

Regular Meeting
Commission Board Room
Dixie County Courthouse
214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628
May 21, 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, Commissioner
Jody Stephenson, District 1
Daniel Wood, District 2
Jamie Storey, District 4, Vice Commissioner
David Osteen, District 5

STAFF

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

05/07/2026 Regular BOCC Minutes and 05/07/2026 BOCC Workshop Minutes

Motion to approve the 05/07/2026 BOCC Regular Meeting and 05/07/2026 Workshop 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.

CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS/CITY OFFICIALS

Nothing to present at this time.

Reminder to Board prior to Mr. Theale's presentation

Commissioner Hatch reminded the Board that Mr. Rudy Theales's presentation was for informational purposes only. He instructed commissioners not to express their positions or discuss how they might vote on the matter, in order to avoid any potential Sunshine Law violations, should Mr. Theale decide to move forward with a formal proposal. Commissioner Hatch then turned the floor over to Mr. Theale for his presentation.

RUDY C. THEALE– THE PRESERVE COMPANIES

Presentation – Proposed Motor Coach Resort & Marina

Presenter: Rudy Theale, The Preserve Companies, with partner **Cal Water**

Location: Property near Steinhatchee (George Edwards parcel; already zoned for up to 400 residential “abodes,” including condos)

Summary of Presentation:

Mr. Rudy Theale introduced himself and his partner, Cal Water, explaining they operate The Preserve Companies and are proposing a motor coach resort and marina. Key points:

- Mr. Theale stated he discovered the area “by accident” while boating and became convinced it was a special place suitable for his long-held vision of a motor coach resort and marina.
- He reported he has a contract to purchase the George Edwards property, with closing anticipated in June, but:
 - No stamped/engineered plans have been completed.
 - They are in a conceptual phase and seeking community input before finalizing plans.
- He acknowledged AI-generated concept images that appeared online and apologized for any confusion created by social media.
- Mr. Theale emphasized:
 - Desire to work with the community and commission early in the process.
 - Intent to “build into the nature” of the site and minimize environmental impact.
 - Plan not to build on the marsh or on the Gulf-side marsh island, but instead to:
 - Leave marsh areas intact.
 - Use the island primarily as a nature preserve with walking paths and a walking bridge.
 - On the river side, the only marsh impact contemplated would be at the berm/entrance to the marina dock, if approvals are granted.
- Mr. Theale stated they envision:
 - A motor coach resort with a marina.
 - A waterfront restaurant and clubhouse that would be open to the general public, not just resort guests.

- A limited gated component around the area where motor coaches are stored while owners are away, for security purposes.
- Mr. Theale highlighted anticipated benefits:
 - Job creation (later estimated during discussion at roughly 60–70 jobs, including 40+ at the restaurant).
 - Increased tax revenue and what he considers a less intensive use of the property than the prior entitlement for 400 condo-type units.
 - Use of local contractors and workers for construction and operations when possible.
- Mr. Theale reiterated multiple times that:
 - No formal application or plans have been submitted to the County.
 - He is in a listening phase and is willing to modify aspects of the concept, including gating, based on community feedback.
 - He intends to remain after the meeting outside the building to answer questions from the public.

Commissioner Mark Hatch clarified that, because no formal application has been submitted, the Board is limited by law (Sunshine Law and quasi-judicial concerns) in what it can say on the merits and cannot express positions that could later be viewed as pre-decisional. He directed that any detailed discussions with Mr. Theale and citizens occur outside the formal meeting.

Public Comment – Proposed Motor Coach Resort & Marina

Commissioner Hatch noted that three citizens had filled out speaker cards and would be allowed to address the Board. He asked Mr. Theale to remain available outside after the comments.

1. Speaker: Capt. Brian Smith – Environmental and Growth Concerns

Key concerns:

- Marsh impact:
 - Stated that marshlands are critical natural filters which take “hundreds of years” to form, are prized by EPA, and are easily damaged by heavy equipment.
 - Argued that any heavy-equipment use there would “destroy” the marsh and that this is the “wrong thing to do.”
- Overdevelopment / character of community:
 - Warned that allowing the project is a “baby step toward developing a tiny Tampa,” citing Tampa’s overdevelopment as an example of what residents are fleeing.
 - Questioned how one can take something “pristine” and make it “more pristine,” concluding development can only harm it.
- Gated community concept:
 - Asserted that building a gated community suggests the developer does not want to be part of the existing community.

- Expressed concern that a gated project would bring in people “running from” crime and problems elsewhere, effectively importing those issues.

Mr. Theale’s responses:

- Clarified that only the motor coach storage area is contemplated to be gated, primarily for security while owners are away.
- Stated the restaurant, clubhouse, and other common amenities are intended to be open to the general public.
- Indicated the decision to gate that area is not final; he is open to reconsidering it based on community input and whether it proves necessary.

Brian Smith reiterated that residents currently feel safe enough not to lock their doors and are concerned that the project – and its clientele – could change that.

2. Speaker: Donna Spoon– Environmental, Infrastructure, and Cost Impacts

Key concerns:

- Consistency of developer’s rationale:
 - Questioned Mr. Theale’s stated reasons for coming to the area, arguing that developing what makes the area special is inconsistent with preserving its character.
- Marsh and storm protection:
 - Emphasized that the marsh is essential to protecting:
 - Wildlife
 - Fisheries
 - Local resources
 - Hurricane/storm impacts (serves as a buffer).
 - Asserted that building a marina and motor coach resort “in the middle of a marsh” would undermine these protections.
- Water, sewer, and infrastructure strain:
 - Mrs. Spoon stated the proposal would effectively double the local community’s size (approx. 800 residents) and significantly strain water and sewer systems.
 - Expressed concern that county taxes (Taylor and Dixie) would increase to fund needed infrastructure upgrades, while the developer’s costs are limited to private investment.
- Runoff, impervious surfaces, and garbage:
 - Predicted increased garbage, groundwater runoff, and acres of concrete, arguing that RV patrons prefer concrete pads over grass/marsh.
 - Warned that runoff from new impervious surfaces would flow into the river and marsh, degrading water quality.
- Credibility and plans:
 - Referenced having seen plans online and accused the developer of not being fully candid by saying he has “no plan.”

- Noted that even if concept drawings were produced “in 10 days,” they still reflect a plan.

Mr. Theale’s responses:

- Reiterated that:
 - The property is already zoned for 400 residential abodes/condos under existing entitlements.
 - His concept is, in his view, less intensive than that full build-out.
- Clarified:
 - They do not plan to disturb the marsh on the Gulf side or the marsh island.
 - On the river side, the only marsh impact contemplated is where the marina dock/berm would extend, subject to environmental review and permitting.
- Acknowledged the concept plan circulated online, but stressed:
 - It was an early, quickly assembled concept, not a final engineered plan.
 - His primary goal in appearing before the Board now is to gather input before formal plans are drawn and submitted.

Commissioner Hatch suggested that a town hall-style meeting might be a more appropriate setting for detailed back-and-forth discussion between the developer and the community.

3. Speaker: Barbara “Babs” Radcliff – Adjacent Owner & Property Impact

Key concerns:

- Adjacent property owner:
 - Stated she (or her family) has owned the adjacent property since 1968, which will pass to her upon her mother’s death.
 - Expressed personal affection for George Edwards but concern over the timing and scale of this sale and project.
- Runoff and physical impacts:
 - Said stormwater runoff from the proposed resort would naturally flow toward her property, potentially impacting her land and structures.
 - Cited existing hurricane damage to her dock and seawall and feared increased boat traffic and wake from the marina would further damage her seawall and any rebuilt dock.
- Property values and taxes:
 - Reported she already pays roughly \$8,000/year in property taxes for a small structure.
 - Concerned that a multi-million-dollar resort next door will inflate her property value on paper and thereby raise her taxes, even if she receives no direct benefit.
- Timing and community change:
 - Argued the proposal comes at the “wrong time” given recent hurricanes and ongoing recovery.

- Expressed a broader concern that people come to Steinhatchee because they love its current character and then seek to turn it into the places they left (e.g., Jacksonville/St. Augustine).
- Jobs and workforce:
 - Questioned the estimated 60–70 jobs (including 40 in the restaurant), doubting they would be:
 - Truly long-term or well-paying.
 - Staffed locally, citing existing difficulty finding reliable workers and issues with substance abuse.
 - Asked where imported workers would live if they cannot be hired locally.
- Quality of life:
 - Stated that, combined with existing issues (e.g., crab traps near her other property), the resort would be another negative impact rather than a benefit to her or many long-time residents.

Mr. Theale’s responses:

- Reiterated the estimate of 60–70 jobs, including around 40 restaurant positions across front and back of house, with a smaller number of full-time positions.
- Stated his preference is to hire locally and he asked “Is there anything wrong with trying?” acknowledging it may be challenging.
- Mentioned they had internally discussed securing a house or facility to host some staff, similar to other local businesses.
- Acknowledged the challenges with workforce reliability but remained optimistic about finding and supporting local workers.

Board Direction and Next Steps

- Commissioner Hatch reiterated that:
 - The Board cannot take action or express positions on the project because no formal application has been submitted.
 - Detailed project questions should be addressed outside the formal meeting.
- After the three registered speakers addressed the Board, Commissioner Hatch:
 - Invited Mr. Theale to step outside the meeting room to continue discussions with any citizens who did not complete speaker cards.
 - Confirmed that citizens could either remain for the remainder of the County’s regular business or speak with Mr. Theale outside.
- Mr. Theale agreed to remain available outside after the meeting for additional questions and discussion.
- The Board then returned to regular agenda items unrelated to the proposed resort and marina.

SCOTT NIOLET – SAVINACIOUS

Disaster Recovery / FEMA Project Worksheet Update – Scott Niolet & Jason Benoit

Mr. Scott Niolet (with Jason Benoit) thanked the Board for the opportunity to work with the County and recognized Chief Garner for his assistance.

- Mr. Niolet reported that, over the past month, they have been working with the County Manager’s office to review RFIs and resolve technical issues with FEMA Project Worksheets (PWs) and that progress is going well.
- Mr. Niolet highlighted PW 119, noting that the State has indicated they have all required documentation, and once processed this should release approximately \$3 million in funding. He stated they will continue to press the State to move this forward. He also reported that the local match waiver for Hurricanes Helene and Debbie is progressing; the Governor’s office has confirmed receipt of all needed information and has begun issuing awards for the 12.5% local match to Christian and other eligible communities.
- As of this report, there are approximately 22 total PWs, with 19 obligated. The County has received about \$2.9 million of obligated funds, with \$5.9 million obligated in total, and an additional \$5–7 million in unobligated PWs still moving through the process. Mr. Niolet described a recent productive call with FEMA’s mitigation department to revisit several PWs to address changes in work status and pricing since the storms. He explained that PW 119 is primarily a reconciliation issue regarding cash flow and documentation, not an issue of ineligible expenditures, and that delays have been compounded by federal leadership changes, a national funding cap, and a prior government shutdown.
- Mr. Niolet stated they plan to develop a comprehensive, storm-by-storm PW summary for the Board as they continue working through the nuances of each worksheet. Mr. Nalls indicated he intends to coordinate with the State and bring in staff under Director Guthrie to finalize what is needed to fully reconcile PW 119. Commissioners emphasized the importance of PW 119 to the overall recovery funding.

No Board action was requested; the report was for information only.

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

Not present.

NIKIE WAITS – ROAD 2 REDEMPTION

Not present.

KAY MCCALLISTER, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Tourism / Special Events & Parks Update – Kay McAllister, Tourism Director

Mrs. Kay McAllister, Tourism Director, reported that the upcoming weekend will be very active

in Dixie County and encouraged the public to participate in local events. Mrs. McCallister thanked the Dixie County Chamber of Commerce and volunteers for placing Veterans' flags holders along the highway and noted that, compared to other rural counties she had driven through, Dixie County's display was especially impressive.

Mrs. McAllister announced the following weekend events:

- Horseshoe Beach: Full day of events and live music on the coast.
- Suwannee: A Poker Run visiting local businesses, providing an opportunity to learn about and support the town's businesses.
- Cross City: A downtown cleanup event beginning at 8:30 a.m., with volunteers meeting at Dixie Appliance (between Subway and McDonald's). The first 55 volunteers will receive "Doing It for the Love of Dixie" t-shirts. She encouraged citizens to support these efforts to improve the appearance of Dixie County and Cross City for residents and visitors.

Ms. McAllister then provided a parks update, displaying a sample of the new informational signs being installed at all County parks. The signs include a QR code and web address (visitdixie.com/park) that direct users to online registration for campsites, as well as clear explanations of fees, County revenue, and booking charges. She credited Shelly Ross for her work with CampSpot.com in setting up the system.

While on the topic of parks, Mrs. McAllister introduced a proposal regarding Joe Anderson Park at the bridge. She explained that, following the passing of the previous park attendant, Adam Williamson (AW Kayak Expeditions), a veteran who also works in mental health outreach, has offered to:

- Open and close the park gates seven days a week
- Handle trash and general park upkeep
- Serve as an off-site camp host, without County pay and without on-site residence, eliminating the prior electric expense
- Operate his kayak business (AW Kayak Expeditions) from the park while performing these duties.

Mrs. McAllister noted that some concessionaire-type paperwork and a formal arrangement would be needed and deferred to the County Attorney for details.

Motion to allow AW Kayak Expeditions to serve as the off-site camp host/attendant at Joe Anderson Park and to operate its kayak business from the park while providing these services, as an unpaid position with no County utility costs made by Commissioner Wood. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Board approved.

- Discussion: Clarifying comments were made that this arrangement would fill a prior service gap for visitors and that the park's location is ideal for kayaking.

Mr. Williamson's wife Maloy appeared on his behalf (he was transporting kayakers) and thanked the Board for the opportunity; the Board welcomed her and expressed appreciation. Mrs. McAllister concluded by again reminding everyone of Karen VanAernam's Cross City cleanup event (8:30 a.m., meeting at Futch Appliance) and noted there would be multiple community activities occurring across the County that Saturday.

On Mrs. VanAernam's behalf, Mrs. Higginbotham informed the Board and public that the plate glass window in front of Futch's appliance store, long covered with plywood, is being replaced. After receiving a quote of approximately \$1,200 plus \$180 delivery from Perry Glass, Mrs. VanAernam contacted Nature Coast (Chiefland). Nature Coast measured the window, committed to provide and install the replacement glass, and donated the glass and installation at no cost to the County. The Board and staff expressed appreciation for this contribution.

KAREN VANAERNAM, DIXIE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Not present.

GREG BAILEY, NORTH FLORIDA PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Mr. Kellan Bailey provided construction and grant-project updates.

- Mr. Bailey reported that interior work and site work/framing are underway at Fire Stations 3 and 6, and both projects are progressing. The contractor has begun grouting at the evidence building and is approximately halfway through the primary grouting; once complete, testing will determine whether any secondary grouting is required, but current results look favorable. He anticipates this phase will be finished by the next Board meeting. Staff are coordinating with the County Manager's office and the Sheriff to schedule a meeting to review building plans and discuss next steps once grouting is complete.
- Mr. Bailey further reported that the roadway project on 95th and 97th is complete and the County is working with the Department of Commerce on grant closeout. For the Working Waterfront project, the County has responded to the Army Corps of Engineers' RAI, met with DEP regarding their permit requirements, and is assembling the DEP permit package. The geotechnical report has been completed; the focus now is on finalizing the remaining two permits. Mr. Bailey noted that the other RESTORE projects (the Jena bridges and the seawall) are also moving forward; staff recently met with RESTORE program staff, and agreements are expected at a later stage.

No Board action was requested; the report was for information only.

JOHN LOCKLEAR, LOCKLEAR AND ASSOCIATES

Public Works / Project Updates – John Locklear

- Mr. John Locklear reported that the Suwannee River dredging project is moving forward. Materials are being mobilized and staging is underway; while there is not yet a firm start date, work is expected to begin soon.
- Mr. Locklear stated that, after discussions with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA, the County was allowed to obtain pricing from the contractor already under contract to perform the shoreline work by piping sand rather than hauling it by truck. This approach is significantly less expensive and avoids complications related to bridge reconstruction, allowing all three related projects to be completed with the funding currently available.
- Mr. Locklear further reported that the Cow Creek Bridge project is progressing “behind the scenes” and is being prepared for submission under the RIF (Rebuild Florida / Department of Commerce) program, which opens in June. That program will require one public hearing. He noted the County had considered applying through the CDBG Small Cities program but missed that application window because it requires two public hearings, which could not be scheduled in time.

Commissioner Hatch thanked Mr. Locklear for following up and providing the update.

CINDY BELLOT, LIBRARY DIRECTOR

- Ms. Bellot reported that the restrooms are now fully operational and thanked the County’s maintenance crew David Ellison and Dwayne Bird, along with John Jenkins, Roy Bass, Mikel Gainey, and Bradley Hurst, for their diligent work and assistance.
- Ms. Bellot provided the Board with a list of summer programs for children, noting that the activities listed in the left-hand column of the handout will be held at the gym on Wednesdays at 10:00 a.m., while all other programs will take place at the library due to parking space limitations. She advised that one set of classes is already full because the instructor can only accommodate a limited number of children, and she may ask the instructor to consider offering an additional session. She stated that the planned activities should help keep local children engaged and busy over the summer.

Commissioner Hatch thanked Ms. Bellot for coordinating the schedule and working through the space constraints, and Commissioners expressed their appreciation for her efforts and patience.

RAELYNN BROWNELL, SUWANNEE WATER AND SEWER

Not present.

STEVE FREMEN, CODE ENFORCEMENT & VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

Not present.

MIKEL GAINEY, COUNTY ROAD SUPERINTENDENT

Road Department – Mechanic Hiring & Compensation / Funeral Leave – James Valentine

- Mr. Gainey reported that the Road Department has not yet been able to hire a new mechanic. Of the three applicants interviewed, one declined the position and another lacked diesel and heavy-equipment experience. He stated that the County offered Mr. Zach Perry an annual salary of \$50,000, which Mr. Perry declined, requesting \$30/hour (approximately \$62,400 annually). Commissioners discussed the need to adjust pay to attract a qualified diesel mechanic, noting the importance of candidates who can operate modern diagnostic computer systems and help modernize inventory and work-order processes. Chairman Hatch directed Mr. Gainey to work with County Manager John Jenkins to evaluate pay options and move the hiring process forward. Commissioners expressed appreciation for the Road Department’s recent work, including improvements at the library.
- Mr. Gainey then requested direction regarding the upcoming funeral of Mr. James Valentine, noting that several Road Department employees wished to attend. Chairman Hatch recommended that all County and courthouse employees be given the opportunity to attend the service, recognizing Mr. Valentine’s 22 years of service to the County.

Board Action – Funeral Leave: Commissioner Hatch moved to excuse County staff from work from lunchtime until 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday (day of the funeral) to allow attendance at Mr. Valentine’s 1:00–1:30 p.m. service.

Motion to excuse County staff from work from lunchtime until 4:00 p.m. to attend Mr. Valentine’s funeral made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved.

- Discussion: Clarified that this applies to courthouse and County employees who wish to attend, in recognition of Mr. Valentine’s long service.
- Mr. Gainey noted he would notify staff that evening so they could prepare and coordinate with HR regarding any necessary payroll or scheduling adjustments.

TIM JOHNSON, SOLID WASTE DIRECTOR

Not present

LEON WRIGHT, BUILDING AND ZONING OFFICIAL

APPLICATIONS for SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS

(Tabled from 4/16/2026 BOCC Meeting due to District Commissioner not being available)

20260282 A petition by Andrew Quincoses requesting a Special Exception to be granted, as provided in Section 4.4.5 Special Exceptions: number (9) Campgrounds, of the Dixie County Land Development Regulations "A" AGRICULTURAL, in accordance with the petition dated 09/10/2026 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #10-09-13-0000-3997-0301 343 NE 558 AVE, OLD TOWN, FL 32680; 10.11 Acres. COMMISSION DISTRICT 1 JODY STEPHENSON - LPA RECOMMENDED APPROVAL WITH THE DOCUMENTATION OF 8 PRIMITIVE SITES FOR THE 10 ACRES. NO RECORDED OPPOSITION – 8 CITIZENS IN AUDIENCE FOR SUPPORT OF APPLICANT

LPA Recommended Approval (4-0)

Mr. Wright noted that the application had been tabled at the April 16 meeting and that the Local Planning Agency (LPA) had recommended approval, documenting eight (8) primitive campsites on 10 acres. There was no recorded opposition, and eight citizens were present in support of the application at the LPA hearing.

Chairman Hatch opened the floor for public comment; no one present or on the phone spoke in opposition.

Motion to approve Variance 2026-0282 to allow a campground in an Agricultural (A) zoning district, pursuant to Section 4.4.5, Special Exceptions No. 9 of the Dixie County Land Development Regulations made by Commissioner Stephenson. Seconded Commissioner Storey. Board approved.

20260521 A petition by James McNichol requesting a Special Exception to be granted, as provided in Section 4.3.5 subparagraph (5) of the Dixie County Land Development Regulations to permit a WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS TOWER IN AN ESA (ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVE AREA), in accordance with the petition dated 03/30/2026 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel #36-09-13-0000-4503-0104 77 NE 303 AVE, Old Town, FL 32680; 9.21 Acres. COMMISSION DISTRICT 1 JODY STEPHENSON - LPA Recommended Approval (4-0)

Chairman Hatch opened the floor for public comment; no one present or on the phone spoke in opposition or support.

Motion to approve Special Exception 20260521 to permit a WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS TOWER IN AN ESA (ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVE AREA) as described above made by Commissioner Stephenson. Seconded Commissioner Osteen. Board approved.

Code Enforcement / Tire Cleanup – Informational Item

Mr. Wright reported that DEP began removing tires behind the Methodist Church earlier that day and expected to finish by the afternoon. At approximately 1:30 p.m., the count was around 4,000 tires removed. He confirmed that the tires now being collected were within the right-of-way, and that all tires in the right-of-way were being removed.

Mr. Wright added that other garbage and debris on the site had not yet been removed, but that Mr. Ben, the property occupant, was present and stated he had help and intended to clean up the remaining debris; he also indicated that his camper had been crushed. Attorney Chana Watson reminded the Board that the County previously obtained authorization to abate the nuisance at this location, and that, if the owner does not complete the cleanup, the County is prepared to return in early June (tentatively the first week, around the 3rd–5th) to complete abatement. No Board action was required; the report was for information only.

SCOTTY PENDARVIS, CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

- Mr. Pendarvis provided an update on the County phone system. He reported that he has already proceeded with upgrades at the jail, in coordination with the Sheriff. He stated that the library is the only County building not yet on the Unity phone system and presented two options for providing phone service there.
- Mr. Pendarvis explained that AT&T has proposed a “POTS-in-a-Box” solution, which would use a wireless-capable box connected to the existing internet service and tied into the current analog phone wiring. The box would connect to the existing AT&T demarcation point on the back of the building and feed the interior phone lines as they operate now.
- Mr. Pendarvis noted that he also obtained a similar quote from Unity, but that option would require more infrastructure investment, which is not recommended given the County’s interest in eventually replacing the existing library facility. Both options would cost approximately \$100 per month, which is comparable to current expenses.
- In response to questions from the Board, Mr. Pendarvis confirmed the demarcation is located on County property and that he would verify whether any other occupants of the building use that connection before changes are made. He recommended proceeding with the AT&T POTS-in-a-Box option so that AT&T remains responsible for the associated equipment and wiring.

Motion to authorize AT&T to provide the POTS-in-a-Box phone service solution for the library, with staff to coordinate necessary line connections at the demarcation made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved.

Commissioner Hatch thanked Scotty for the update.

DARIAN BROWN, DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Fire / EMS & Burn Ban Ordinance

Chief Darian Brown addressed the Board and reported on the current countywide burn ban. He stated that:

- The County remains under a burn ban.

- The Florida Forest Service had requested that the County consider lifting the ban to allow certain commercial burns, but after a wildfire occurred the following day, the Forest Service decided on its own to suspend burning in Dixie County again.
- Dixie County had recently been the driest county in this part of the state, underscoring the need to keep the ban in place.

Chief Brown informed the Board that Attorney Watson had prepared a draft burn ban enforcement ordinance to replace the prior resolution, which had no enforcement mechanism.

The ordinance would:

- Authorize the Sheriff's Office and Code Enforcement (not Fire/EMS) to enforce burn ban violations.
- Allow the Fire Chief, in coordination with the Florida Forest Service, to declare and lift burn bans based on the Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KBDI) and other conditions, without necessarily requiring a local state of emergency.
- Include a provision allowing the Forest Service to authorize limited commercial burning during a ban under defined conditions.

Attorney Watson noted that:

- The ordinance needs to be advertised and will require two public hearings.
- If Chief Brown, the County Manager and Attorney Watson are all satisfied with the draft, she would like authorization to place the notice in the newspaper so the public hearings can occur before the next Board meeting.

Commissioner Stephenson asked how the proposed ordinance would interact with existing Florida Forest Service burn authorizations and certified pile burner rules. Chief Brown clarified that:

- A County burn ban enacted under the ordinance would mean no open burning, including for certified burners, unless specifically authorized by the Forest Service under the limited commercial exception in the ordinance.
- Existing state certification requirements remain in effect but do not override a local burn ban.

Chairman Hatch commented that the ordinance would strengthen and complement state law by giving the County local enforcement authority.

Motion to advertise Draft Burn Ban Enforcement Ordinance made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Board approved.

- Contingent upon review and approval by the County Manager, Fire Chief Darren Brown, and County Attorney Chana Watson, so that the required public hearings can be scheduled.

Chief Brown also reported:

- He, Chief Garner, and Chief Ferguson will attend the state EMS meetings the week after next; Jason Lemmerman will cover at the local level during their absence.
- It is currently EMS Week. The County has participated in several recognition events with area hospitals, and the Medical Director provided a meal for crews.
- Fire/EMS will host a family “water day” event at Station 4 (Chavous) on Saturday from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. with water slides/activities for staff and families.

Chief Brown then updated the Board on state rural healthcare funding and community paramedicine:

- Florida has been awarded approximately \$209 million for rural hospital and medical care initiatives, including community paramedicine, but most funding is tied to strict federal criteria and is difficult for small counties to access independently.
- Dixie County has signed non-binding letters of intent to participate in grant applications led by:
 - Andrews Healthcare Consulting, and
 - ComHIT (based near the Space Center).
- These groups believe they can structure programs to:
 - Support community paramedicine staffing,
 - Improve reimbursement and billing options for EMS and at-home services, and
 - Potentially fund additional personnel or services locally.
- Chief Brown emphasized that no contracts will be executed without returning to the Board; so far, the County has only committed to supporting inclusion in the grant applications.
- Chief Brown noted that two additional entities have inquired about similar partnerships; he remains cautious and is further researching their qualifications.

Commissioner Hatch added that the County is also working to complete facility improvements for Fire/EMS, which will complement any new funding for the community paramedicine program.

Emergency Management – Chief Garner

Chief Scott Garner then addressed the Board and provided:

1. Hurricane Season Outlook & Pre-Season Meeting

- The National Hurricane Center is forecasting a below-average hurricane season, but Chief Garner stressed that “it only takes one” storm and urged continued preparedness.
- Named storm projections are 8–14, with 3–6 hurricanes and 1–3 major hurricanes expected.
- The County’s annual pre-hurricane coordination meeting is scheduled for June 9, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. at the EOC. Key stakeholders and departments (including the Clerk’s office and others) are being invited.

2. River / Tide Gage – Suwannee / Horseshoe Area

- Chief Garner revisited prior discussions regarding installation of a Suwannee River / tide gage in the Old Town area. He reported that state and federal partners asked whether Dixie County is ready to move forward.
- Chairman Hatch explained that earlier efforts to place a gage at a specific Suwannee River site encountered local resistance. As an alternative, partners now recommend placing a gage at Butler Douglas Park in Horseshoe Beach, mounted on an existing dock piling, to fill a gap in coverage between existing gages at Suwannee (Salt Creek), Shired, Fishbone, Rocky Creek, and Jena.
- Commissioner Bass cautioned that the Horseshoe dock is scheduled for repair and replacement, and installation will need to consider potential construction impacts. Chief Garner and staff will coordinate with Kelly to identify an appropriate piling and timing.

Motion to Support Relocation of Tide Gage to Horseshoe Beach area at Butler Douglas Park made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved.

Chairman Hatch requested Board action in support of the revised location. In coordination with state and federal partners, with final placement to be worked out by staff.

3. Old Town Canal Dredging Project – Design Phase

Chief Garner also requested authorization to proceed with the design phase of the Old Town canal dredging project, which extends from the Chavous area through CR 349 to the Suwannee River. He noted:

- The project is funded through HMGP (Hazard Mitigation Grant Program) with the County's match already in place.
- Advancing the design will allow the project to move toward construction and final permitting.

Motion to authorize Design Phase of Old Town Canal Dredging staff and the County's engineering firm to proceed with the design phase of the Old Town canal dredging project under the existing HMGP grant, including use of the approved local match made by Commissioner Wood. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved.

GAIL CARTER, INDIGENT CARE

Not present.

HOLLY HOUGHTON, COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT

Not present.

ANGIE CROWLEY, HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATOR

Not present.

JOHN JENKINS, COUNTY MANAGER

1. Request Board approval of the Notice of Award to Passero for 2026-03 Professional Aviation Engineering and Planning Services based on separately issued work orders associated with grants.

Motion to approve the Notice of Award to Passero for 2026-03 Professional Aviation Engineering and Planning Services based on separately issued work orders associated with grants made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved.

2. Request Board approval of the Master Consulting Services Agreement between Dixie County and Passero for a five-year term based on separately issued work orders associated with grants.

Motion to approve the Master Consulting Services Agreement between Dixie County and Passero for a five-year term based on separately issued work orders associated with grants made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved.

3. Request Board approval to execute the Hudson Ballfield Lease Agreement between Dixie County and A Game C/O Travis Jones for the purpose of Recreational Use (Baseball Field). In lieu of payment the tenant will prepare an annual maintenance of the field and property for review and allow access to other individuals and organizations and maintain the playing field to ensure the field is operational for baseball use.

Under the lease:

- The tenant will perform annual maintenance of the field and property, subject to County review; and
- The tenant will allow access to other individuals and organizations as needed to maintain the playing field and keep it operational for baseball use.

Motion to execute the Hudson Ballfield Lease Agreement between Dixie County and Travis Jones for recreational use of the Hudson baseball field and adjacent paved area made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved.

Information Items:

Reminder County offices will be closed Monday, May 25, 2026, in observance of Memorial Day.

CHANA WATSON, COUNTY ATTORNEY

Attorney Chana Watson reported on several legal matters:

1. Solid Waste / Landfill Enforcement Ordinance

- In addition to the burn ban ordinance discussed earlier, she is working on a draft solid waste / landfill ordinance to provide enforcement authority for issues such as “dirty loads” and similar violations at the landfill.
- She noted that this draft is not as far along as the burn ban ordinance because the burn ban has been more urgent, but work is ongoing.

2. Pending Possible Lawsuit / Insurance Counsel

- Attorney Watson advised the Board that a report on a pending, potential lawsuit has been submitted to the County’s insurer.
- The County received notice that the insurance carrier is assigning defense counsel, and she expects to speak with the assigned attorney within the next week to bring them up to speed.
- This matter involves the same party who recently submitted a public records request.
- She noted that Clerk staff, including Ms. Higginbotham, are still compiling responsive records. Mr. Jenkins has provided data recovered by Mr. Pendarvis from County computers and electronic systems. Attorney Watson will correlate that information with records from the Clerk’s office before sending a complete response.

3. City–County Meeting Request – Tipping Fee Issue

- Attorney Watson informed the Board that the city attorney has requested a joint meeting between the City and County regarding the landfill tipping fee issue. She stated she wanted Board direction on the record.

Commissioner Hatch noted that this matter falls under Commissioner Storey’s assigned solid waste committee. He asked Commissioner Storey if his position had changed; Commissioner Storey replied that it had not.

Commissioner Storey then stated for the record:

- In his view, the City should get out of the garbage collection business, as the city collects fees from citizens, has no garbage equipment to maintain, and does not pay the disposal costs at the Greenville facility, effectively “collecting free money.”
- He believes the fees the City already collects are sufficient to cover the County’s tipping fee without raising citizens’ rates, if the City would allow Waste Pro to deal directly with City residents.
- He will not support litigation between the City and County over this issue, as both entities are using taxpayers’ money.
- If the City presses the matter, he would advocate that the City take all of its waste directly to Greenville and be prohibited from using the County landfill, noting that other counties have barred outside entities from dumping at their facilities.

Attorney Watson acknowledged Commissioner Storey's position and confirmed she is continuing work on the solid waste ordinance, stating she would "put a little more fire under it." Commissioner Storey added that if Mr. Lander (city attorney) identifies any problems with the County's ordinance, he is willing to amend it as needed to ensure it is legally sound. Chairman Hatch reminded the Board that committee assignments were voted on by the Board, and Commissioners had agreed to support the Commissioner holding each assignment. He then asked each Commissioner, individually, whether they support Commissioner Storey's position on the tipping fee matter:

- Commissioner Osteen – Yes
- Commissioner Stephenson – Yes
- Commissioner Wood – "100%"
- Commissioner Hatch – Yes

Attorney Watson stated she now had clear direction from the Board and would relay that position to the city attorney and proceed accordingly. She added that, aside from these pending items, the County is in "pretty good shape" on the legal front, with several matters continuing to simmer in the background.

Commissioner Hatch thanked Attorney Watson for her report.

BARBIE HIGGINBOTHAM, CLERK OF COURT

Mrs. Higginbotham reported that the only additional item she had was to invite the public and Board members to assist with the "Cross City Restore & Renew" cleanup event on Saturday morning, May 23, 2026. She stated they would welcome all available volunteers and expressed appreciation for any help provided.

COUNTY COMMISSION ITEMS

Commissioner Wood:

- Wished everyone a safe weekend, he welcomed Commissioner Stephenson back to the Board, noting he was glad to see him back in his seat, even if made the meeting about 15 minutes longer.

Commissioner Storey:

- Welcomed Commissioner Stephenson back and said he was glad to see him in his seat again.
- Thanked the Board for supporting him on solid waste issues and noted he is working with several partners on recycling efforts, explaining that even if recycling does not generate profit, it can still save money by reducing disposal at the landfill.
- Reported that next Friday Tim Johnson and a County employee will take the County's knuckle boom loader to Greenville to load a large pile of tires. The County will be paid at FEMA rates to cover equipment, fuel, mileage, and labor. He noted that he intends to use the same type of documentation used for hurricane debris to ensure proper tracking and reimbursement.

Commissioner Stephenson:

- Expressed sincere appreciation for the prayers, calls, and support he received during his recent illnesses and surgeries and following the passing of his mother.
- Stated that the community's and Board's support helped him get through a very difficult period.
- Commented that he has been reviewing old records on garbage and landfill operations and questioned how the County arrived at its current arrangements, indicating his support for efforts to bring the system back in line with what earlier documents contemplated.

Commissioner Osteen:

- Welcomed Commissioner Stephenson back.
- Thanked Tourism Director Kay McCallister and the Dixie County Chamber and volunteers for placing the Veterans' flags along the highway, noting how impressive they looked and how much they meant to families.
- Wished everyone a safe holiday weekend and encouraged citizens to enjoy time with their families.
- Noted that he is continuing to work on a park-related issue and will bring it back to the Board when more information is available.

Commissioner Hatch – **Healthcare & Economic Development / Budget Context**

1. Andrews Healthcare Consulting – Proposed Use of Old Town Facility

Commissioner Hatch recognized Mr. Logan Andrews of Andrews Healthcare Consulting and invited him to address the Board regarding potential use of the former EMS/Fire station building near the Greenway Trail in Old Town.

Mr. Andrews:

- Introduced Ms. Maddie Kelly Chewing, Director of Psychiatric Services, for the group.
- Explained that Andrews Healthcare primarily provides in-home primary care and psychiatric/mental health services across the lifespan, along with some office-based services.
- Stated their current office in Fanning Springs is rapidly outgrowing its space, and that their largest patient base is now in Dixie County.
- Expressed interest in relocating and expanding into the Old Town building, thereby establishing a Dixie-based clinic while continuing house-call services.
- Noted their ongoing collaboration with Chief Brown on community paramedicine, including billing arrangements, and described ongoing discussions with major managed care organizations and state Medicaid leadership to improve reimbursement for home-based and paramedicine services and to restore some network contracts.

Commissioner Hatch remarked that the County is working to relocate Fire/EMS from that building, which would free the structure for healthcare use, and stated it would be beneficial to have expanded local medical and behavioral health services in Old Town.

Commissioner Hatch Announcements and Comments

Chairman Hatch announced that the Quarterback Club will host an airboat poker run fundraiser in Horseshoe Beach. A kickoff event will be held on Friday, June 19, 2026, at Edward Marshall's place, with the main airboat poker run on Saturday, June 20, 2026, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. He stated that airboats will use the Horseshoe sand area and asked Tourism Director Kay McCallister to help publicize the event, indicating he would send her the details and also forward them to John.

Commissioner Hatch also reported on a recent "250th" celebration commemorating the founding of the United States, praising Judge Jennifer Johnson for an excellent program. He reflected on the historical significance of shifting from a dictatorship to a system where "power is with the people," noting that this principle continues to guide decisions in Dixie County today.

Turning to county finances, Commissioner Hatch emphasized that Dixie County must be managed as a business:

- He referenced a cost analysis prepared by Roy Bass, showing that a Firefighter/EMT and a Firefighter/Paramedic each cost approximately \$60,000–\$63,000 per year, or roughly \$240–\$265 per day, per position.
- He noted that law enforcement positions are in a similar cost range.
- These figures cover only public safety and do not include costs for Road & Bridge, Solid Waste, Buildings & Maintenance, or Constitutional Offices.

He stressed that:

- Private businesses routinely factor in 3–7% annual cost increases, and the County faces similar pressures without automatic revenue growth.
- The Board has a responsibility to leave the County in sound condition for children and grandchildren, not just the current generation.
- Staff, including Brenda, Barbie, John, and Roy, have worked hard on the budget, and the Board previously committed during budget workshops to "tighten belts" where possible.

Commissioner Hatch cautioned that the County cannot always depend on Tallahassee:

- If Dixie County consistently turns down reasonable projects because it is unwilling to accept any change, state officials may justifiably question continued funding.
- He remarked that "you can't help someone who doesn't want to help themselves."

He clarified that his comments were not directed solely at any one project but at the broader pattern, and asked Commissioners to be mindful of operational costs when evaluating future development and economic proposals. He:

- Acknowledged that Dixie County is no longer a "fishing village" in the sense it once was, noting that local realtors report it is difficult to find homes under \$200,000–\$250,000 without storm damage.

- Stated that while the County retains the right to approve or deny projects, the Board should remain open-minded and recognize that not every project is bad and some may be critical for the tax base.
- Reiterated that he would not support certain uses, such as data centers or a medical waste incinerator, referencing his prior vote against a medical waste facility years ago.

Commissioner Hatch highlighted ongoing economic development efforts:

- Multiple prospects are being pursued through the Economic Development Council.
- A Duke Energy site readiness event is scheduled for the following Thursday.
- Work continues on McGriff Pass, with the Department of Commerce and others actively reviewing cost analyses prepared by John.

Commissioner Hatch encouraged Commissioners to consult Roy Bass, John Jenkins, or Brenda Royal at any time for department-level cost information and reiterated that each new project should be weighed carefully in light of the County’s long-term fiscal health. He acknowledged that he, too, has previously opposed projects that, in hindsight, might have benefited the County, and urged the Board to evaluate future proposals with an open mind.

Commissioner Stephenson then stated he was proud of the Board for “stepping up to the plate.” He noted that when he and Ms. Higginbotham first came into office, the County’s finances were in poor shape after 20+ years of avoiding adjustments to assessments and fees, effectively “kicking the can down the road.” He said:

- The current Board has pledged to fix the problems, regardless of political consequences, so that their children and grandchildren will not say, “Look what they left us.”
- He will “fight hard” to make necessary changes, not to leave future generations with an upside-down county.
- He also expressed heartfelt thanks for the prayers, calls, and encouragement he received during a very difficult period that included a sudden heart surgery and the death of his mother, saying that, without that support, he might not be here today.

Chairman Hatch then noted, for those who follow racing, that NASCAR driver Kyle Busch had reportedly passed away at age 42, and asked that his family be kept in everyone’s prayers.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

No comments from the public.

ADJOURN

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

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

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