reason unless new survey data is obtained; hence his offer to help write a monitoring-only proposal for Dixie.
  - Confirmed that Taylor has a separate Anderson Columbia site and the only permanent permitted site in Dixie is Anderson Columbia, so obtaining data there is critical for Dixie’s future reef program.
- **Board concerns & questions:**
  - Why Taylor would be moving forward on BOCC when Dixie’s Anderson Columbia was denied; some felt Dixie should be priority given its previous denial.
  - Commissioners noted Taylor received \$60,000 this year; questioned how Taylor’s multi-county proposal interacts with Dixie’s interests.
- Mr. Blanco clarified:

- Taylor did apply and receive \$60,000 for this year under its own application; the multi-county concept with CCA match is intended to leverage limited funds, not to sideline Dixie.
- Mr. Blanco offered to help Dixie submit a separate monitoring grant focused solely on Anderson Columbia (Dixie), which would not compete with Taylor’s construction grant.
- No final decision was taken at this point; the Board continued discussion (later in the meeting) about needing:
  - More written information on the grant structure and scoring,
  - Clarity on how supporting Taylor’s BOCC proposal would affect Dixie’s future eligibility and priority for Anderson Columbia construction grant funding.

**ADJOURN**

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

ATTEST:

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Mark Hatch, Chairman

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Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk-Auditor

**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.