Regular Meeting Minutes
Commission Board Room
Dixie County Courthouse
214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628
July 02, 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
Chairman Hatch called the meeting to order.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE AMERICAN FLAG

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

APPROVAL OF COMMISSION MINUTES

06/18/2026 Regular BOCC Minutes
Motion to approve the 06/18/20269 BOCC Regular Meeting Minutes made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved.

VOUCHER APPROVAL

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

KATRINA VANAERNAM, DIXIE COUNTY ANTI-DRUG COALITION

Mrs. Sheila Frierson (standing in for Katrina) provided a brief update on Narcan distribution. She reported that:

- A document listing all locations of Narcan boxes in the county has been prepared and copies were left for the Board.
- EMS and the Sheriff's Office believe the availability of these boxes has had a positive impact.
- She previously introduced the One Box Program, primarily intended for businesses whose employees handle mail, money, and similar items, to help ensure their safety.
- She currently has approximately five One Box units remaining and invited any interested businesses to contact her so she can provide them with a box.

NIKIE WAITS – ROAD 2 REDEMPTION

Paddle 22 event held on June 27th on the Weeki Wachee River.

Ms. Waits stated that:

- The event had a phenomenal turnout, with 26 community members participating despite the two-hour drive.
- Chairman Mark Hatch and Commissioner Daniel Wood, Mrs. Barbie Higginbotham, and four of Mrs. Higginbotham's staff members attended and paddled, and she thanked them for their support.
- The event's purpose was to raise awareness about PTSD, promote community support, and affirm to veterans that they are seen and not alone.
- Sheriff Butler was unable to attend, but his wife Lola represented him at the event.
- Participants faced various challenges on the river (exhaustion, fear, current, navigation), and Ms. Waits highlighted lessons learned about perseverance, leadership, asking for help, and the importance of traveling "further when we paddle together," relating these lessons to recovery, mental health, grief, PTSD, and everyday life.
- Ms. Waits expressed appreciation for the broader community mission in Cross City to "restore and renew" and noted that these efforts go beyond flyers and lights to meaningful community building.
- Financially, the event had 26 participants and raised a total of $1,825, including an additional $100 cash donation from Commissioner Osteen that was not on the initial sponsor slide. She thanked all sponsors and noted there are still potential donors, with a goal of reaching $2,200.
- In response to comments from the Board, Ms. Waits added that the Weeki Wachee River is tidal, making paddling with the tide easy and paddling against it challenging, and she drew a parallel between paddling against the current and the difficulties of life when one must "dig deep" to keep moving forward. She and others also noted that the river was beautiful and "full of manatees."

Chairman Hatch thanked Ms. Waits for organizing the event, stated that it was a great event and a great cause, and briefly remarked on the difficulty of paddling "going down" against the tide.

KAY MCCALLISTER, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Tourism / Community Events Update

- Mrs. McCallister reported that the upcoming weekend will feature multiple Independence Day / 250th birthday events across the county, including Suwannee and Horseshoe Beach (First District) and other locations, with fireworks generally scheduled for "dark-thirty" on July 4th.
- Noted that the Visit Dixie website and the Events at the Shoe site list many of the county's events.
- Stated that Suwannee's golf cart parade will begin at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, with lineup at 6:00 p.m., and that Horseshoe Beach will hold its parade at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, with both communities hosting daytime events beginning around 10:00 a.m. with numerous vendors.
- Encouraged residents to enjoy the festivities, support coastal vendors during the day, and be safe while celebrating.
- Publicly thanked Shelly Ross for her ongoing work managing park rentals, including daily follow-up with renters and ensuring everyone has the necessary access codes.
- Thanked Brian, John, and staff for working hard to open the county park in Horseshoe ahead of the holiday weekend and to prepare park facilities for visitors.
- Noted that the middle scallop in the Gulf is doing very well and suggested that while the coming holiday weekend will be busy, next week would be an excellent time for residents to go scalloping.

Board Comments – Chairman Hatch

- Thanked Mrs. McCallister, Brian, John Jenkins, and staff for their efforts, noting that the coastline has been heavily impacted in recent years but has "really bounced back."
- Commended the work to clean up Suwannee, stating that it looks "really, really good," and emphasized that fundraising for fireworks is a year-round effort by volunteers to benefit the community and celebrate the 250th anniversary.

KAREN VANAERNAM, DIXIE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. VanAernam provided a brief economic update and followed up on Mrs. McCallister's earlier comments regarding the coastal communities. She reported that dredging efforts in Horseshoe Beach and Suwannee are going very well and that she has received positive feedback on both the dredging and ongoing cleanup efforts. She noted that opening the county park in Horseshoe and improving coastal areas attracts visitors and positively impacts the county's bottom line.

She stated that the county is “moving forward in significant stride,” with Horseshoe, Suwannee, Jena, and other coastal towns—along with Commissioner Jody Stephenson and others assisting in the First District—working together to strengthen the county. She added that there are major plans for all coastal communities and that the county is “being blessed greatly” in several areas.

Ms. VanAernam then provided an update on McGriff Pass, the waterway from the Suwannee River to the Gulf. She stated that the economic development team has met multiple times with Representative Kat Cammack and Florida Commerce about dredging the pass, an issue discussed locally for approximately 20 years. She noted that recent hurricanes helped draw additional attention to the need for dredging. She announced that Representative Cammack will visit on Tuesday, July 7th, for an on-site tour of the pass, accompanied by her chief assistant Ms. Jessica Norfleet, the county’s economic team, and a small group of county officials (limited to about 10 people for security reasons). Airboats will be used for the tour. Mrs. VanAernam recognized Mr. Bill Lee for his work physically probing the pass at zero tide to gather data and reported that Florida Commerce and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have expressed interest in visiting and are in communication with the county. She stated that the county is optimistic and continues to push forward, emphasizing that opening waterways—“the highway, the waterway”—is critical to ensuring money is spent in Dixie County.

Board Comments

- Commissioner Jody Stephenson commented that during meetings in Tallahassee, the delegation’s presentation on the poor condition of McGriff Pass, including imagery that showed the waterway as a narrow aisle, underscored state liability concerns if someone were injured. He noted that this helped state officials take the issue more seriously.
- Mrs. VanAernam agreed, stating that it has taken many voices at multiple levels to gain attention, and highlighted Representative Cammack’s strong advocacy with federal agencies, including the Army Corps. She reiterated that “it takes everyone” and that many positive developments are occurring in Dixie County.
- Chairman Hatch reiterated how clean Suwannee looks following recent efforts, noting that a clean, mowed appearance significantly improves the community’s image and benefits the county. He remarked that Representative Cammack’s visit aligns well with these improvements and expressed confidence that the dredging project will ultimately be accomplished, though it has been a long process.
- Mrs. VanAernam added that improved appearance and cleanliness across the county seat and all coastal communities “attracts positive” and “makes a difference.” She noted that she routinely walks and picks up trash in the mornings, remarking that litter is a fact of life and that the key is to “just keep going” and not give up on keeping the county clean.

SCOTT NIOLET – SAVINACIOUS – Not present

Disaster Recovery / PW 119 Update – Mr. Roy Bass for Scott Niolett
Mr. Bass reported that Project Worksheet (PW) 119 has finally been resolved and removed, and that the remaining funding tied to that PW is now being released. He stated that the money is "slowly rolling in," and that once sufficient funds are deposited, the county will proceed with the remaining related projects and work to get them completed. Mrs. VanAernam and Chairman Hatch thanked Mr. Bass for the update.

GREG BAILEY, NORTH FLORIDA PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Kellan Bailey – had nothing to present at this time.

JOHN LOCKLEAR, LOCKLEAR AND ASSOCIATES

Landfill Monitoring Well Proposal – Mr. Walker Wren
Mr. Wren presented, on behalf of Mr. Locklear, a proposal for installation of an additional groundwater monitoring well at the county landfill after contaminants were detected and reported to DEP. The single new monitoring well would be located on the entry road south of the closed portion of the landfill. He stated that the estimated costs are $2,800 for the drilling company (well installation), $3,600 for laboratory fees, and $3,990 for county manpower (well design, installation oversight, and sampling), for a total of approximately $10,900.

Mr. Wren advised that Vice Chair Storey, who is experienced with drilling and well installation, had reviewed the pricing and felt it was reasonable, particularly the drilling cost. The Board discussed the requirement to advertise the project, the likely two-week advertisement period, and the goal of holding a bid opening and award at the next Board meeting, noting this would be close due to the holidays. Mr. Wren confirmed that DEP's deadline is the next sampling event, around October, which allows sufficient time. It was noted that the drilling cost is the primary variable between potential bidders; sampling and testing costs are expected to be similar.

- **MOTION: Vice Chair Storey moved to advertise for bids for the landfill monitoring well project as presented.**
- **SECOND: Commissioner Osteen seconded the motion.**
- **VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.**

CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS/CITY OFFICIALS

Darbi Chaires – Supervisor of Elections

Supervisor of Elections Darby reported that her office had just mailed 10 military and overseas ballots and emailed 2 additional ballots, noting that this was her first time overseeing the mailing of military/overseas ballots as Supervisor. She stated it is not too late for military and overseas voters to request a vote-by-mail ballot and emphasized that such voters have multiple options, including receiving ballots by email for faster delivery and return.

Mrs. Chaires advised that the office currently has 895 active vote-by-mail requests (excluding military/overseas), whereas they would typically have at least 1,500 for a primary and about 3,000 for a general election. She reminded everyone that state law has changed and all voters must re-request their vote-by-mail ballot; prior standing requests no longer carry over. Voters can request a ballot by calling the Elections Office, online, or through an immediate family member. She stressed the importance of spreading the word so voters who normally vote by mail do not miss their ballot.

Mrs. Chaires urged voters not to overlook primary elections, noting they are traditionally lower turnout but "primary elections matter; local elections matter." She emphasized that local officials (the Board, Supervisor of Elections, Property Appraiser, Tax Collector, etc.) make daily decisions that directly affect residents. She stated that the last day to register to vote or change party affiliation for the primary election is July 20. She added that there are two local races on the ballot that will appear on every voter's ballot, regardless of party affiliation.
She noted that all this information is available on the Supervisor of Elections website, that sample ballots are already posted online, and that sample ballots will be mailed to every household in the coming weeks to remind voters about the election.
Board/Additional Comments

- In discussion, it was mentioned that a sound system will likely be available at an upcoming public event, and candidates running for office will be welcome to speak to the public before the show if they choose to, similar to prior years.
- Mrs. Chaires added that the local Republican Party is planning to host a candidate forum to give all local candidates an opportunity to speak. The date has not yet been set; once it is confirmed, her office will help publicize the forum and remind voters to attend and listen to the candidates.

CINDY BELLOT, LIBRARY DIRECTOR

Library / Youth Programs Update

Ms. Bellot reported that the children's programs at the gym are going very well and are increasingly well-attended. Parents have been returning to the library with positive feedback, stating that their children greatly enjoy the programs. She noted that a special guest/program is scheduled for next week and encouraged everyone to attend. She shared that one grandmother reported her granddaughter's first request every summer is to go to the library, which she cited as evidence that "we are doing good things." She added that the library is also offering programs for older children, including sewing, canning, cake decorating, crafts, and painting, which teach life skills while allowing participants to have fun. She invited everyone to "come check it out."

RAELYNN BROWNELL, SUWANNEE WATER AND SEWER

Not present.

STEVE FREMEN, CODE ENFORCEMENT & VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

Mr. Freeman reported that there will be a code enforcement hearing at 3:30 p.m. that afternoon, and that the property behind Methodist Church case would be returning. He stated he had no other items unless the Board had questions.

In response to questions from Commissioner Stephenson regarding prior code enforcement ordinances/amendments—including older provisions that prohibited camping or staying on property without county permits and allowed for $500 per day fines and up to 30 days in jail—Mr. Freeman stated he had not yet had time to review those older documents due to preparations for court, but would look into whether those provisions had been rescinded or superseded and update the Board after reviewing the files. Commissioner Stephenson noted that such provisions, if still in effect, would significantly strengthen enforcement authority.

Mr. Freeman advised that citations with court dates have proven more effective than warning letters alone, as recipients take them more seriously; several properties have already been brought into compliance after citations were issued. He expressed hope that, upon receiving a signed order from the judge, the County would be able to proceed with abatement of a property near the Mexican restaurant. Commissioners thanked Mr. Freeman for his efforts, noting that he "wears a lot of different hats" in the county that many residents do not see.

MICHAEL GAINEY, COUNTY ROAD SUPERINTENDENT

Not present.

TIM JOHNSON, SOLID WASTE DIRECTOR

Mr. Johnson reported that the county's tire transfer station is at capacity and can no longer accept additional tires. He stated that staff reached out to Liberty Tire the previous week but received no response and expressed concern that ongoing issues with the company could leave the county without an outlet for waste tires, leading to illegal dumping. He suggested the county may need to look for a different vendor or solution.

Commissioner Jamie Storey reported that the county is working with Greenville and three other counties on the potential purchase of a tire shredder. He explained that a shredder would allow the counties to shred tires and dispose of them on their own C&D landfill cells, saving each county money by avoiding payment to outside vendors for whole tire disposal.

Mr. Johnson requested clarification on whether the Road Department would be working on Monday; when advised they would not, he stated that Solid Waste will need a mechanic and tire changer on duty because Solid Waste must continue operating. Chairman Hatch directed him to coordinate scheduling through Mikel Gainey so that Solid Waste and the Road Department can swap days as needed (Thursday/Monday) and avoid falling behind.

Commissioner Stephenson informed the Board that, while in Orlando, he met with a landowner who has multiple garbage packer trailers available for purchase at approximately $3,000 each, and a 40-foot container with air conditioning available for $1,750 (pickup required). He suggested these may be useful to the county. Chair Hatch asked Commissioner Stephenson to provide the contact information to Commissioners Storey and Johnson so they could follow up.

Mr. Johnson also reported that the bulldozer repair is nearly complete and that staff hopes to retrieve it by Friday or early the following week, though he is currently short-handed. Commissioner Stephenson asked whether, once available, the bulldozer could be used to clean canals while conditions are dry. Vice Chair Storey explained that the Road Department swapped equipment with Solid Waste so that Solid Waste now has the bulldozer and the Road Department has the front-end loader, and that the bulldozer is needed by Solid Waste as well.

Commissioner Stephenson further referenced a fairly new front-end loader at the county yard that needs a transmission; proceeds from prior surplus equipment sales had been intended to help repair it, but those funds were later redirected for flood-related pipe and infrastructure costs. Chair Hatch concluded by stating that Solid Waste and the Stormwater Task Force have historically worked hand in hand, and he did not foresee any issue coordinating use of the bulldozer for canal work once it is operational. He thanked Mr. Johnson for his efforts.

<u>LEON WRIGHT, BUILDING AND ZONING OFFICIAL</u>

Nothing to present at this time.

<u>SCOTTY PENDARVIS, CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER</u>

Information Technology (IT) Update

Mr. Pendarvis reported that:

- The library phone system has been successfully migrated to a new solution, reducing the risk of losing phone service there.
- Installation of the new phone system at the County Jail is scheduled for Friday the 10th; once installed, IT will complete the migration and fully transition jail communications to the new system.

- The Solid Waste phone migration was completed a few weeks earlier.

Mr. Pendarvis stated that the only remaining phone item on his list is the weather station line at the airport. He has spoken several times with Clint and advised that, based on the contract, the airport (FOB operator) is responsible for that line and already has its own Verizon-based phone system. Scotty explained that:

- One option is for the airport to assume responsibility and port the weather station number into its existing system (which, by contract, appears to be their obligation).
- Alternatively, IT could deploy a “POTS in a box” (a wireless-based analog solution like the one used at the library), but this would require an internet/transport cost that would be borne by the County for a building primarily managed by the airport/FOB.
- He has not yet received a definitive answer from Clint on whether the airport will take over the number or prefers that the County provide a solution.

Chairman Hatch asked Mr. Pendarvis to coordinate with Clint and schedule an Airport Committee meeting at the airport (Don’s office) so that the committee can decide how to proceed with the weather-station line, consistent with the contract.

Mr. Pendarvis also reported that he has made several network changes which are projected to reduce Microsoft-related costs by about $10,000, primarily by moving traffic off certain higher-cost services. Only a few computers remain to be migrated. He noted that the overall Microsoft bill has already decreased as a result of this work. Additionally, he informed the Board that the new external auditors are now asking detailed questions about IT; he is compiling the requested information and using much of the documentation and work the County completed last year, confirming that prior efforts are now proving beneficial.

No formal action was taken.

DARIAN BROWN, DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

EMS / Fire – Staffing, Pay, and Operations Update

Chief Brown reported severe paramedic shortages that led to the closure of Station 22 in Old Town and downgrading one engine to BLS status. He stated the department is down 6–7 paramedics, with another possibly leaving, and emphasized that ALS ambulances cannot operate without paramedics. He reviewed pay comparisons with surrounding counties (where paramedic rates are in the $22–$25/hour range), and explained that:

- Current pay levels (including only a $0.10/hour increase last year compared to the higher COLA given to the County) are no longer competitive.
- EMTs are disincentivized from becoming paramedics because the pay differential is too small.

- To stabilize staffing, he requested:
  - An immediate $1.50/hour raise for current paramedics only, and
  - A $2,000 sign-on bonus for new paramedic hires, payable after 3 months, subject to repayment if they leave within one year (contracted).

Chief Brown stated he had conferred with Finance and identified approximately $85,000 in EMS (previously planned for a squad chassis) and $25,000 in Fire (not currently needed for purchases) that could cover the proposed raises for current staff this year. Vacant positions would be funded as they are filled; in the meantime, salary savings from vacancies and the closure of Station 22 are accumulating. He stressed that without action the County risks further loss of paramedics.

Motion on Immediate Paramedic Raise and Sign-On Bonus (Rescinded)

- **MOTION: Commissioner Stephenson moved to implement the requested $1.50/hour raise for paramedics and the $2,000 sign-on bonus as described by Chief Brown.**
- **SECOND: Commissioner Osteen seconded the motion.**

Chairman Hatch then noted that a budget/finance committee meeting was already scheduled (with Finance, the County Manager, and himself) for Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. to review pay structure and budget impacts more comprehensively. He expressed support for EMS staff but cautioned against committing non-recurring funds (equipment lines) to recurring salary costs without a full plan, in order to protect both personnel and long-term equipment needs.

- **MOTION/CHANGE: After discussion, Commissioner Stephenson withdrew his motion, and Commissioner Osteen withdrew his second, with the understanding that the proposal will be reviewed in detail at the upcoming finance meeting and brought back to the full Board at a subsequent meeting.**

No action was taken on raises or bonuses at this time.

Chief Brown also noted that, looking ahead to the upcoming budget, staff anticipates needing at least a $2.00/hour across-the-board raise (subject to final budget analysis), though the exact amount may change as budget work progresses.

Drought / Burn Conditions and Parks Funding Acknowledgment

Chief Brown advised that Dixie County is currently the fourth driest county in Florida and referenced recent water use Phase 2 restrictions. He indicated a burn ban ordinance may be necessary soon if conditions persist and asked staff to verify readiness to advertise such an order as needed.

Chief Brown also:

- Reminded the Board that it is hurricane season, with a few systems having already formed and dissipated.
- Publicly praised his staff, notably Chief Garner and Tina Keen, for their extensive work over the past 2½ years to secure grant funding for park rebuilding projects. He noted

that although a contractor has now been engaged to manage the construction, the underlying funding was obtained through their efforts. Chairman Hatch echoed this praise and emphasized the progress made.

Camp Amigo and Fire Chiefs Conference

Chief Brown announced that Camp Amigo, a camp for pediatric burn survivors, will return to Camp Anderson from July 19–24. He invited Commissioners to stop by during camp to meet participants and staff, noting that the event was very successful last year and even resulted in a hire from among participants.

Chief Brown further reported:

- He, Chief Ferguson, and Chief Garner will attend the Fire Chiefs Association Conference next Friday.
- While at the conference, Mr. Jimmy Golden received an award by the Red Cross last week (Tuesday) and will be recognized by the Florida Fire Chief's Association for his long-time membership and participation until his death as a member of the Association as a Certified Fire Investigator and Inspector, and Mrs. Kelly Golden will attend that recognition; the County will be present to support the award.

No formal Board action was taken on these informational items.

Board Discussion

Chairman Hatch briefly noted that the EMS compensation issue will be reviewed at the finance committee meeting on Tuesday, and any recommendations will be brought back to the next Board meeting; no further motion was made at this time.

GAIL CARTER, INDIGENT CARE

Nothing to present at this time.

HOLLY HOUGHTON, COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT

Mrs. Higginbotham reported having heard that Ms. Houghton plans to retire in August and that Kendall Bussard is also leaving the Extension Office. The Board discussed the need to maintain services and questioned whether the position(s) would be advertised and how quickly the University of Florida/IFAS would act on the vacancy. Chairman Hatch stated that the County has already been in contact with the appropriate UF/IFAS office in Orlando and confirmed that the County will need to advertise for the position(s). No formal action was taken beyond this acknowledgement.

ANGIE CROWLEY, HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATOR

Nothing to present at this time.

JOHN JENKINS, COUNTY MANAGER

County Coordinator / Grants, Opioid Funds, Airport Leases, SHIP, and Boat Ramp

1. Request Board approval to accept the FY 2026-2027 Detailed Work Plan Budget – Arthropod Control to submit for the reimbursement program.

- **MOTION: Commissioner Osteen moved to approve acceptance of the FY 2026–2027 DCL work plan budget for the Inbox program.**
- **SECOND: Commissioner Stephenson seconded.**
- **VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.**

2. Request Board approval to accept the FY 2026–2027 operational Mosquito control budget for the reimbursement program.

- **MOTION: Commissioner Stephenson moved to approve acceptance of the FY 2026–2027 operational skid control budget for the Reindeer program.**
- **SECOND: Vice Chair Storey seconded.**
- **VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.**

3. Request Board decision of the $93,672.00 of Opioid funds for FY 2027 between EMS and Anti-Drug Coalition. The distribution would be $46,836.00 each.

- **MOTION: Commissioner Osteen moved to allocate the $93,672 in FY 2027 opioid settlement funds equally between EMS and the Anti-Drug Coalition, at $46,836 each.**
- **SECOND: Commissioner Daniel seconded.**
- **VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.**

4. Request Board approval of the T-Hangar 3 & 11 Lease Agreements as presented.

- **MOTION: Commissioner Osteen moved to approve the T-hangar lease agreements for Hangars #3 and #11 as presented.**
- **SECOND: Commissioner Stephenson seconded.**
- **VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.**

5. Request Board approval of the SHIP Rehab Reimbursement for Elizabeth Duke in the amount of $24,961.00.

- **MOTION: Commissioner Wood moved to approve the SHIP rehab reimbursement to Elizabeth Duke in the amount of $24,961.**
- **SECOND: Vice Chair Storey seconded.**
- **VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.**

6. Request Board approval of the SHIP Rehab Reimbursement for Gerald Hammonds in the amount of $22,217.50.

- **MOTION: Commissioner Stephenson moved to approve the SHIP rehab reimbursement to Gerald Hammonds in the amount of $22,217.02.**
- **SECOND: Vice Chair Storey seconded.**
- **VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.**

7. Request Board approval of the SHIP Rehab Reimbursement for Gerald Hammonds in the amount of $22,217.50.

- **MOTION: Commissioner Stephenson moved to approve SHIP down payment assistance to William Koester in the amount of $30,000.**
- **SECOND: Commissioner Wood seconded.**
- **VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.**

8. Suwannee Boat Ramp Closure for Dredging Project – SE 867 Avenue

Mr. Jenkins requested Board approval to temporarily close the public boat ramp on SE 867 Avenue in Suwannee (near the old water plant) beginning July 7 to allow the contractor to perform dredging work. He stated the closure is expected to last approximately 4–6 weeks.

Chairman Hatch noted that the closure was scheduled to begin after the July 4th holiday to avoid disrupting holiday boating and that the closure is intended to keep the public safe and allow the dredging contractor (Mr. Dale) to work efficiently.
Chairman Hatch requested that public notice of the closure be posted, and Mr. Jenkins agreed to coordinate that notice.

- **MOTION: Vice Chair Storey moved to approve the temporary closure of the SE 867 Avenue boat ramp in Suwannee beginning July 7 for the dredging project, for an anticipated duration of 4–6 weeks.**
- **SECOND: Commissioner Stephenson seconded.**
- **VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.**

Holiday Office and Crew Schedules

Mr. Jenkins reminded the Board that the County offices will be closed on Wednesday, July 3rd in observance of Independence Day, and that the Road Department crews will be off on Monday, July 6th. Chairman Hatch also noted that Solid Waste employees are adjusting their work schedule for the holiday period to maintain service.

<u>CHANA WATSON, COUNTY ATTORNEY</u>

Attorney Watson reported that there is an upcoming criminal case related to a code enforcement matter, with depositions involving Mr. Leon Wright scheduled for either July 10 or July 17 (date to be confirmed). She clarified that Mr. Wright is not the subject of the charges. Mr. Wright explained that the case involves an individual who moved to the county, built a house without a permit, and then attempted to sell the house. The County issued a stop work order, which the individual ignored and continued building. Mr. Wright stated that he involved DEP and that, due to continued noncompliance, the matter escalated. He thanked the State Attorney's Office for taking up the case; the individual has been arrested and is contesting the charges in court. Attorney. Watson noted that this is a court matter and all information discussed is part of the public record.

Attorney Watson then addressed a follow-up question from the previous meeting regarding the old jail property. She stated that the Board had previously voted to donate the property to a 501(c)(3) organization associated with Dixie Church of Christ, contingent upon the group obtaining its 501(c)(3) status. She confirmed that:

- The recipient organization is in the process of completing and filing all required 501(c)(3) paperwork.
- No deed has been executed yet because the County is awaiting the formal 501(c)(3) documentation.
- It is her intention to draft the deed with a reverter clause, providing that if the property is ever not used for the stated charitable purpose, title will revert back to the County, and that the property must be maintained in a clean and orderly manner.

Attorney Watson indicated she anticipates having the necessary documentation and a draft deed ready for Board review later this month, depending on how quickly the State and IRS return the organization's paperwork.

Commissioners acknowledged and thanked her for the clarification.

BARBIE HIGGINBOTHAM, CLERK OF COURT

Clerk / Budget and TRIM Calendar – Ms. Brenda Royal – Director of Finance

Ms. Royal reported that TRIM "Day 1" began the previous day, meaning the Property Appraiser has certified the taxable value, and the Clerk's Office is now fully engaged in preparing the FY budget, working with a new external auditor while simultaneously completing the prior year audit, the current year, and the upcoming year's budget. She noted the new audit process is challenging but expected to yield long-term benefits. She emphasized that the Clerk's Office compiles and presents budget information, but the Board makes the final budget decisions, and that all must work together to balance expenses and use taxpayer funds wisely.

Ms. Royal distributed budget recap forms showing the current status and advised that all constitutional officers' proposed budgets (due June 1) have been received and listed for the Board's review. She reminded the Board that these submitted budgets are not final; the Board retains final authority once the countywide budget picture is clear.

Ms. Royal explained that, due to Department of Revenue (DOR) TRIM timing requirements, the Board must adjust its September meeting schedule so that budget hearings fall within required notice windows. She noted that on July 16th (evening) the Board will set a proposed millage rate (which may later be reduced but cannot be increased).

To comply with TRIM rules, she requested the following meeting changes:

1. September 3rd Meeting – Move to Evening

She requested that the regular September 3rd morning meeting be moved to the evening so that the first (tentative) budget hearing can be held.

- **MOTION: Vice Chair Storey moved to reschedule the September 3rd meeting to the evening, with the budget hearing at 5:30 p.m. and the regular Board meeting at 6:00 p.m.**
- **SECOND: Commissioner Osteen seconded.**
- **VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.**

2. September 17th Meeting – Move to September 14th

She further requested that the second September evening meeting, originally set for September 17th, be moved to September 14th, again to comply with TRIM notice windows.

- **MOTION: Commissioner Osteen moved to reschedule the September 17th, evening meeting to September 14th, with the final budget hearing at 5:30 p.m. and the regular meeting at 6:00 p.m.**
- **SECOND: Vice Chair Storey seconded.**
- **VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.**

Ms. Royal explained that if the County does not follow the DOR scheduling requirements, it would be out of compliance, potentially forced to restart the budget process and incur significant fines, something she stated she is determined to avoid. She stressed the importance of full Board attendance at the September budget hearings so that the Board can adopt the tentative and final budgets.

Commissioners thanked Ms. Royal and her staff for their work on the budget and audit process.

COUNTY COMMISSION ITEMS

- **Commissioner Wood** – Offered holiday well-wishes, thanking everyone who helps "make everything happen," and encouraged residents to have a safe and happy Fourth of July with their families.
- **Vice Chair Storey** – Commented on the good attendance at the meeting, wished everyone a safe and happy Fourth of July, and advised the Board that he will not be present at the July 16 meeting due to being out of town.
- **Commissioner Stephenson** – Wished everyone a safe holiday and joked about lighting fireworks. He reported that the community garden he planted is producing abundantly, noting he picked approximately 200 pounds of squash that morning (zucchini, crookneck, and straight-neck) and invited anyone to take vegetables from his truck. He stated that okra will be ready in about a week, with cucumbers, peas, and sweet corn to follow. He explained that he is continuing a tradition started by his father and "Mommel" of planting for the community, and that fireworks activities will be done in their honor, recognizing how they supported many local families over the years. Chair Hatch and other commissioners thanked him for his efforts and generosity.
- **Commissioner Osteen** – Thanked the Road Department for cleaning and mowing roads in preparation for holiday visitors and specifically thanked Tim Johnson for responding promptly to trash complaints. He wished everyone a happy and safe Fourth of July and jokingly requested to be "wrapped in bubble wrap" for safety.
- **Chairman Hatch** – Noted that holiday periods bring significant economic activity to local businesses and that the County often adjusts operations to keep the community presentable for visitors. He commended Solid Waste and the Road Department for their outstanding work in mowing, trash pickup, and general appearance, stating that a clean, well-maintained county can help attract new residents and businesses. He emphasized the significance of the nation's 250th anniversary, observing that no one present will see the next such milestone, and encouraged everyone to celebrate safely with family, enjoy the fireworks, and take pride in Dixie County. He again thanked staff for their efforts.

- **Additional Comments** – Commissioner Stephenson and Vice Chair Storey further thanked Tim Johnson and Solid Waste staff for working holidays and for their hard work to keep garbage collection and disposal operating smoothly, noting that the department had been in difficult shape but that recent equipment decisions by the Board have made a major difference.

<u>PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS</u>

Mr. David Capo (Stormwater Task Force)

Mr. Capo, speaking on behalf of the Stormwater Task Force, stated that the Task Force has been operating for about five years and meets multiple times per month on a volunteer basis to plan, prioritize, and execute drainage projects. He explained that their current priorities include Twin Lakes, Rock Sink, and Stephenson's office area, and that they rely on a specialized piece of equipment (a canal/ditch mower) purchased with grant funds to maintain and open ditches.

Mr. Capo reported that, when the Task Force arrived at a recent job site, they discovered the machine had been moved without their knowledge to Suwannee for mowing in preparation for the holiday events. This required them to search for the equipment and disrupted their work schedule. He emphasized that many of the county's ditches had seen little or no maintenance in decades, that the Task Force has already opened many miles of ditches and installed numerous culverts, and that they are working against the weather, especially during dry periods when ditch work is possible. He stated that if the Board intends to use the equipment independently, the Task Force needs to know and stressed that advance communication is essential so they can adjust their plans, otherwise their volunteer efforts are undermined. He added that, as agreed when the grants were obtained, the Task Force expected priority use of the equipment for stormwater projects, with the understanding that, once their work is done, the County could then use it for other purposes.

Mr. Bobby Davis (Stormwater Task Force)

Mr. Davis, also of the Stormwater Task Force, introduced himself and noted his 38 years of experience working for a timber company, during which he helped install many of the county's drainage ditches. He stated that many of these ditches have had no maintenance in roughly 50 years, contributing to the severity of recent flooding events. He explained that:

- The Task Force has already opened approximately 70 miles of ditches and installed between 200–300 culverts, much of it on private timber company land, with the cooperation of the landowners.
- Without the specialized equipment purchased with grant funds, they cannot maintain the ditch system effectively.
- They receive no salary for their work, only a tank of gas per week in his case and donate their time "because we love the county."

Mr. Davis stressed that continued access to the equipment is critical, especially while conditions are dry and work can be completed. He noted some public criticism about spending money on ditches located on company land but argued that if those ditches remain clogged, floodwaters cannot move, and neither the county nor the landowners will fix them at the same level without the grant-funded program. He pointed out that the Task Force has likely done what would otherwise be a multi-million-dollar job for under $1 million, which has helped the county's reputation with the state and improved eligibility for additional funding. He reiterated that they need the equipment available for Task Force work first, and that the County is welcome to the equipment whenever time remains after their scheduled work.

Board Response

Commissioners Stephenson, Osteen, and Chairman Hatch thanked Mr. Capo, Mr. Davis, and the entire Stormwater Task Force for their work, noting:

- The Task Force has significantly improved the county's drainage system and has been publicly praised by state officials for how efficiently grant funds have been used.

- Many ditches had to be cleared multiple times due to storm damage and debris, and the Task Force has continued to respond.
- The mapping and maintenance “Bible” being developed by the Task Force to document ditch locations, access points, and structures will be invaluable for future generations.

Chairman Hatch acknowledged that communication broke down regarding the temporary relocation of the equipment to Suwannee for a three-day cleanup prior to the holiday, and he apologized for that lack of notice. He stated that the Suwannee cleanup was important for holiday tourism and community image, but agreed that, going forward, the County must notify the Task Force in advance when the equipment will be reassigned so schedules can be coordinated. He emphasized that the Board continues to fully support the Stormwater Task Force, values its work, and wants the group to continue its mission.

Commissioners reaffirmed their appreciation for the Task Force’s volunteer service and reiterated that Solid Waste, Road, and Stormwater operations are expected to work hand-in-hand on drainage and flood-mitigation needs.

Final Public Comment

Mr. Chris McKenzie briefly asked everyone to keep their fingers crossed and pray for an important soccer game on Monday night, noting that the USA team is in a position the country has “never been in” and that a win would be wonderful for the nation.

ADJOURN

- **MOTION: Vice Chair Storey moved to adjourn.**
- **SECOND: Commissioner Wood seconded.**
- **VOTE: The motion to adjourn carried unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned.**

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.