

Commission Board Room  
Dixie County Courthouse  
214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628  
March 05, 2026 – 10:00 AM

*The Board meetings are audio recorded. The public can hear and participate in the meeting via conference call by dialing 1 469-551-3616 and enter code 394317873#*

**COMMISSIONERS**

Mark Hatch, District 3, Chairman  
Jody Stephenson, District 1  
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  
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**

02/19/2026 Regular BOCC Minutes

**Motion to approve the 02/19/2026 BOCC Regular Meeting Minutes made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved.**

**VOUCHER APPROVAL**

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

**CHRISTINA JIMENEZ – ANOTHER WAY, INC.**

- Reported that April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month and the awareness color is teal.

- Explained that the courthouse is typically allowed to decorate the front area with teal ribbons.
- Requested permission, in addition, to either:
  - Replace existing spotlight bulbs with blue bulbs, or
  - Place blue film over the spotlights for the month of April only, to be removed afterward.

**Motion to Replace existing spotlight bulbs for the month of April only made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved (4-0)**

\*Commissioner Stephenson came in after the vote

#### **Commissioner Stephenson / Vote Clarification**

- Commissioner Stephenson arrived after the prior votes.
- A question was raised as to whether his arrival changed the vote count from 4–0 to 5–0.
- It was clarified on the record that Commissioner Stephenson’s voting would begin upon his arrival, and he did not vote on the earlier items because he was not present for the discussion, so the earlier votes remain 4–0.

#### **SANDRA WOODWARD -PROVIDER APPRECIATION DAY**

##### **Early Learning Coalition / Child Care Provider Appreciation Day Proclamation**

- Presenter: Sandra Woodard, Director of Communications, Early Learning Coalition of the Nature Coast, accompanied by Director Tanya Hiers and Ms. Jacqueline Vega of the GOAT Learning Center (recognized as a high-quality childcare provider in Dixie County).
- Ms. Woodard thanked the Board for recognizing the importance of childcare workers and read a proclamation declaring May 8, 2026 (the Friday before Mother’s Day) as “Child Care Provider Appreciation Day” in Dixie County, Florida.
- The proclamation recognized:
  - The vital role of early care and education providers in nurturing and educating young children, supporting working families, and strengthening the local economy.
  - The importance of quality early learning experiences in promoting school readiness, healthy development, and strong social-emotional skills.
  - The daily dedication and professionalism of childcare providers as trusted partners to families and contributors to the workforce infrastructure.
  - The partnership between the Early Learning Coalition and Dixie County providers in administering School Readiness and VPK (Voluntary Prekindergarten) programs, professional development, and expanding access to high-quality early learning.

**Motion to approve Proclamation made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Story. Board Approved 5-0.**

#### **CAROLINE EFSTATHION VDCI – MOSQUITO CONTROL**

## **Mosquito Control Presentation – Vector Disease Control International (VDCI)**

**Presenter:** Dr. Caroline Efstathion Card (with colleague Lita Honsby and another VDCI representative)

- Introduction / Company Background
  - VDCI is a private mosquito control company serving 25 states.
  - Operates 17 aircraft (for adulticiding and larviciding), 350+ spray trucks, ~350 full-time and 150–200 seasonal employees.
  - Has an established footprint in Florida, providing full mosquito control programs for Baker, Clay, Lake, Putnam, and Sumter Counties, and for the cities of Live Oak, Clewiston, and South Bay.
  - Dixie County is added as their new mosquito control customer.
- Program Approach – Integrated Mosquito Management
  - Dixie will receive an Integrated Mosquito Management (IMM) plan, which is proactive rather than reactive and combines:
    - Surveillance – trapping and identifying mosquitoes to track species and abundance.
    - Larviciding – targeting larvae in standing water where they are easier to control.
    - Adulticiding (spray trucks) – used as needed, based on surveillance/action thresholds.
    - Source reduction – identifying and reducing standing water and habitats.
    - Public education and communication with the County.
  - Goal is to keep mosquito populations low while being good stewards of the environment and minimizing unnecessary chemical use.
- Year One Focus
  - Learning the county:
    - Mapping where people live, parks, stormwater areas, flood-prone areas, and other mosquito habitats.
    - Identifying which of the ~45 mosquito species in Dixie County:
      - Transmit disease,
      - Are nuisance biters, or
      - Primarily affect wildlife.
  - Q1: Input maps into tablet systems; begin surveillance and inspections.
  - Q2: Increase field operations:
    - More intensive larviciding,
    - Adulticide missions as needed,
    - Response to citizen complaints.
  - Peak season: Use accumulated data to better target problem areas.
  - End of season: Review data to refine and improve the program for subsequent years.
- Citizen Complaints Number
  - The existing county mosquito complaint number (“303” line referenced by the Chair) will remain the same.
  - Calls will be forwarded to VDCI, and VDCI will have direct access to that line to receive and respond to complaints.
- Private Property, Right of Entry, and Treatment

- VDCI usually stays on county roads/right-of-way due to:
  - Liability concerns, and
  - Risk of heavy spray trucks getting stuck or damaged on private/dirt roads.
- For spray trucks (adulticiding at night):
  - They typically do not go onto private property without specific legal arrangements.
- For larviciding:
  - They have more flexibility; products are biological.
  - Standard practice:
    - Knock on the homeowner’s door when traps show high mosquito numbers.
    - Ask for permission to inspect and treat standing water on the property.
  - They can apply larvicide “chunks/dunks” or more advanced, longer-lasting products.
- For special situations:
  - If homes are 300–400+ feet off the road, and spray trucks cannot effectively reach, VDCI can:
    - Work with the county to obtain necessary written permissions and legal coverage before going further in.
- No-Spray Zones / Beekeepers
  - County maintains a list of no-spray requests and beekeepers.
  - VDCI will implement no-spray or exclusion zones:
    - Trucks will shut off spray when passing these properties.
  - They will continue to update and honor these lists in coordination with the County.
- Public Information / Data Sharing
  - In Florida, most citizens primarily care about when the spray truck is coming, so full data dashboards are not common.
  - However, in other locations, VDCI:
    - Hosts web pages with data, maps, and program information.
  - They are open to:
    - Setting up a page for Dixie County, or
    - Providing a link from the county’s website,
    - Showing where spraying/larviciding is occurring and what the surveillance data show,
    - To help demonstrate that work is being done and potentially reduce complaint calls.
- Aerial Spraying / Emergency Response
  - Aerial application is very expensive and is not in Dixie’s current budget.
  - In the event of:
    - Major storm or hurricane, or
    - Disease outbreak, funding may become available, and:
      - VDCI can deploy 4–6 aircraft; one aircraft is stationed in Florida full-time.
  - For FEMA reimbursement, CDC/FDACS require:
    - Compilation of baseline mosquito count data,

- Post-event counts showing at least 80% above baseline.
- VDCI would:
  - Work with FDACS using historical data Dixie already has,
  - Compile and submit the necessary counts for concurrency checks,
  - Once thresholds and approvals are met, they could spray without waiting behind other counties on FDACS' list, as Dixie is now a regular customer.
- Spray Hours
  - Truck adulticiding typically runs:
    - From sunset to approximately 3–4 hours after sunset.
- Q&A Highlights
  - Large private properties / swamps / low areas:
    - VDCI acknowledged Dixie is “unique” with Mallory Swamp, Suwannee River, Gulf, and low terrain.
    - Emphasized the need to:
      - Identify hotspots, and
      - Proactively seek landowner cooperation for larviciding in large water-holding areas.
  - Citizens wanting larvicide dunks:
    - Due to label laws, VDCI cannot distribute larvicide directly for citizens to apply themselves.
    - Residents can request service, and VDCI will come out and treat water on-site with homeowner permission.
  - Beekeepers and opponents of spraying:
    - VDCI will:
      - Maintain and update no-spray and beekeeper lists,
      - Turn off spray when passing those properties.

## **VICTOR BLANCO - UF/IFAS MARINE EXTENSION**

### **Artificial Reef Program –Florida Sea Grant**

- Mr. Blanco provided commissioners with:
  - A copy of the FWC/FBCC denial letter for Dixie County’s previous artificial reef construction grant application (Anderson–Columbia site).
  - Supporting documentation explaining the denial.
- Key reason for denial:
  - Application could not be approved because the deployment sites had not been surveyed/monitored prior to submission, so required data were missing.
- Current Funding Context:
  - State artificial reef funds are limited (approx. \$1.2 million statewide per year) and split between construction and monitoring projects.
  - Each county is typically limited to about \$60,000 per project if applying alone, which is insufficient to build a meaningful reef at the Anderson–Columbia site.
- Proposal for 2026 Cycle:
  1. Letter of Support for Taylor County (this cycle):

- Requested a letter of support from Dixie County BOCC for Taylor County’s reef construction grant at the Clerks reef site this year.
- 2. Monitoring Grant for Dixie County (this cycle):
  - Proposed Dixie County submit a monitoring grant application (\$6,000) for the Anderson–Columbia reef site, covering:
    - A couple of trips with a charter boat.
    - Volunteer and technical divers to conduct bottom surveys and collect missing data.
  - Monitoring application to be approved by the BOCC on March 19 and submitted to FWC the following day.
- 3. Future Construction Application for Dixie (next cycle):
  - With monitoring data in hand and a future letter of support from Taylor County, Dixie would be eligible to apply next year for a larger construction grant (up to \$220,000) for Anderson–Columbia.
- Stakeholder Support:
  - Noted the importance of letters of support from:
    - Charter boat captains.
    - Fishing clubs.
    - Marinas.
    - Anderson–Columbia and other local stakeholders.
  - Mr. Blanco committed to helping draft and gather these letters for future applications.
- Kay McCallister (Tourism/Economic Development) spoke in support of Mr. Blanco and Florida Sea Grant, noting that:
  - After the last meeting, she requested his help with ecological and environmental justification for a Shired Island BP/Restore project, and within one day he provided a detailed report.
  - She believes this shows he is now committed to being “in the front seat” with Dixie County.
  - She continues to fully support Sea Grant and this reef funding strategy.
- Board Concerns & Response:
  - Commissioner Hatch expressed frustration that the prior denial (June 20, 2024) had not been clearly presented to the Board until now and felt “left in the back seat.”
  - Victor Blanco:
    - Mr. Blanco acknowledged he did not come back to present the denial in person.
    - Mr. Blanco stated he had emailed the denial and supporting documents to county administration at the time.
    - Mr. Blanco accepted responsibility for the communication gap and committed to better, direct communication with the BOCC going forward.
    - Emphasized there is no guarantee any grant (monitoring or construction) will be funded, but:
      - “If we don’t apply, we are guaranteed not to get it.”
- Board Action (from discussion following his presentation):

**Motion to approved issuing a letter of support for Taylor County’s current Artificial Reef Construction Grant Application made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board Approved 5-0**

The Board approved issuing a letter of support for Taylor County’s current artificial reef construction grant application, with the understanding that a Dixie County monitoring grant application for the Anderson–Columbia site will be brought back for approval at the next meeting.

**CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS/ CITY OFFICIALS**

Mayor Ryan Fulford, Town of Cross City – Thanks and Suwannee River Water Management Meeting

- Thanks for Benefit Support:
  - Mayor Fulford thanked Commissioner Storey, Mr. Tim Johnson, and others for providing a dumpster for the Friends of Roll family benefit, stating it was greatly needed and deeply appreciated.
  - Noted there was an overwhelming and humbling turnout, with support from local residents and people from outside the county.

Mayor Fulford discussed the Suwannee River Water Management District Public Meeting Topic: St. Johns River Water Management District – Proposed Water Pumping into Suwannee River Water Management District Area

- Date: March 19, 2026  
Time: 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.  
Location: Suwannee River Water Management District Headquarters, 9225 County Road 49, Live Oak, FL
- Attendees (Dixie County):
- Mayor Ryan Fulford, Town of Cross City will attend
- Commissioner Stephenson (designated Commission attendee, health permitting) and Mr. Roy Bass.
- Backup Commissioner Storey as needed.

Purpose:

- To receive information and public input regarding the proposal for St. Johns River Water Management District to pump water into the Suwannee River Water Management District area.
- To ensure Dixie County’s interests are represented and local concerns are voiced.

Notes:

- Mayor Fulford is continuing research on the issue and is attending primarily to gather information and ensure local voices are heard.
- Mayor Fulford will provide a follow-up report to be provided to the BOCC after the meeting.
- Commissioner Hatch discussed the conflict with its own March 19, 2026, Board meeting and agreed that at least one commissioner (Commissioner Stephenson, health permitting) would attend, with Commissioner Storey volunteering as backup, and Mayor Fulford will share additional details as he receives them.

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

- Ms. Sheila Frierson, Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition, thanked the community and commissioners for supporting their educational efforts.
- Mrs. Frierson presented a new parent’s guide to drug misuse, covering ages three through adulthood, designed to help parents and schools start age appropriate conversations with children about safe use of medications and avoiding unknown pills; copies were provided to the Board and are available to others.
- Mrs. Frierson reported that the Coalition will continue its “Know the Law” program for 6th graders at the end of the month and will also conduct environmental scans using their “Hit List” tool.
- Mrs. Frierson reminded everyone of the “Uplift the Tri-County” resource event hosted by Lutheran Services at Camp Anderson on March 26, 2026, aimed at equipping churches, teachers, Sunday school leaders, and other faith-based workers with resources to help people in need.

**KAY MCCALLISTER, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

- Events & Festivals:
  - Reported a strong turnout and thanked commissioners for supporting the Dixie County High School Bears football booster fishing tournament.
  - Announced upcoming events:
    - March 14 – Lower Suwannee Arts & Nature Festival in Suwannee (10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.).
    - March 14 – Horseshoe Beach Music Festival (12:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.).
    - March 28 – Heritage Hill Spring Festival.
  - Encouraged the public to attend and “make a day of festivals” in Dixie County.
- Parks / Recreation Updates:
  - Mrs. McCallister reported that Gornto Springs and Hinton Landing are very close to being available for online reservations.
  - Noted that the Suwannee pickleball group is coordinating with the “Jena” pickleball group to set up an inter-county tournament and will keep the Board informed.
- Shired Island / BP Restore Project:
  - Informed the Board that the County is pursuing purchase of private property adjacent to Shired Island using BP Restore funds; the BP committee has requested detailed ecological and economic justification.

- Stated that on Monday she contacted Victor Blanco (Florida Sea Grant) for assistance, and by Tuesday he provided:
  - A one-page summary and a seven-page detailed justification explaining how the project aligns with BP Restore priorities, including habitat protection, fishery recovery, storm resilience, and economic revitalization.
- Mrs. McCallister expressed appreciation for Mr. Blanco’s quick and professional response and noted she has reached out to Sea Grant staff to further educate the County on the economic benefits of aquaculture.
- Conflict Disclosure / Appraisal Request:
  - Asked the Board to authorize use of Tourism/BOCC funds to hire a BP-approved appraiser for the Shired Island-adjacent property as the next step toward acquisition.
  - The County Attorney advised that the involved commissioner must first complete a conflict-of-interest form and be recused from voting; the Chair declined to entertain a motion until the form was signed.
  - Mrs. McCallister agreed to bring the request back once the conflict documentation was complete so that the Board could vote with both the commissioner and County protected.
- Friends of the Refuge:
  - Reported attending a recent Friends of the Refuge meeting; the group wants greater Dixie County participation, especially since much of the refuge is on the Dixie side of the river.
  - Provided flyers describing local hiking/biking opportunities and information about the Friends program; encouraged interested residents to get involved.
  - Noted that the Friends group will have a booth at the Suwannee Arts & Nature Festival for anyone wishing to learn more or join.

**RE-VISIT** (for recorded audio clarification purposes this portion came after Mrs. VanAernam’s presentation)

**Shired Island Adjacent Property – Appraisal Authorization**

- Following completion of the required conflict-of-interest form, Mrs. McCallister requested Board approval to use Tourism/BOCC funds to hire a BP-approved appraiser to perform an appraisal on the privately owned property adjacent to Shired Island, owned by Margorie Stephenson.
- Chairman Hatch clarified on the record that Commissioner Jody Stephenson:
  - Has signed a conflict/non-participation form,
  - Commissioner Stephenson will not vote on this matter, and
  - May sit in silence during discussion due to his family’s ownership interest.
- It was noted for the record that:
  - The Stephenson property is approximately 2 acres of Gulf-front land contiguous to the Shired Island County Park, with federal land on the other side, making it a strategically important parcel for long-term public access and tourism.
  - During discussion it was noted that the well, serving the Shired Island County Park is believed to be located on Stephenson family property, meaning the

County has benefited from this private property for many years (well and, likely, part of the pavilions).

- Commissioners expressed gratitude to the Stephenson family, particularly Mr. Johnny Stephenson, and acknowledged that Commissioner Jody Stephenson, Ms. Margie, and the rest of the family have continued allowing this public benefit.
- The Stephenson family did not pursue the County; rather, Mrs. McCallister approached them about the possibility of acquisition.
- The family has historically allowed public use, including the park well and part of the pavilion reportedly sitting on Stephenson property, and has indicated willingness to convey the land to the County for consideration, subject to Restore/BP processes.
- Mrs. VanAernam and Commissioner Hatch emphasized that acquisition is being pursued strictly from an economic and tourism perspective, as a critical public investment for residents, the region, and the state.

**Motion made by Commissioner Osteen to approve use of Tourism/BOCC funds for an appraisal by a BP-approved appraiser. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board Approve 4-0**  
Commissioner Stephenson abstained due to conflict (non-voting status to be noted in the minutes).

## **KAREN VANAERNAM, DIXIE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **Economic Development Update**

#### **McGriff Pass:**

- Reported that McGriff Pass remains one of the top economic development projects for Dixie County, the Town of Suwannee, and the broader region.
- Mrs. VanAernam stated that an informational letter is being distributed to legislators and various offices.
- Mrs. VanAernam noted a contact in Lake City who is willing to assist the County with Army Corps of Engineers permit applications, and confirmed active work is underway on this front.

#### **Shired Island Beach Project:**

- Mrs. VanAernam advised that the County is gaining traction and direction on the Stephenson/Shired Island Beach project.
- Mrs. VanAernam mentioned ongoing discussions with Daniel Duarte (associated with Restore funding) to better understand his role and level of control in order to move the project forward, in coordination with legal guidelines.

#### **SPARK Initiative – Industrial Park:**

- Mrs. VanAernam described participation in the SPARK initiative (Site Positioning and Readiness Catalyst) with the North Florida Economic Development Partnership (15-county consortium).
- Dixie County has selected a primary project/area in the industrial park for SPARK's detailed assessment.
- A team is preparing a comprehensive report on strengths and needed improvements to make the site more attractive for industrial and construction investment; this assistance is provided at no cost to the County.

- Economic development staff are reviewing a lengthy draft report to ensure completeness before finalization.
- **Gornto Springs – Online Reservations:**
  - Mrs. VanAernam reported that the Gornto Springs Park project is progressing well and is expected to be available for online reservations soon.
- **Lieutenant Governor Visit / McGriff Pass Advocacy (Chairman Hatch / Karen VanAernam)**
  - Commissioner Hatch noted that the Lieutenant Governor Jay Collins visited Monday; the County provided him a letter regarding McGriff Pass.
  - The Lieutenant Governor returned Commissioner Hatch’s call, and his aide, Hunter, also has followed up.
  - The County plans to schedule a full-day visit in April, including:
    - A boat trip to McGriff Pass, and
    - Site visits to local industries (timber, cattle, metal, row crops) to showcase Dixie County’s economic base.
  - Mrs. VanAernam added that Kat Cammack, Representative Jason Shoaf, and Senator Corey Simon are all aware and engaged on McGriff Pass, and expressed confidence that, despite skepticism, the County will continue pushing forward and “will not quit.”

## **GREG BAILEY, NORTH FLORIDA PROFESSIONAL SERVICES**

### **Project Updates – Kellan Bailey**

- **Fire Station #3:**
  - Interior framing is being completed, and mechanical/electrical rough-ins are underway.
  - Exterior progress may not be obvious, but work is actively ongoing inside.
- **Fire Station #6 (Horseshoe Beach):**
  - Site work continues and the foundation pour is scheduled for March 12, 2026.
- **Evidence Building:**
  - The County is advertising for grout injection foundation work.
  - Bid opening has been extended to Monday, March 9, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.; bids should be ready for Board consideration at the next meeting.
- **Roads 95th Street and 97<sup>th</sup> Street:**
  - 95th Street has been paved; 97th Street is currently being prepared for paving.
  - Some cleanup and additional work remain on 95th; the contractor is aware of a gate that may be used when shifting work to 97th, and the inspector has been instructed to coordinate with the affected landowners (Mr. John Jenkins and Mr. Roy Bass) as needed.
- **Horseshoe Beach Dock / Shrimp Off-Loading (Board Discussion):**
  - Commissioner Osteen raised concerns from shrimpers about lack of off-loading infrastructure at Horseshoe Beach and asked if the deteriorated wooden dock (planned for future replacement) could be removed and a temporary barge or similar structure used for unloading.
  - Mr. Bailey stated:

- This is possible in concept, but current project funds are limited to the residential/foot-traffic side and cannot cover commercial off-loading improvements.
- Additional funding or a separate project would be needed for shrimp dock/barge and related boat ramp work.
- Commissioner Osteen discussed checking locally (through Tim Futch and others) for availability of a barge that might be used temporarily, with the goal of placing it where it can later be moved when permanent improvements are funded.

**JOHN LOCKLEAR, LOCKLEAR AND ASSOCIATES**

**Project Updates – Josh Green, Locklear & Associates**

- **Airport Canal Drainage Improvements:**
  - Mr. Green reported that the contractor has completed the drainage improvement project at the airport canal.
  - Stated the work “turned out great” and looks very good.
- **Dredging – Suwannee and Horseshoe:**
  - Advised that they are in ongoing discussions with the proposed dredging contractor for Suwannee and Horseshoe.
  - Noted the contractor has a good understanding of the required scope and the project is moving forward smoothly.
- **County Road 349 / County Park at Horseshoe Beach:**
  - In response to a question about who is working on the park at Horseshoe Beach, Mr. Green reported that on County Road 349 the project is nearing completion.
  - **Guard rails are being installed**, and the work is on track and on schedule to be completed soon.

**CINDY BELLOT, LIBRARY DIRECTOR**

Not present

**RAELYNN BROWNELL, SUWANNEE WATER AND SEWER**

Not present

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

Nothing to present at this time

**MICHAEL GAINEY, COUNTY ROAD SUPERINTENDENT**

- Not present – Commissioner Hatch reported that Michael Gainey is in Suwannee relocating benches that were previously on a county right-of-way easement and commended the Road Department for doing a “super” job throughout District 3 and 55A, stating the county is looking very good.
- Commissioners added that:
  - Road crews have been working extensively in the Hammock area with quick response times.
  - The work order system is functioning well.
  - Safety improvements on the Jena Highway and Rocky Creek Highway have been “amazing.”

- Overall, commissioners expressed they are pleased with road operations, noting smoother workflows and improved morale across the department.

## **TIM JOHNSON, SOLID WASTE DIRECTOR**

### **Solid Waste / Landfill Operations Discussion**

#### Toxic Roundup Event –

- Announced Toxic Roundup on Saturday, March 21, 2026, from 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m. at the former fire station behind Hardee’s in Old Town (71 NE 84th Ave).
- Dump Site Abuse / Metal Handling
  - Mr. Johnson reported ongoing problems at the Rock Pit site with an individual repeatedly removing items from the dump and stockpiling them in their yard; the County previously removed about 50 tons from this yard and conditions have reoccurred.
  - Suggested removing metal collection from that site and directing residents to bring metal to the Cross City transfer station to stop the abuse.
  - Commissioners discussed:
    - The feasibility of trespassing the individual from County facilities (noting prior arrests/trespass actions in similar cases).
    - Using the Sheriff’s Office as needed for enforcement.
- Centralizing Metal & Possible In-House Recycling
  - Commissioner Storey noted that the 55A site already handles metal without similar issues and supported centralizing metal at Cross City.
  - Mr. Johnson and Commissioner Storey discussed:
    - The lack of a current metal recycling contract.
    - A possible trial where the County uses its boom truck to consolidate metal at Cross City, then haul loads to a metal buyer (e.g., Lake City), tracking labor, fuel, and revenue to determine if in-house hauling is cost-effective.
    - Long-term plan to use roll-off cans at the central site so citizens place metal directly into cans, reducing handling and equipment time.
- Compactor Strategy
  - Commissioner Storey outlined a goal, jointly with Mr. Johnson, to:
    - Fully implement the new compactor at the Rock Pit this year to reduce windblown trash and improve operations.
    - Acquire a second compactor by November, with the intention of placing it at Suwannee, and eventually obtain additional compactors for other sites.
    - Over time, double-up compactors at the busiest sites and phase out smaller cans, reducing scattering, litter, and abuse.
  - Board members agreed the compactor at 55A has already significantly improved site appearance and operations.
- Hauler Compliance / Enforcement (County Attorney Watson & Board)
  - Attorney Watson raised the need for a clearer policy/ordinance:

- To address non-compliant commercial haulers who dump prohibited materials (e.g., pressure-treated lumber, tires, toxic waste) at County sites.
- To allow suspension of dumping privileges (30 days, 90 days, a year, or permanent) for repeat or serious violations, based on established criteria rather than ad hoc decisions.
- Attorney Watson advised:
  - The County already has authority under solid waste statutes to control use of its landfill/transfer stations and can deny access, provided actions are consistent and non-arbitrary.
  - More detailed, written standards would provide guidance and reduce claims of selective enforcement.
- Commissioner Stephenson emphasized the importance of enforcing existing ordinances until amended or rescinded, and ensuring the Board understands current rules before creating new ones.
- Tires / Open-Top Trailers
  - Mr. Johnson reported a contact with a tire company that might provide an open-top trailer for waste tires, with the County loading and the company hauling, possibly at a rental cost.
  - The Board noted:
    - Any change must address EPA requirements, including preventing rainwater from collecting in tires and controlling runoff/contamination.
    - Additional research is needed before altering current tire handling methods.
- Next Steps / Workshop
  - By consensus, the Board agreed:
    - Tim Johnson and Commissioner Storey will bring a detailed proposal on metal centralization and handling to a future meeting.
    - Broader solid waste enforcement and hauler policy will be placed on the agenda for discussion at the upcoming Board workshop on committee assignments and policies.

**LEON WRIGHT, BUILDING AND ZONING OFFICIAL**

Nothing to present at this time

**APPLICATIONS for SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS/ VARIANCES**

NA

**SCOTT PENDARVIS, CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER**

**9-1-1 Grant Amendment –**

- Reported on state grant S2620-40703 (awarded last year) and explained that an item had been inadvertently omitted from the original grant budget.
- Mr. Pendarvis stated that a change request in the amount of \$6,450 was submitted to correct the shortfall and was approved at the last 9-1-1 Board meeting.
- Requested BOCC approval of the updated/amended grant agreement reflecting the additional \$6,450.

**Motion to approve updated/amended 911 Grant by Commissioner Stephenson. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Board Approved 5-0**

**DARIAN BROWN, DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES**

Chief Garner - Nothing to present at this time

**GAIL CARTER, INDIGENT CARE**

Nothing to present at this time

**HOLLY HOUGHTON, COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT**

- Holly Houghton, UF/IFAS Dixie County Extension, commented that Dixie County's BOCC is unusually open and accessible, noting that in many counties (e.g., Alachua) employees must go through a county manager and can be disciplined for contacting commissioners directly. She suggested Victor Blanco may not have realized how open this Board is and that this contributed to the communication issue.
- Mrs. Houghton distributed a list of youth showing market animals at the county fair and reported:
  - This weekend will feature non-market animals (bulls, heifers, dairy, rabbits, chickens) and a barbecue contest.
  - The following week the fairgrounds will be set up for the market sale, with hogs, steers, and Wethers coming in.
  - The number of youth selling market animals is now below 100, largely due to increased costs: hogs costing \$500–\$1,000 and feed around \$50/bag (two bags per week per hog), with similar cost pressures on steers.
  - She noted Wether projects as a more affordable alternative (roughly \$300–\$500 per animal plus about \$300 in feed), and has been encouraging some hog exhibitors toward that option.
- Commissioner Hatch reaffirmed the Board's open-door policy, apologized to Mr. Blanco if his earlier comments seemed too blunt, and emphasized the Board's responsibility to protect the county while remaining accessible. Mrs. Houghton reiterated that other counties do not operate this way and that she wanted Mr. Blanco to understand he is welcome to address the Board directly.

**ANGIE CROWLEY, HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATOR**

Nothing to present at this time

**JOHN JENKINS, COUNTY MANAGER**

- **Approval of Dredging Contractor**
  - Request Board approval to award Florida Dredge and Dock, LLC. as the lowest bidder for the Town of Suwannee and Horseshoe Beach dredging projects. (Sammy Royal)

**Motion to approve Florida Dredge and Dock, LLC for the Town of Suwannee and Horseshoe Beach dredging projects made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved 5/0**

- **Airport Future Projects:**

- Request Board approval of the FDOT Airport Future Projects as presented.

**Motion to approve FDOT Airport Future Projects made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved 5/0**

- **EDA Disaster Supplemental Grant (Airport Upgrades):**

- Requested authorization for Liberty Partners to apply for an EDA disaster supplemental grant to support airport upgrades and capacity.

**Motion to approve Liberty partners to apply for the EDA Disaster Supplemental Grant to support Airport upgrades and capacity enhancements to stormwater infrastructure made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved 5/0**

- **Event Dumpsters:**

1. Glen Dyals Park – Art Festival:

- Requested Board approval to place a dumpster at Glen Dyals Park for the upcoming art festival.

**Motion to approve the placement of a dumpster at Glen Dyals Park for the upcoming art festival made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved 5/0**

2. Horseshoe Ballfield – Music Event:

- Requested approval to place a dumpster at the Horseshoe Beach ballfield for the music festival.

**Motion to approve the placement of a dumpster at Horseshoe Beach ballfield for the music festival made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved 5/0**

- Staff will follow up with organizers for contact information and logistics.

**Announcements:**

- Mr. Jenkins reminded the Board of the Toxic Roundup event on March 21, 2026, from 9:00 a.m.– 3:00 p.m., at the rescue station behind Hardee’s in Old Town.
- Mr. Jenkins noted all commissioners are registered for the upcoming FAC conference.
- Mr. Jenkins reported that the Charlie Kirk signs have arrived.
- **Charlie Kirk Sign Unveiling / Workshop Scheduling (with Commissioner Hatch):**
  - Commissioner Hatch and the Board scheduled a sign unveiling for the Charlie Kirk markers on Thursday, March 19 at 2:00 p.m. to be located at NE 410<sup>th</sup> Ave. and NE 516<sup>th</sup> Ave in Commissioner Stephenson’s district (near Trading Post Loop), with coordination through the Road Department.
  - Clerk’s staff will coordinate the event with Dixie Advocate (Joey Lander)
- **Army Corps of Engineers – Steinhatchee River Dredging:**
  - Mr. Jenkins reported receiving notice from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding proposed dredging in the Steinhatchee River, involving both Taylor and Dixie County sides.
  - Mr. Jenkins noted that Taylor County declined involvement; dredging will remove approximately 3,900 cubic yards of sediment, with Dixie potentially responsible for spoil management on its side.

Mr. Jenkins requested authorization to negotiate with the Army Corps of Engineers on Dixie County's participation and spoil placement.

**Motion to approve to negotiate with the Army Corps of Engineers on Dixie County's participation and spoil placement made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved 5/0**

**CHANA WATSON, COUNTY ATTORNEY**

**Mediation Representation & Legal Updates (Miss China)**

- RV Park / Land Use Mediation Representation:
  - Attorney Watson requested Board approval to engage Brandon Stubbs to represent the BOCC in mediation regarding the Florida Land Use Development / RV park matter.
  - Noted Mr. Stubbs is very knowledgeable in land use and would be a strong representative if willing.

**Motion to Brandon Stubbs to represent the BOCC in mediation regarding the Florida Land Use Development / RV park matter made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved 5/0**

- Cost will be billed at Brandon Stubbs' hourly rate; length of mediation is unknown but the County's position is clear, and opposing counsel has been advised they must "bring something to the table" for settlement.
- Leon Wright added that he and Mr. Stubbs have discussed the need, after this case is resolved, to review campground/RV park provisions in the LDRs, including possibly requiring locations on certain collector roads and clearer standards to prevent similar issues in the future.
- Tipping Fee / City of Cross City Correspondence:
  - Attorney Watson reported that the County has not yet received all requested public records from City regarding tipping fees.
  - Attorney Watson informed the Board that a letter from Attorney Landers was received, attaching a 1991 letter from then-City Attorney Robert Mott about tipping fees and assessments.
  - Attorney Watson asked commissioners to review the letter, highlighting:
    - It states the City of Cross City collected its own garbage at that time, which is a key distinction from the current situation.
    - The original assessment was for closing the old landfill and establishing a regional landfill.
    - References to a promise of "no tipping fee" appear, in her interpretation, to apply to the City as a municipal hauler at that time, not as a permanently exempt customer under current conditions, especially since the City no longer collects its own garbage.
  - Attorney Watson noted that Attorney Landers' email indicates the City's position differs from the County's reading of the letter; because this matter may lead to

litigation, she advised the Board not to formally adopt a legal position yet, but to be informed of the context.

- Authority to Restrict Dumping / Landfill Access:
  - In response to a commissioner’s question, confirmed that under solid waste statutes, the County does have discretion to control who may dump at County landfill/transfer sites.
  - The County may deny or suspend access for violations, provided it is done consistently and not arbitrarily (i.e., based on substantial rule violations, not personal preference).
  - Attorney Watson will provide additional detailed guidance, but her preliminary review indicates the County is “solid” on this authority.

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

Nothing to present at this time

### **COUNTY COMMISSION ITEMS**

#### **Commissioner Wood**

- Commissioner Wood reported helping with two different fundraisers over the weekend and noted:
  - Turnout and community support were very strong despite many events happening.
  - Said it makes him proud to be from Dixie County.
- Commissioner Wood spoke about ongoing fundraising for a local family (Pinner), encouraging people to follow what the Lord lays on their heart regardless of how much others have already given.

#### **Commissioner Storey**

- Commissioner Storey discussed solid waste/metal operations (alongside Tim Johnson):
  - Commissioner Storey indicated he and Mr. Johnson are working on a plan for centralizing metal and possibly hauling it in-house for revenue.
  - Commissioner Storey stated they intend to bring a proposal for Board action at a future meeting.
- Commissioner Storey supported a policy review workshop to:
  - Revisit existing ordinances and policies.
  - Ensure the County enforces current rules consistently before creating new ones.

#### **Commissioner Stephenson**

- Requested a workshop with residents of McCrabb Landing subdivision and FDOT:
  - Commissioner Stephenson made a McCrabb Landing / FDOT Workshop Request
  - Commissioner Stephenson requested that the County set up a workshop/meeting with residents of the McCrabb Landing subdivision and representatives from FDOT to address ongoing concerns about the long-delayed paving project.

Commissioner Stephenson explained that:

- The road had been on the FDOT docket for over 10 years, and citizens believe the County “used the money somewhere else,” which is not true but has spread through the community.
- The project was stopped previously because FDOT requires a minimum right-of-way width, and certain sections did not meet that requirement.
- County staff spent one–two years obtaining donated right-of-way from property owners to correct the width issue, after which the project had to be re-entered into FDOT’s work program.
- Commissioner Stephenson and Commissioner Hatch noted:
- The County submits about five road projects per year to FDOT, which typically funds two to three; McCrabb Landing and the Jena Highway have both been on the list for years.
- FDOT has moved the priority list over time, and the Board wants FDOT to explain why McCrabb Landing has not been advanced despite the County resolving the right-of-way problem.

Commissioner Hatch directed that, since the Road Department is Commissioner Stephenson’s committee assignment:

- Commissioner Stephenson and the County Manager (John Jenkins) should coordinate with FDOT to schedule a public meeting or workshop with McCrabb Landing residents and FDOT staff to provide answers and clarify the status and process.

Commissioner Stephenson – Health Update

- Commissioner Stephenson thanked everyone for their prayers and provided a personal health update:
- Recently underwent a heart catheterization; initial findings of “moderate” valve leakage were revised to a more urgent condition, requiring attention sooner than expected.
- Commissioner Stephenson stated that if valve replacement is needed, it will likely require a mechanical valve rather than a biological “pig” valve.
- Commissioner Stephenson reported congestive heart failure, with blood pooling around the heart, contributing to shortness of breath and fatigue.
- Commissioner Stephenson noted an additional concern found on recent chest imaging: a 7.5 mm lesion on his left lung, which is currently being evaluated.
- Despite these issues, he said he actually feels better mentally knowing the cause of his symptoms and will continue to “keep plugging forward.”
- Commissioner Stephenson thanked fellow commissioners and staff for carrying on county business when he has missed meetings and expressed appreciation for their support as they “keep moving forward.”

### **Commissioner Osteen**

Praised the Road Department:

- Highlighted safety work on the Jena Highway and Rocky Creek Highway, saying the improvements have been “amazing.”
- Thanked Mrs. McCallister and the tourism/parks team:

- Noted that the Boys & Girls Club plans to use county parks to teach kids pickleball and a new disc golf game and expressed appreciation for the parks' role in youth activities.

### **Commissioner Hatch – Red Roof Aviation & Workshop Scheduling**

- Red Roof Aviation Name/Logo Change:
  - Commissioner Hatch presented a request from Mr. Bill Palmer, longtime airport tenant operating as Red Roof Aviation, to change the business name/logo on his airport lease to a new logo featuring the name “Palmer,” drawn by his father (a longtime aviation professional) when he was 17.
  - Commissioner Hatch explained the request is to honor Mr. Palmer’s father; lease documents and federal papers have historically listed the business as Red Roof Aviation.
- **Motion to approve the requested name/logo change for Red Roof Aviation made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved 5/0**
- Committee Assignments Workshop / Charlie Kirk Dedication:
  - Commissioner Hatch proposed holding a workshop on committee assignments before the next regular BOCC meeting.
  - Noted a Charlie Kirk sign dedication is already scheduled for March 19, 2026, at 2:00 p.m.

Commissioner Hatch Proposed scheduling the Committee Assignments/Policy Workshop the same day (March 19) at 4:00 p.m. in the Board room, so commissioners can:

- Provide updates on their committee work, and
- Discuss ongoing efforts to help the County through current projects/issues.

### **Motion to set the March 19 workshop at 4:00 p.m. made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved 5/0**

- County Attorney Watson noted publication should clearly distinguish:
  - The 2:00 p.m. dedication meeting (on site), and
  - The 4:00 p.m. workshop (at the BOCC chambers).
- Attorney Watson also advised she has a 1:30 p.m. hearing and may miss the dedication but will attend the workshop if possible.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS**

#### **Road to Redemption / Court Diversion Program – Nikki Waits**

- Presenter: Nikki Waits, founder of **Road to Redemption** and certified peer support specialist.
- Ms. Waits shared her personal recovery story (from entering court in shackles to now returning as a peer specialist) and explained Road to Redemption’s mission: “hope restored, lives reclaimed, communities transformed.”
- Ms. Waits stated she is working to implement a court diversion program for adults and youthful offenders in Dixie County, aimed at breaking cycles of addiction, incarceration, and hopelessness through:

- Recovery support,
- Accountability,
- Life skills,
- Mentorship.
- Reported she is now on the Department of Corrections resource provider list, so classification officers can refer individuals being released to her program and classes for re-entry services; she is also on the DOC vendor list for potential future procurement.
- Explained she has invested about \$8,000 in certifications to offer:
  - Moral Reconciliation Therapy for Youth
  - Job readiness and life-skills training
  - “Untangling Relationships” curriculum (self-worth, values, responsibility, relapse prevention – helping people not just quit but stay quit).
- Noted she cannot launch the diversion program without approval from the Department of Corrections and is therefore starting a petition to demonstrate to Tallahassee the need for a diversion program in Dixie County.
- Requested signatures and support from the Board and community to move the program forward; stated she feels called to this mission and will not stop working until the program is implemented.

**County Attorney Watson Comment (in Support of Nikki Waits)**

- County Attorney Watson spoke in support of Ms. Waits, noting:
  - She sees Nikki in court every day, standing with individuals, advocating for them, and seeking help for them.
  - Current courts are not often favorable to diversion for drug offenders, preferring incarceration, but Nikki continues to push for alternatives.
  - Publicly stated she would be proud to add her signature to the petition, praising Nikki’s passion, consistency, and the example she sets in recovery.
- Ms. Waits noted she will celebrate 12 years of recovery on May 28.

**Public Comment – Horseshoe Beach County Park (JD Nobles) & Staff Response**

- JD Nobles, Horseshoe Beach resident, addressed the Board to request an update on the Horseshoe Beach County Park, noting it has been closed for about two and a half years. Mr. Nobles emphasized:
  - Many people present (including the district commissioner, tourism committee, and staff) can help push the rebuild forward as spring season approaches.
  - Mr. Nobles appreciated work already done (e.g., Roy Bass working on gangway welding/installation) but asked for more coordinated effort to “get the ball rolling” and reopen the park and structure.
  - Mr. Nobles stated he meant no disrespect but was “pleading for help” to move the project forward for the community and tourists.
- **Staff Response (Leon Wright):**
  - Mr. Wright apologized for not providing an earlier update and explained that he and County Manager John Jenkins already have a plan in motion:
    - They have coordinated with Central Florida Electric to set three power poles at the park, with elevated service required due to the park’s commercial designation.

- Local officials requested an underground line for additional boat-ramp lighting; that routing has been worked out, and Central Florida Electric will set the poles, which the County will purchase.
- Mr. Bass stated the gangways for the inside canal are being finished at the welding shop and will be delivered to the site.
- Mr. Jenkins noted the County will first restore power to the canal side sites, which can be used while:
  1. Dredging is completed, and
  2. The riprap (ramp/foreshore) work is redone.
- Mr. Nobles thanked the Board and staff, stating he mainly needed a status report, and indicated the explanation was sufficient.

## **ADJOURN**

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