# Regular Meeting

Commission Board Room
Dixie County Courthouse
214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628
July 16, 2026 – 6:00 PM

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

**COMMISSIONERS**

Mark Hatch, District 3, Chairman
Jody Stephenson, District 1
Daniel Wood, District 2
Jamie Storey, District 4, Vice Chairman – Not present
David Osteen, District 5

**STAFF**

John Jenkins, County Manager
Roy Bass, Assistant County Manager – Not present
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 - Not present
Victoria Darkow, Deputy Clerk

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Hatch called the meeting to order.

**INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE AMERICAN FLAG**

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

**APPROVAL OF COMMISSION MINUTES**

**07/02/2026 Regular BOCC Minutes**

**Motion to approve the 07/02/2026 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 Stephenson. Board approved.**

## CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS/CITY OFFICIALS

**City Election Dates and Housing Authority Vacancy**
**Speaker: Ryan Fulford, Mayor of Cross City**

- Announced the qualification period for the upcoming city elections will be from August 3 at 12:00 p.m. (noon) through August 7, 2026, at 12:00 p.m. (noon).
- Announced that Election Day will be September 15, 2026.
- Reported that he had been contacted by the Sheriff's Office regarding a vacancy on the Florida Rural Housing Authority Board. The preference is for an appointee from Dixie County, preferably Cross City, since the housing is located there.
- Mayor Fulford stated that if the Board has anyone in mind, he has information regarding the position and application and can forward it to County Manager John Jenkins or whomever the Board designates.
- Mayor Fulford noted that the Governor will make the appointment.
- Clarified that the preferred candidate is not an elected official, but rather a citizen or business person.
- Chairman Hatch directed that the information be provided to John Jenkins, and Mayor Fulford agreed to do so.
- Mayor Fulford stated he had nothing further. Chairman Hatch asked if anyone had anything for the Mayor; there were no further comments, Chairman Hatch thanked the Mayor.

## ANDREW QUINCOSIS – PROPOSED MORATORIUM WORKSHOP – DATA CENTER

**AI / Data Center Workshop – Scheduling**

- Presentation:
  Andrew Quincosis, "King Cobra "addressed the Board and requested that the County hold a public workshop to discuss AI/data centers and their potential impacts on the community, including:
  - Health
  - Water and wastewater
  - Natural resources
    He stated that the topic was too complex to cover in a regular meeting and recommended a dedicated workshop including commissioners and residents to review information and make informed decisions.

**Motion: Commissioner Osteen moved to hold an AI/data center workshop. Seconded by: Commissioner Wood. Motion carried unanimously.**

- Date and time discussion and decision:
  The Board discussed possible dates, including holding the workshop on the same day as a regular meeting and whether to meet on August 6 or August 20, with a preference for an evening time to increase public turnout. After discussion and clarifying conflicts, the Board reached consensus to schedule the workshop as follows:
    - Date: Tuesday, August 6, 2026
    - Time: 4:00 p.m.
    - Location: BOCC meeting room (County Commission chambers)
    - Final action:
        - Confirmation: Chairman Hatch asked each commissioner if they were in agreement with August 6, 2026 at 4:00 p.m.; all commissioners present indicated they were in favor.
        - Vote: Chair called for a vote on scheduling the workshop for August 6, 2026 at 4:00 p.m.; motion passed unanimously.

**<u>SANDRA NEUBARTH – ACCENTURE - DIXIE COUNTY FIRE AND SOLID WASTE ASSESSMENTS</u>**

**Fire Assessment & Solid Waste Assessment Presentations and Resolutions**

**Fire Assessment Presentation**

**Presenter: Sandy Newbarth**, Accenture (formerly Government Services Group)

Sandy provided an overview of the fire non-ad valorem assessment:

- **Background & Purpose**
    - County has used a fire assessment program since at least 2020, with rate updates implemented in 2021.
    - Goal is to:
        - Generate dedicated revenue for fire protection services.
        - Diversify revenue so the General Fund does not bear the full cost.
        - Provide restricted, accountable funding that can only be used for fire services.
        - Allocate costs based on service benefit, not taxable value.
- Current (prior year) fire assessment rates
    - Residential: $125 per dwelling unit
    - Non-residential: $0.12 per sq. ft.
    - Vacant land:
        - Up to 160 acres: $33 per parcel
        - 161–640 acres: $0.10 per acre (capped at 640 acres)
- Existing exemptions (policy choices already in place)
    - Government property

- Institutional tax-exempt property
    - Properties must be wholly tax-exempt, and buildings must be institutional use (e.g., churches, nonprofits).
- Statutory agricultural exemption
    - County cannot charge ag-exempt property for non-ad valorem assessments, except for residential buildings on such parcels.
    - Non-residential ag buildings and ag vacant land are not charged.
- All exemptions are a “buy down”: forgone assessment revenue must be covered from other county funds (e.g., General Fund); the burden cannot be shifted to other payers.

- Methodology & Legal Framework
    - Non-ad valorem fire assessment is a home rule revenue source and is case-law driven.
    - The methodology used is the court-tested and widely adopted Florida fire assessment methodology used in cases such as Desiderio v. City of Boynton Beach (4th DCA, 2010), which Accenture (then GSG) helped defend.
    - To be legally defensible:
        1. Special Benefit to assessed properties – courts have recognized that fire protection and solid waste qualify; EMS does not, so EMS costs must be excluded from the fire assessment.
        2. Fair and reasonable apportionment – allocation of costs to property classes must be based on documented demand/benefit, not arbitrary.
- Service delivery and call data
    - County provides fire protection county-wide, so all properties in the county are included in the benefit area.
    - Method removed EMS calls and EMS costs, considering only fire-protection/first-responder calls.
    - Two years of call data were analyzed:
        - Total calls (2-year period): 10,400
        - Fire-protection calls: 1,901
            - After removing non-specific locations (e.g., auto accidents, waterways) that do not tie to a tax parcel, 1,219 fire calls were used for cost apportionment.
    - Calls were weighted by resource usage (time on scene) rather than counted equally:
        - Average on-scene time:
            - Residential: 44 minutes
            - Non-residential: 94 minutes
            - Land: 71 minutes
        - Resulting weighted demand on fire resources:

        - Residential: 68.13%
        - Non-residential: 23.24%
        - Vacant land: 8.63%
    - Compared to the prior study, total call volume and the share of residential and non-residential calls increased, while land demand decreased (consistent with ongoing development).
- Assessable budget
    - A 5-year average “pro forma” budget (excluding EMS costs) was developed to avoid annual rate swings.
    - Maximum assessable fire budget (5-year average): $7,290,000.
    - This represents a substantial increase over the prior year’s funded level of just under $1.5 million; staff is not recommending funding the full $7.29 million.
- Cost & parcel apportionment
    - Cost apportionment (by class) is based on the weighted call demand:
        - Residential: 68.13%
        - Non-residential: 23.24%
        - Vacant land: 8.63%
    - Parcel apportionment method remains unchanged:
        - Residential: per dwelling unit
        - Non-residential: per square foot
        - Vacant land:
            - Per parcel up to 160 acres
            - Per acre over 160 acres (to 640-acre cap)
            - If a property is developed and pays a building charge, it is not also charged a land fee.
- Maximum scenario rate illustration (if the Board funded the full $7.29M)
    - Residential: approx. $589 per dwelling unit
    - Non-residential: approx. $0.65 per sq. ft.
    - Vacant land:
        - $76 per parcel
        - $0.22 per acre (over 160 acres)
    - Sandy reiterated this is not staff’s recommendation, only the legal maximum based on the analysis.
- Staff-recommended fire assessment scenario (for FY 2026–2027)
    - Recommended funding level: 42.4% of the maximum budget.
    - Proposed notice rate for this year:
        - Residential: $250 per dwelling unit
            - Increase of $125 over current $125 rate (adds approx. $1.3 million for fire).
        - Non-residential: $0.28 per sq. ft.

            - Increase of $0.16 per sq. ft. over current $0.12.
        - Vacant land:
            - Per parcel rate decreases due to lower relative demand;
            - Per acre rate remains the same as current.
    - Staff also recommends noticing a higher "future maximum" residential rate of $350 per dwelling unit for future years.
        - This does not obligate the Board to increase to $350.
        - It allows small incremental increases (e.g., $5/year) in future years without re-mailing costly first-class notices (approx. $40–$42k per county-wide mailing).
        - As with TRIM, the Board can always adopt a lower final rate in September, but not higher than noticed.
- **Board discussion**
    - Commissioners discussed:
        - How call volume increases have been affected by repeated disasters (floods, hurricanes).
        - The importance of maintaining the county's ISO rating, as higher ISO scores raise homeowners' insurance costs.
        - The long period (over 20 years) in which assessments were not adjusted, and the difficulty of catching up.
        - The high cost of legally required first-class notices whenever rates exceed previously noticed maximums.
    - Clarifications were made that:
        - The 44-minute and 94-minute figures refer to total time spent on scene, not response time.
        - FEMA reimbursements may assist with disaster-related operations but do not cover day-to-day calls.

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**Solid Waste Assessment Presentation**

Presenter: Sandy Newbarth, Accenture

Sandy then presented the update on the solid waste non-ad valorem assessment:

- Background & current rates
    - Last updated in 2021.
    - County-wide benefit area with same exemptions as fire (government, institutional tax-exempt, and statutory ag exemptions).
    - Prior year revenue: approx. $1.77 million.
    - Residential: $180 per dwelling unit.
    - Small commercial (similar to residential can volume): $180 per unit (treated like residential).

    - Non-residential: per-ton rate (based on prior solid waste tonnage study), currently $159 per ton.
- Methodology
    - Unlike fire, all solid waste budget costs are included, but the residential vs. non-residential shares are based on actual tonnage.
    - Staff has been tracking commercial vs. residential tonnage since the last study, enabling more precise apportionment.
    - Benefit area is the entire county.
    - Parcel apportionment remains:
        - Residential & small commercial: per dwelling or equivalent unit.
        - Non-residential: per ton of waste generated.
- Residential vs. non-residential tonnage
    - Residential generates approx. 75.08% of total tons.
    - Non-residential generates approx. 24.92%.
- 5-year average budget
    - Total 5-year average assessable budget: approx. $2,742,000.
        - Residential/small commercial share: approx. $2,147,000.
        - Non-residential share: approx. $595,000.
    - After exemptions and buy-downs, projected net revenue is approx. $2,540,000.
- Resulting rate calculation (illustrative)
    - Based on the 5-year average:
        - Residential & small commercial: $244 per unit (8,876 units).
        - Non-residential: $416 per ton.
    - Noted that non-residential tonnage has increased, driving a larger per-ton rate.
- Staff-recommended solid waste assessment rates (for FY 2026–2027)
    - Recommend adopting the 5-year average level for notice purposes:
        - Residential & small commercial: $244 per unit this year.
        - Future maximum notice rate: $281 per unit for subsequent years, to permit small increases without re-noticing.
    - Board retains annual discretion to fund any level at or below the noticed maximum.
- Operational comments
    - A commissioner raised concerns about households generating far more trash than average while paying the same flat fee.
    - Sandy clarified that this is an operational issue (e.g., limits on what is accepted at collection sites), not a rate-methodology issue.
    - It was noted that average bag counts per household are not practically trackable; the dwelling unit remains the most administrable unit.

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**Required Procedures & New Statutory Requirements**

  - Annual process
- Each year the Board must:
    1. Adopt an Initial (or Amended and Restated Initial) Assessment Resolution for each assessment (fire and solid waste).
    2. Mail first-class notices to all affected property owners at least 20 days before the public hearing, whenever new or higher maximum rates are noticed.
    3. Hold a public hearing (scheduled for September 3, 2026) to adopt final rates.
    4. Direct staff to certify the assessment roll to the Tax Collector so amounts appear on the property tax bills.
- RV parks – statutory treatment & vacancy credit
  - RV parks must be treated as commercial properties similar to hotels/motels.
    - Each RV space is assigned a square-footage equivalent and charged the non-residential per sq. ft. rate for fire.
  - New statute requires a vacancy credit for unoccupied RV spaces:
    - Credit is based on prior-year occupancy, supported by an annual affidavit from the park owner (spaces available vs. nights rented).
    - The county may accept affidavits at face value or require supporting records; this is a policy choice.
  - The new resolutions incorporate this required vacancy adjustment provision.

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**Fire Assessment – Amended and Restated Initial Assessment Resolution**
**Agenda Item:** *Amended and Restated Initial Assessment Resolution – Fire Protection*
**Resolution No.: 2026-35**

- Summary of Resolution 2026-35
- Relates to provision of fire protection services, facilities, and programs throughout the Dixie County Fire Protection Municipal Service Benefit Unit (MSBU).
- Confirms the MSBU and sets out:
- Authority, purposes, and definitions.
- Legislative findings and determinations.
- Cost apportionment factors and parcel apportionment.
- Maximum rates for FY 2026-2027:
- Residential (current-year notice rate): $250 per dwelling unit.
- Residential (future-year notice maximum): $350 per dwelling unit.
- Corresponding non-residential and land rates as calculated in the study.
- Continuation of government/institutional/agricultural exemptions and RV park vacancy credits as required by statute.
- Method of collection on the ad valorem tax bill.
- Public hearing date set for September 3, 2026, originally at 10:00 a.m., but amended by the Board to 6:00 p.m.

**Board action**

**Motion: Commissioner Jody Stephenson moved to adopt Resolution 2026-35, including staffs recommended $250 current-year residential rate and $350 future-year maximum, and amending the public hearing time to 6:00 p.m. Seconded by: Commissioner Daniel Wood. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Discussion:**

Clarification that:

- The $250 will be the maximum rate that can be adopted for FY 2026-2027 (Board can adopt a lower amount at final hearing).
- The $350 is only a future-year cap and does not obligate any particular increase.
- When rates are not raised above previously noticed maximums, the County saves on re-noticing costs.

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**Solid Waste Assessment – Amended and Restated Initial Assessment Resolution**

**Agenda Item:** *Amended and Restated Initial Assessment Resolution – Solid Waste*

**Resolution No.: 2026-36**

- **Summary of Resolution 2026-36**
- Relates to the collection and disposal of solid waste within the Dixie County Solid Waste MSBU.
- Confirms the MSBU and sets out:
- Authority, purposes, and definitions.
- Legislative findings and cost/parcel apportionment.
- Maximum assessable solid waste costs and estimated rates for FY 2026-2027:
    - Residential & small commercial (current-year notice rate): $244 per unit (5-year average scenario).
    - Residential & small commercial (future-year notice maximum): $281 per unit.
    - Non-residential per-ton rate consistent with the study (approx. $416 per ton at the 5-year average).
- Vacancy adjustment provisions and continued exemptions.
- Public hearing set for September 3, 2026, with the Board directing that the time be 6:00 p.m. to match the fire hearing.
- Collection via the ad valorem tax bill.

**Board action**

**Commissioner Stephenson moved to adopt Resolution 2026-36 with staff's recommended $244 current-year rate, $281 future-year maximum, and public hearing at 6:00 p.m. on September 3, 2026. Seconded by Commissioner David Osteen. Motion passed unanimously.**

- Discussion:

  - Commissioners noted the same logic as for fire regarding notice caps and the ability to lower rates at final adoption.

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

Not present.

**NIKIE WAITS – ROAD 2 REDEMPTION**

Not present.

**KAY MCCALLISTER, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

**McGriff Channel Dredging / Economic Development**

- Mrs. McCallister thanked the County for its ongoing efforts over the years to get the McGriff Channel (the boat-leads navigational channel from the Gulf into the Suwannee River) dredged.
- Mrs. McCallister noted:
  - The channel has been a problem for approximately 25 years and has worsened after multiple recent hurricanes.
  - The County recently hosted Representative Kat Cammack in Suwannee to see the problem firsthand.
  - Although the visit was not publicly announced due to security concerns, word spread and over 40 residents attended in support.
  - During the on-water tour (at relatively low tide, using airboats), Rep. Cammack's group encountered a 35-foot Bertram stuck in the mud at the last marker.
    - The boater stated that:
      "According to my GPS, this is a navigational channel,"
      underscoring the safety and navigational issues.
  - Mrs. McCallister emphasized the economic impact of the obstructed channel on tourism and local businesses and thanked the County for continuing to push for a solution.

**Board/Chair comments:**

- Chairman Hatch added:
  - The stranded boater's second comment was that he needed fuel and had intended to purchase about $6,000 in fuel at the local marina but could not get in due to depth issues.
  - This incident illustrates the lost economic opportunity and sales tax revenue for the County.
  - He has been involved in efforts to address McGriff Channel since around 1989, and the County is still working to secure a long-term fix.
  - Suwannee, though unincorporated, serves as a county-wide economic driver, and revenue from tourism there benefits the entire County.

    - The County currently has $500,000 committed through Florida Commerce for engineering and design work on the project, including design parameters and depth. These funds will be placed in a separate McGriff Pass account, so they are not mixed with the General Fund.
- Commissioner Jody Stephenson commended the whole Board for its advocacy at Rural County Days in Tallahassee, where commissioners:
    - Demonstrated to state officials that mapping and GPS still show a navigable channel where, in reality, boats are grounding.
    - Stressed that this condition creates state liability if someone is injured.
    - He credited those meetings with helping to "open eyes" and get doors opening toward a solution.
- Chairman Hatch also recounted a prior visit with Congressman Neal Dunn, during which:
    - Dunn's airboat became stuck and he experienced sand gnats firsthand.
    - Shortly after, the project received funding and then later lost it, but the event demonstrated the severity of conditions.

**<u>KAREN VANAERNAM, DIXIE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</u>**

Not present.

**<u>SCOTT NIOLET, SAVINACIOUS</u>**

**Horseshoe Beach Updates**

Reported that PW119 has been resolved and the County has received the associated funding.

- Noted that several residents and elected officials from Horseshoe Beach reached out following their Fourth of July celebration to publicly thank the County for the work completed at the Point and the park, stating the event was a huge success.
- No further updates.

**Horseshoe Beach Town Hall and Related Projects**

**Speaker: Jason Benoit**

- Reported that Horseshoe Beach received a $1.8 million state appropriation for a new Town Hall.
- Mr. Benoit stated this funding will be combined with insurance and FEMA funds for a total project budget of approximately $3 million, which is sufficient for the planned project.
- Mr. Benoit noted that the Town will need assistance from the County on related matters, including:
    - Post office property issues, and
    - A new agreement for the new fire station.
- Advised he will be working with Martha McCaskill on these requests so that, once resolved, the Town can engage engineers and proceed to construction.
- Chairman Hatch indicated he had nothing further for Mr. Benoit.

- Commissioner Stephenson mentioned he had documents related to his house in Horseshoe Beach and would provide them to the Clerk; staff acknowledged.

**GREG BAILEY, NORTH FLORIDA PROFESSIONAL SERVICES**

**Project Updates**
**Speaker:** Phil Bishop, North Florida Professional Services

- Reported that the First District fire station and the Horseshoe Beach fire station are under construction.
    - First District station is nearing completion, awaiting several long-lead items (e.g., generator), after which a punch list will be addressed.
    - Horseshoe Beach station has structural steel (“red iron”) erected and interior framing in progress; the project remains on schedule.
- Provided an update on the Sheriff’s Office grouting project, stating secondary grouting is underway and the project is currently under budget, with no issues anticipated.
- Reported on the Horseshoe Beach working waterfront project, noting permitting issues with DEP and a lack of cooperation from the agency.
    - Advised that staff will likely need to discuss alternative designs with County staff; alternatives are “not very palatable,” and some adjustments to the project may be necessary while still meeting the intent of providing a functional working waterfront.
- Chairman Hatch asked Mr. Bishop to continue working on the projects and requested that Bishop call next week regarding the boat ramp diagram previously sent to Jimmy; Bishop agreed.
- Commissioner Stephenson suggested possibly engaging the Governor regarding DEP’s lack of cooperation, referencing prior statements by the Governor in Horseshoe Beach encouraging the County to do whatever necessary to restore the community.
- Mr. Bishop agreed to coordinate as needed and to follow up with the County.

**JOHN LOCKLEAR, LOCKLEAR AND ASSOCIATES**

**Dredging and RIF Grants Update**
**Dredging**

- Reported that dredging operations are actively underway in both Horseshoe Beach and Suwannee.
    - In Horseshoe Beach, crews are still working in the outer room/channel.
    - In Suwannee, work on the south canal has been completed, and equipment is being moved to begin dredging the north canal.
- Stated that the project is moving along on schedule.
- Announced that, after approximately one year, the County has received its final U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permit needed for the project.
- **RIF (Rural Infrastructure Fund) Grants**

- In response to a question from Chairman Hatch, Mr. Locklear confirmed that three RIF grant applications were submitted over the weekend:
    1. Library project
    2. Sports complex
    3. Cow Creek Bridge
- Mr. Locklear noted that:
    - It may take several months before the County hears whether the applications were approved.
    - If approved, there may be an additional delay of a few more months before funds are received.
- Mr. Locklear emphasized that the important step was that all three applications have now been submitted.

Chairman Hatch thanked Mr. Locklear for the update and commended him for his work.

**<u>CINDY BELLOT, LIBRARY DIRECTOR</u>**

Not present. Chairman Hatch reported that Miss Cindy texted earlier that she was unable to attend the meeting. No further issues were reported, and the Board moved on to the next item.

Chairman Hatch reported that:

- The kids enjoyed the gym projects held the previous day.
- A cooking class for children held that day was also a success.
- He commented that the library and related youth programs are "moving right along."

**<u>RAELYNN BROWNELL, SUWANNEE WATER AND SEWER</u>**

Not present. Chairman Hatch stated he had not heard any concerns from Suwannee Water and Sewer and observed that things appear to be going well.

**<u>STEVE FREMEN, CODE ENFORCEMENT & VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER</u>**

Nothing to present at this time.

**<u>MIKEL GAINEY, COUNTY ROAD SUPERINTENDENT</u>**

**Road Department – Dump Truck Accident and Rock Excavation**

- Dump truck accident
    - Reported a recent wreck involving a County dump truck.
    - The new County mechanic, Zach Parry, inspected the truck and estimated repairs at approximately $5,000–$6,000 to return it to service.
    - There was a brief discussion about possible damage to a loader; it was noted:
    - No one was seriously injured.
    - Those involved appeared to have bumps and bruises, but no major injuries were reported.

- Rock excavation while water table is low
  - Mr. Gainey stated that the Road Department has been sending a crew out on Fridays to dig rock.
    - Approximately 160–180 loads have already been hauled.
  - He strongly recommended that crews continue digging rock:
    - The water table is currently very low, exposing rock that is normally inaccessible.
    - This presents a "golden opportunity" to stockpile rock on high ground ("get everything we can get on the hill").

Chairman Hatch agreed, noting this falls under Commissioner Stephenson's Road Department committee assignment, and supported continuing the effort.

  - It was suggested that:
    - As crews dig along narrow roads, they can widen the road as they go, then pull and dress the road on the way back out.
    - Some earlier-started areas could now be reached again with the low water and should be completed.

**Board direction**

  - In response to, "What do you want to do?" Commissioner Stephenson stated he wanted to keep digging as long as conditions allow.
  - There was consensus from the Board to continue the rock excavation work under Commissioner Stephenson's committee direction.

## <u>TIM JOHNSON, SOLID WASTE DIRECTOR</u>

Not present.

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

### APPLICATIONS for SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS

20260610 A petition by JUAN & ELIZABETH LAZO requesting a variance for a reduction of side setbacks from 10' to 5' for the construction of new home to be granted, as provided in 4.7.7 RSF/MH subparagraph (2) of the Dixie County Land Development Regulations in accordance with section 12.3 VARIANCE PROCEDURES., in accordance with the petition dated 06/04/2026 to be located on the property as described as follows: Dixie County Parcel # 30-13-12-0000-3495-0000 58 SE 199 ST; .26. (COMMISSION DISTRICT 3 MARK HATCH) – No opposition - **LPA recommended approval 3-0**

- Mr. Wright explained that the applicants purchased a lot where the previous home had been destroyed. They initially planned to place an RV, but after learning RVs are no longer allowed in that manner, they elected to build a new home to use as a second residence.

- Public Comment: Chairman Hatch asked for opposition in the room or by phone; none was received.

**Commissioner Wood moved to approve the variance as recommended; motion seconded by Commissioner Stephenson.  Motion passed unanimously.**

Mr. Wright additionally informed the Board that the County has received its first Rebuild Florida application for a house replacement in the First District (not on the coastline), noting this program follows Elevate Florida and more applications may follow.

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

**Staffing and System Updates**

- Mr. Pendarvis thanked the County Manager and Board for the flexibility provided over the past month while attending to his father, who has now been moved to rehab.
- Mr. Pendarvis reported that due to the way the County network is designed, he can work remotely (e.g., from the hospital), but several recent incidents required **o**n-site presence, including:
    - A courthouse network outage caused by a failed UPS in the server room; staff member Nick assisted on site, and the UPS has since been replaced after a second failure.
    - Nighttime response to tower/radio issues following lightning events.
- Stated that the County's IT operations rely on a single person, which presents a significant operational and security risk if he is unavailable.
- Mr. Pendarvis requested Board consideration to hire a second IT position under him:
    - Noted he had budgeted for this position last year, but it was removed due to budget shortfalls.
    - Proposed a starting concept of approximately $40,000 salary (~$60,000 with benefits), ideally for a trainable, entry-level person, rather than a fully credentialed high-cost IT professional.
    - Explained that 80% of his current salary is funded by 911 funds and 20% from the General Fund; the new IT position would be General Fund, though he and the Clerk may be able to shift a small portion to 911 in the future.
- Mr. Pendarvis emphasized that an additional IT staff member would:
    - Improve continuity of operations and cybersecurity, and
    - Provide coverage during storms and emergencies, when he must physically travel between towers and critical sites.

**Board/Staff Discussion and Direction**

- County Attorney Watson strongly supported the request, citing the security risk of having only one person with deep access to a highly secured system.

- Commissioners acknowledged the budget constraints but agreed that additional IT support is needed.
- The Board directed Mr. Pendarvis and Finance Director Brenda Royal to work together on the budget to see how a second IT position can be funded and structured.
    - Ms. Royal confirmed she is comfortable working on this.
- Discussion included the possibility of identifying a trainable candidate (e.g., recent high school graduate with IT interest) and the importance of having backup knowledge in-house.
- Consensus: Proceed with budget planning and development for a second IT position and report back with a concrete proposal.

**Jail Network/Phone System Update**

- Mr. Pendarvis reported that the jail's internet service has now been installed.
- Mr. Pendarvis advised that the jail's phone system is scheduled to be ported on the 20th, after which the ongoing county phone issues associated with that transition should be resolved.

**<u>DARIAN BROWN, DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES</u>**

**Dixie County Emergency Services – Updates and Staffing/Funding Discussion**

Chief Brown thanked the Board for moving forward with fire assessment increases, noting rising costs (fire trucks now up to $1.2 million; neighboring counties granting large raises and hiring Dixie's staff).

- Firehouse Subs Grant Award
    - Announced award of a Firehouse Subs grant for $20,803.68 to purchase new lift bags and controllers for extrication/rescue, replacing equipment not updated since the early 2000s.
    - Credited Division Chief Jason Lemerman and Lt. Jonathan Waters for preparing the grant application.
- Gray Construction – Letter of Recommendation Request
    - Reported that Gray Construction requested a letter of recommendation from the County related to their work on current fire station projects, to support a bid in Levy County.
    - Deferred to the Board, noting any such letter should come from the Board, not from him. (Discussion only; no motion recorded in this segment.)
- Camp Amigo – Kubota Loan Request
    - Described Camp Amigo (Camp Anderson, July 20–24) for burn-injured children and requested permission to loan the County's Kubota for staff to shuttle children.
    - Confirmed only adult staff would operate the vehicle.

**Commissioner Osteen moved to approve loaning the Kubota. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Station Construction and Weather Update**

- Station 3 (First District):
  - Water storage tank installation being completed; once done and punch list items addressed, the building can be turned over and an open house scheduled.
- Station 6 (Horseshoe Beach):
  - Interior framing underway; exterior work and site/sidewalk prep in progress; project remains on schedule, with water system timing being the main remaining dependency.
- Reported two low-pressure systems (one in the Gulf, one in the Atlantic) being monitored, not expected to immediately threaten the County.

- Fire Chiefs Conference / Memorial
  - Reported on attending the Florida Fire Chiefs Conference with staff.
  - Shared that former employee Jimmy Golden was honored at the fallen members memorial service; his widow attended and expressed appreciation for the recognition.
- Personnel Update – Bambi (Anne Roberson)
  - Noted that staff member "Bambi" (battling breast cancer) has undergone treatment and was present at the meeting; expressed appreciation for her and her recovery.
- Staffing Crisis and Pay Discussion (EMS/Fire)
  - Reported a critical staffing shortage:
    - 9 positions vacant out of 39, including 8 paramedics.
    - Station 2 is closed except when partially staffed with part-time help.
  - Chief Brown emphasized that paramedics are essential for ALS transport; without them, ambulances become BLS "load and go" units (blood pressure and diesel only), and BLS-only operations would likely drive EMTs away as well.
  - The Chief noted neighboring counties are paying $7,000–$20,000 more per year for paramedics and implementing more favorable shift schedules (e.g., 24/72), drawing Dixie's trained staff away.
  - Chief Brown stated firmly that if nothing is done, the department will not be able to continue current service levels:
    - "If we don't do something today, this department is not going to continue to function."
    - Warned that trucks may have to be shut down and response capability reduced.
  - Budget/Revenue Context:

    - EMS collections so far this fiscal year are lower than projected (about $754,000 vs. a $1.4 million target), despite higher call volume; Chief and billing staff are analyzing causes.
    - Fuel costs and other operating costs are higher than budgeted.
    - Some savings exist in operating supplies and repairs/maintenance, and the planned re-chassis of a squad truck (≈$85,000) will not occur this year, leaving that capital allocation unused.
  - Immediate Pay Proposal (Paramedics Only):
    - Requested an immediate $1.50 per hour raise for paramedics plus a $2,000 signing bonus for new paramedic hires.
    - Characterized this as necessary to stop current staff from leaving and attract replacements; said he believes it can be covered this year from existing EMS budget line items and vacancies, but cannot guarantee perfect balance due to unknowns (fuel, collections).
    - Indicated EMT and other pay adjustments would still need to be addressed in October for the next budget year.

**Board Discussion:**

- Commissioners acknowledged the life-safety stakes and the risk of not having ambulances available.
- Concerns were raised about recurring costs: using one-time capital funds and vacancy savings to support permanent raises would create a structural deficit next year unless new recurring revenue is identified.
- A letter regarding potential federal/other EMS funding was referenced, and commissioners supported aggressively pursuing any external funding sources.
- Commissioner Hatch introduced the idea of contracting with a private EMS provider was briefly discussed as a "rock to look under;" Chief strongly cautioned against this option based on regional examples (quality of service, equipment conditions, and funding/coverage issues), but acknowledged it is ultimately a Board decision.
- Decision – Schedule Funding/Staffing Workshop
  - Recognizing the complexity and urgency, the Board agreed a dedicated workshop was needed to evaluate:
    - EMS and Fire staffing, pay, and service levels,
    - Funding options (assessments, millage, grants, possible structural changes), and
    - Alternatives including, but not limited to, any private-service models.

Motion/Direction:

  - Consensus to schedule a workshop on Tuesday at 5:00 p.m. (the date referenced in context as the following Tuesday) to discuss EMS/Fire funding and staffing in detail.
  - Staff were instructed to advertise the workshop accordingly.

- Department Name Alignment (Information Only)
    - Chief noted that the department is legally registered as "Dixie County Emergency Services", while most operations and external partners use "Dixie County Fire Rescue."

**Motion to schedule a Workshop to discuss EMS/Fire funding and staffing in detail made by Commissioner Stephenson. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Motion passed unanimously.**

The Board scheduled a workshop for July 21, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. to discuss EMS and Fire staffing, pay, and funding options, and directed staff to advertise the workshop accordingly.

**GAIL CARTER, INDIGENT CARE**

Nothing to present at this time.

**HOLLY HOUGHTON, COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT**

Not present.

**ANGIE CROWLEY, HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATOR**

Not present.

**JOHN JENKINS, COUNTY MANAGER**

1. Purchase – Flashboard risers (Weir Control) Board – Piedmont Plastics
    - Requested Board approval to purchase flashboard/knife board materials from Piedmont Plastics in the amount of $9,499.92, based on a quoted proposal.

**Motion by Commissioner Wood to approve the purchase. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Motion carried unanimously.**

2. Purchase – Rock for Airport Canal Bank Stabilization – Blue Rock (Sole Source)
    - Requested approval to purchase rock for Airport Canal bank stabilization from Blue Rock, identified as a sole-source provider, in the quoted amount.

**Motion by Commissioner Osteen to approve the purchase. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Motion carried unanimously.**

3. Purchase – Skid Steer Push Bar
    - Requested approval to purchase a skid steer push bar in the amount of $2,700, funded from stormwater tax proceeds.

**Motion by Commissioner Wood to approve the purchase. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Motion carried unanimously.**

4. Purchase – Skid Steer Grapple – Men's Industrial Welding
    - Requested approval to purchase a skid steer grapple from Men's Industrial Welding as the lowest quote, in the amount of $3,350, based on formal quotes.

**Motion by Commissioner Stephenson to approve the purchase. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Motion carried unanimously.**

5. SHIP – Emergency Repair Reimbursement (Jordan Hill)
    - Requested Board approval of SHIP emergency repair reimbursement for Jordan Hill in the amount of $15,867.13.

**Motion by Commissioner Osteen for repair reimbursement. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Motion carried unanimously.**

6. Airport – Backup Generator Work Order (Passero Associates)
    - Requested approval to execute Passero Associates, LLC Work Order 26-22 for the airport terminal backup generator in the amount of $30,500.

**Motion by Commissioner Wood to execute Work Order. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Motion carried unanimously.**

7. County Attorney Contract – Chana M. Watson, P.A.
    - Requested approval to execute the County Attorney contract with Chana M. Watson, P.A., for the term August 1, 2026, through July 31, 2027, at a base amount of $103,000 per year and $250/hour for additional services outside the listed scope.
    - It was noted on the record that the initial dates stated were incorrect and were corrected to reflect 2026–2027.

**Motion by Commissioner Osteen to execute County Attorney Watson Contract. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Motion carried unanimously.**

8. Airport Property – Randy King Mutual Termination and Release
    - Requested approval of a Mutual Termination and Release Agreement with Randy King for property located at the airport.

**Motion by Commissioner Osteen for the Randy King Termination and Release Agreement. Seconded by Commissioner Wood (clarified as a Board motion with consensus).**

- **Vote: Motion carried unanimously.**

9. Scrap Metal Services Agreement – WC Mills
    - Requested approval to execute an extension of the scrap metal services agreement between WC Mills and Dixie County, for the term beginning September 25, 2026, through September 25, 2027, as a renewal/extension of the existing contract.
    - Commissioner Stephenson asked if this had been re-bid; staff confirmed it is a renewable extended contract, not a new bid.

**Motion by Commissioner Osteen to approve WC Mills Scrap Metal Agreement. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Motion carried unanimously.**

10. Professional Services Agreement – Ovid Solutions, LLC
    - Requested approval of the Ovid Solutions, LLC Professional Services Agreement through December 31, 2028, in the total not-to-exceed amount

of $76,250, with rates of $175/hour for grant proposal development as needed and $200/hour for grant administration as needed.

**Motion by Commissioner Osteen for the Ovid Solutions Agreement. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Motion carried unanimously.**

11. Employee Events – Retirement and Health Screening
    - Announced retirement reception for Ms. Holly Houghton to be held at 5:00 p.m. on Monday, July 27, 2026, at the library.
    - Announced employee health screening scheduled for August 5, 2026, 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. at Trail.
        - Chairman Hatch noted that last time the County narrowly missed the participation target, which affects health insurance costs, and emphasized the importance of participation.
        - The Board agreed that health screening participation should be mandatory for employees.

**Motion by Commissioner Stephenson to make participation in the August 5, 2026, employee health screening mandatory for all County employees. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Vote: Motion carried unanimously.**

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

**Litigation/Mediation Update**

Attorney Watson Reported that she and staff are working with Building Official Leon Wright and Mr. Brandon Stubbs on mediation regarding the land use/zoning dispute involving an RV park.

- Anticipated that by the next Board meeting they should have a confirmed mediation date, and she will keep the Board informed.
- Advised that the County has recently received several pre-suit letters; these matters are in the pre-litigation stage and will be addressed as they develop.
- Noted that additional written information was distributed to the Board regarding these matters.
- No Board action was requested at this time.

<u>**BARBIE HIGGINBOTHAM, CLERK OF COURT**</u>

**Clerk/Finance – Millage Rates and Financial Software Upgrade**

**Speaker:** Brenda Royal – Director of Finance

1. **Proposed Millage Rates (TRIM – Maximum Rates)**
    - Presented suggested **maximum millage rates** for FY 2026–2027, explaining that these are set now for TRIM notice purposes and may be **reduced later**, but **cannot be increased** after adoption.
    - Distributed worksheets showing **rollback rates vs. maximum allowable rates** for:

        - Board General Fund
        - EMS
        - Library and Recreation
    - **Board General Fund Millage:**
        - Recommended setting the **maximum at 10.0000 mills**.

**Commissioner Stephenson moved approval. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Motion carried unanimously.**

- **EMS Millage:**
    - Recommended setting the EMS millage at 3.2000 mill**s** at this time, with the understanding it may be revisited during the budget process.

**Commissioner Osteen moved approval. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Motion carried unanimously.**

- **Library/Recreation Millage:**
    - Recommended setting the maximum at 0.5000 mills for Library/Recreation.

**Commissioner Stephenson moved approval. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Motion carried unanimously.**

2. **Financial Software Replacement – Funding Plan**
    - Reported that the Clerk's Office has been exploring replacement of the current Munis financial software (in use since early 2000s) with a new, modern system also used by other counties and favored by the County's new auditors.
    - Explained that there is a significant one-time cost associated with the new system, but the Clerk's staff have been working diligently for several years to reconcile and clean up legacy clerk accounts (tax deed, bond, registry, etc.) and identify funds properly due to the Board.
    - Stated they are now confident there is a substantial amount of clerk fee revenue that can be legally transferred to the Board, and that this amount should be sufficient to cover the entire cost of the new finance system.
    - Requested that, once the check is presented, the Board earmark those funds specifically for the financial software upgrade.
    - Board Direction:
        - The Board expressed strong support for upgrading the system.

Chairman Hatch called for a motion to dedicate the forthcoming transfer from clerk accounts to fund the new financial software system.

**Commissioner Stephenson moved approval. Seconded by Commissioner (consensus on the record). Motion carried unanimously.**

- Mrs. Higginbotham confirmed they are piggybacking off other counties' bids for procurement of the software and will coordinate closely with the County Attorney and IT on implementation and cybersecurity.

## COUNTY COMMISSION ITEMS

- **Commissioner Wood** – No additional comments.
- **Commissioner Stephenson** – No additional comments.
- **Commissioner Osteen:**
  - Welcomed Bambi (Anne Roberson), noting it was good to see her present and encouraging her to "never stop fighting."
- **Chairman Hatch** provided a brief update on Mr. Dan Ellison, stating he has spoken with him several times, hopes he will be back on his feet and back in the field soon, and has offered assistance as needed.
  - Reflected on prior budget discussions, mentioning the Board had previously talked about having to "live on ramen noodles" and "eat them," and stated that without the budget decisions made last year, the County would have struggled to get by.
  - Thanked the commissioners for:
    - Their work on committee assignments and agreed to hold the workshop related to his committee area.
    - Again, expressed that it was great to see Bambi in attendance.

**Public Comments and Concerns**

- Chairman Hatch opened the floor for Public Comments and Concerns.
- Commissioner Stephenson briefly commented that he managed to get through the fireworks this year without getting hurt and joked that he had been "fired" and not allowed to handle them.
- No additional public comments were offered.

## ADJOURN

- **Motion to Adjourn by: Commissioner Osteen**
- **Seconded by: Commissioner Stephenson**
- **Motion carried unanimously. 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.**