Regular Meeting

Commission Board Room
Dixie County Courthouse
214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628
August 06, 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 - Not present

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

07/16/2026 Regular BOCC Minutes and 07/21/2026 Emergency Workshop Paramedic Funding and Raises Minutes

Motion to approve the 07/16/2026 BOCC Regular Meeting Minutes made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Wood.
Motion to approve the 07/16 /2026 BOCC Emergency Workshop Minutes made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson.
Board approved.

VOUCHER APPROVAL

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

CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS/CITY OFFICIALS

Supervisor of Elections Darbi Chaires addressed the Board and provided election reminders and statistics:

- Election Day: August 18.
- Vote-by-Mail:
    - Today is the last day to request a ballot to be mailed.
    - Tomorrow is the last day to pick up a ballot at the Elections Office without an emergency.
- Early Voting:
    - Held at the Elections Office from Saturday through Saturday, August 15.
    - Hours: 8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. daily, except Sunday 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
- Voter Identification: Voters must bring a photo ID with signature; a Florida driver license or Florida ID card is preferred. A list of acceptable IDs is available on the Supervisor of Elections website.
- Turnout History and Goal:
    - Since 2008, primary turnout has averaged 36.11%, versus 65% for general elections.
    - The turnout goal for this primary is 45%.
- Local Races:
    - Emphasized that local elections have an immediate impact on residents because local boards and officials make decisions affecting all Dixie County voters.
    - Noted that both local races on this ballot will be decided in the primary; no candidates will move on to the November general election. The highest vote-getter will be elected.
- Current Turnout and Vote-by-Mail:
    - As of today, turnout is 4.23%, entirely from returned vote-by-mail ballots.
    - Approximately 1,100 vote-by-mail ballots have been mailed; 421 have been returned.
    - Vote-by-mail ballots must be received by the Elections Office by 7:00 p.m. on Election Day to be counted.

At Chairman Hatch's request, Mrs. Chaires also reminded the public of recent precinct changes:

- Precinct 4 – Old Town:
    - Former location: Old Town Elementary School.

    - New location: Suwannee River Baptist Church, Old Town, just off U.S. 19 next to the Dollar General Store.
    - An elections worker will be stationed at the former school site on Election Day to redirect any voters who arrive there, and signs will be posted throughout the county with the updated information and early-voting reminders.
- It was further noted that Suwannee voting will be held at the fire station.
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Horseshoe Beach Mayor Jeff Williams addressed the Board:

- Mayor Williams thanked the Board for continued partnership and support through three recent hurricanes.
- Provided history of Horseshoe Beach Town Hall:
    - 2016: Hurricane Hermine caused ~4.5 ft of water inside town hall.
    - 2023: Hurricane Idalia caused just under 7 ft of water, destroying the interior.
    - Rebuilt structure was then damaged by Hurricane Debbie (2 ft of water) and ultimately destroyed/washed away by Hurricane Helene.
- Explained that town hall is more than a meeting room; it houses:
    - Maintenance operations
    - Utility operations and water plant billing
    - Compliance/permits and other administrative functions
- Reported that, with support from Senator Simon, Representative Shoaf, and Congresswoman Cammack, the Town obtained:
    - Funding for a feasibility study and full engineering for a new town hall (early 2025).
    - Current-year funding for full Town Hall construction.
- Feasibility study evaluated two sites:
    1. Existing town hall site, severe flood exposure.
    2. Current fire station site, the only parcel in town not in a flood zone.
- Due to the town's average age 68.5 years and accessibility issues with an elevated building, the study recommended the fire station site.
- Request to County: Donation of the county-owned parcel adjacent to the fire station (where the post office sits) so the town can construct the new town hall on that combined footprint.

Board discussion included:

- Post Office Future & Accessibility
    - Mayor Williams stated the post office has multiple options:
        - Possible inclusion within the new town hall building; or
        - Refurbishment and "facelift" of existing structure to match town hall aesthetics.
    - Stressed that any final option depends on whether the county conveys the land.

    - If land is not obtained, the town will likely have to return the construction funding, as no viable build site exists that meets FEMA requirements and accessibility needs.
    - Mayor Williams confirmed the post office lobby and boxes would be accessible 24/7, and conceptual plans include 24/7-accessible handicap restrooms, separated from operational areas.
- Building Size & FEMA Requirements
    - Commissioner Storey clarified rumors of an 8,000 sq. ft. building; Mayor confirmed:
        - Old town hall: approx. 2,400 sq. ft.
        - Proposed new town hall: approx. 2,800 sq. ft., largely to provide adequately sized restrooms.
    - FEMA requirements would force any new building at the original site to be elevated ~11 ft, with ramps and fire escape routes, plus parking, which the site cannot accommodate without losing eligibility for FEMA funds.
- Property Swap Concept
    - Commissioner Storey proposed exploring a property swap:
        - Town would convey its former town hall lot (on the coast) to the County.
        - County would convey the post office parcel next to the fire station to the Town.
        - County could then sell the former town hall parcel and use proceeds to purchase additional land near county boat ramps for parking, addressing long-standing parking shortages.
    - Mayor Williams indicated he could not commit on behalf of the council but would bring the swap concept to the Town Council for consideration.
    - Mayor also described their concept for the former town hall site:
        - A non-insurable, outdoor "museum" (e.g., fountain, placards honoring shrimping/fishing history), not an enclosed building, to comply with flood regulations.
- Concerns Raised
    - Commissioner Stephenson expressed concern about placing any "museum" in a flood-prone zone if it contained documents or irreplaceable materials; Mayor Williams clarified it would be open-air with no enclosed archives.
    - Commissioners reported hearing feedback from some Horseshoe Beach residents:
        - Opposition to combining city hall and post office in one structure.
        - Concerns that the proposal felt "pushed" on residents.
    - Mayor Williams emphasized the Town must balance funding limitations and strict post office construction standards (which can significantly increase square-foot costs).

- Board Direction
    - Chairman Hatch asked when the Town Council meets; Mayor Williams replied they meet that night.
    - Board requested that the Town Council:
        - Discuss the land conveyance and property swap options.
        - Return to the Board's next regular meeting with a recommendation.

A motion was initially made by Commissioner Osteen to deny the land donation.

- **Motion was seconded by Commissioner Stephenson, triggering discussion.**
- **After discussion and introduction of the property-swap concept, Commissioner Stephenson withdrew his second, leaving the motion without a second.**
- **Motion to deny failed for lack of a second.**

    - Board invited the Town to be placed on the next agenda (under Constitutional Officers and City Officials) to provide an update and formal proposal.
- Fire Station / Interlocal Agreement
    - Mayor Williams requested:
        - Continued use of the existing in-town fire station by the Town's volunteer fire department, recognizing that the new county fire station located ~1 mile outside town is intended for future staffing.
        - When the new station becomes fully manned, the Town's volunteer fire department operations at the old station would likely wind down.
    - Chair Hatch summarized that the original 8,000–9,000 sq. ft. concept had envisioned combining town hall and fire station functions on one hilltop site; the construction of the new county fire station outside of town allowed the town hall footprint to be reduced.
    - Interlocal Agreement Amendment:
        - Board discussed updating the interlocal agreement to allow the Town to utilize the new county fire station building for its volunteer fire department until such time as the station is manned by county personnel.

Motion by Commissioner Osteen to amend the interlocal agreement to allow Horseshoe Beach to use the new station in this manner. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Motion carried unanimously.

- Meeting reminder: Board confirmed a joint City–County workshop is scheduled Monday at 6:00 p.m. in the boardroom.

Public Comment – Property Rebuild and FEMA (Horseshoe Beach)

- Commissioner Stephenson raised a personal concern regarding difficulties in obtaining FEMA assistance to rebuild his property due to its V-zone designation, noting that his elevation is similar to others but he is closer to the water.

- Mayor Williams advised that Jason Beniot as a key contact for FEMA and grant guidance is the appropriate person to assist with such issues and expressed a desire for legal, compliant rebuilding that returns properties to the tax roll.
- Commissioner Stephenson noted he had previously spoken with Mr. Benoit without resolution but would continue trying.

MIKEALA PARSONS AND ROSE TABER – MERIDIAN TABLE SET-UP

Meridian Healthcare – Behavioral Health & Recovery Services Presentation
Presenters:

- Rose Taber introduced Meridian Healthcare and distributed a PowerPoint overview.
- Noted Meridian serves multiple counties from Jasper to Cedar Key, Live Oak, and White Springs, and is often known locally as "the Baker Act people," but provides much broader behavioral health and recovery services.
- Rose and Michaela are peer specialists, meaning they are themselves in some form of recovery/wellness and help connect others to services.

Local Presence & Program Focus

- Meridian is now stationed in Dixie County (Cross City).
- Their program is an entry / engagement program:
    - Works with hospitals, paramedics, and community paramedics to identify people needing treatment.
    - Seeks permission to attend injunction court and felony court, setting up a non-law-enforcement "friendly face" table to:
        - Offer information, connect individuals to services, and help them engage voluntarily in treatment.

Services and Populations Served

- Meridian serves a wide variety of clients, including:
    - Uninsured individuals and those with limited income, people experiencing homelessness (staff will meet people "in the woods"),
    - Adults and youth (children are referred to specialized children's programs).
- Key services mentioned:
    - Mental health and substance use counseling.
    - 24/7 detox in Gainesville:
  - Individuals struggling with substance abuse can be evaluated any time of day or night.
  - Aim to get people into residential treatment within ~30 days, or sooner if beds are available.
    - Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder and alcoholism, often within one week.
    - Housing support:
        - PATH program (housing help with deposits/security if there is some income).
        - Coordination with SHIP and Suwannee Valley Economic Council programs.

        - Assistance with:
            - Social Security, disability, and other benefits.
            - Food, clothing, and basic needs (e.g., picking up food, finding clothing).
        - Specialized units/programs:
            - Residential treatment facilities,
            - A children's unit for youth with mental health or substance use needs,
            - Numerous programs (they referenced "about 100 programs" overall).

Access, Cost, and Insurance

- Sliding-fee scale similar to a community clinic:
    - Fees depend on income (e.g., visits may be as low as $1–$3).
    - If someone is homeless with no income, Meridian will still see them and will not charge immediately.
- Insurance:
    - They serve most insurances; the greatest challenge is full Medicare for inpatient services.
    - Their peer-support/entry program services are 100% free to clients, funded through a core program, meaning:
        - Calls to their 24/7 peer line do not generate a charge to the caller.

Confidentiality / HIPAA and Coordination

- Confirmed they are fully HIPAA-compliant; who seeks services is not disclosed without proper authorization.
- Already have MOUs with hospitals and community paramedics in other counties; are willing to:
    - Develop similar memoranda of understanding with Dixie County entities (hospitals, paramedics, etc.).
    - Coordinate at the vice-president/leadership level to ensure no HIPAA issues.

Q&A – Detox Timing and Crisis Access

- HR Director Angie Crowley asked about situations requiring detox within 24 hours:

Meridian responded:

- Their Gainesville crisis unit and detox are open 24/7.
- Individuals can present at any time and will be evaluated immediately.
- Admission is a medical decision by the physician, so placement cannot be guaranteed, but no one is turned away without evaluation.
- If needed, clients may first be seen at the Lake City crisis unit (which does not have detox) and then transferred to Gainesville for detox.

- Clarified that detox is generally the quickest access point; if Meridian's own beds are full, they work with Phoenix House and other providers that have beds.

Follow-Up and Contact

- Meridian requested:

        - Permission to be present during court days (injunction and felony) to offer on-site support and referrals.
- The Board:
    - Expressed appreciation for the services and indicated interest in having Meridian more involved.
    - Chairman Hatch directed Meridian to:
        - Coordinate continued efforts through County Manager John Jenkins.
        - Obtain his contact email for ongoing communication.
- County Manager John Jenkins agreed to coordinate with Meridian and provide the appropriate County contact information.

The Board thanked Rose Tabor and Michaela Parson for their presentation and for the services Meridian provides to Dixie County residents.

<u>BRAD HOARD AND ANDREW RAINS – INSURANCE UPDATES</u>

Daybright Financial / Blue Cross Blue Shield – Health Insurance and FSA Issues
Brad Hoard – Daybright Financial (with representatives from Blue Cross Blue Shield) presented and discussed the County's health plan:
Claims Experience and Renewal (context to ongoing discussion)

- Reported recent high claims experience, with a current loss ratio around 102% (claims paid exceed premiums paid).
- Initial Blue Cross renewal indication was just over 18%, but after negotiation the increase was reduced to slightly over 8%.

FSA Card Problems and Possible Return to HSA

- The Board revisited prior concerns with the flexible spending account (FSA) cards:
    - Many employees report:
        - Cards not working at point of sale.
        - Multiple requests for itemized receipts and procedure codes.
        - Having to make extra trips or phone calls during working hours to obtain documentation.
    - Finance data indicates about $85,000–$90,000 in FSA funds went unused, suggesting employees are not able to effectively access the benefit.
- Commissioners' comments:
    - Commissioner Storey described the documentation process as excessive, noting employees:
        - Use the card, then must submit receipts, then are told to obtain additional detailed documentation (procedure codes, etc.).
        - Often can't handle this outside work hours, which hurts productivity and frustrates employees.

    - Commissioner Stephenson noted the program was intended to ensure the $1,000 benefit went to medical care only, not personal expenses, but believes the current implementation is a disservice to employees.
- Mr. Hoard explained:
    - IRS rules on what is eligible are the same for FSA and HSA; the difference is administration:
        - With an FSA, a third-party administrator and the employer must validate each expense (hence itemized bills, procedure codes, etc.).
        - With an HSA, the employee is responsible for compliance with IRS rules; the County is not in the middle of substantiating each transaction.
    - Returning to an HSA would significantly reduce administrative burden on:
        - The Finance Office (fewer weekly reports and allocations).
        - Employees and department heads (fewer documentation disputes).
- Chairman Hatch:
    - Emphasized he does not support simply cutting $1,000 checks to employees; he wants a mechanism ensuring funds are used for health care.
    - Noted the current FSA process is consuming work time and hurting morale, and said employees “deserve better than that.”
    - Stated that the Board will consider moving back to an HSA and explore other options at an upcoming committee assignment workshop.
- Workshop Scheduled:
    - The Board confirmed a committee assignment workshop for August 20 at 4:00 p.m., where:
        - FSA vs. HSA options, card problems and related health benefit structures will be discussed in detail.
    - Mr. Hoard agreed to attend this workshop.

PPO / Copay Plan Availability

- In response to questions from Chairman Hatch and others:
    - Mr. Hoard confirmed a PPO/copay plan (with office visit copays rather than only a high deductible) was added last year when the County moved from HSA to FSA.
    - The plan is currently available to employees, but no one enrolled in it during the last open enrolment, likely due to lack of awareness and cost tradeoffs.
    - Explained that:
        - Adding copays increases plan cost, so deductibles and/or premiums are higher than the base high-deductible plan.
        - If the County moves back to a funded HSA, that traditional copay plan could not be paired with the HSA.

Mr. Hoard agreed to clearly explain plan options and tradeoffs at open enrollment.

Open Enrollment Timing

- Brad requested that open enrollment be held the last week of August (instead of September), as the County did last year:
    - This gives the Clerk's Office more time to:
        - Set up payroll deductions correctly.
        - Avoid timing conflicts with hurricane season.
    - He proposed to be onsite in Dixie County for three days (Tuesday–Thursday) during that last week of August to assist employees.

Additional Commissioner Comments

- Commissioner Stephenson:
    - Apologized for missing the previous day's wellness event due to a household issue.
    - Reported he has personally carried Blue Cross Blue Shield coverage since the 1990s as a self-employed individual and now pays about $4,000 per month, reinforcing how expensive private coverage is compared to the County's group rates.
    - Requested to speak with Brad about possible alternatives for his personal coverage; Brad noted that County plan rates are materially lower than individual market rates.

Wellness Funds Request

- Mr. Hoard informed the Board he has requested up to $10,000 in wellness funds from Blue Cross to:
    - Purchase equipment/services for a County-run wellness fair,
    - Which would allow:
        - Shift workers (EMS, jail, night staff) to participate even if they cannot attend the standard wellness day.
- He expects an answer on this wellness-fund request by the end of next week, and before the August 20 workshop.

The Board thanked Brad and the Blue Cross representatives for their continued work and confirmed that health insurance structure and wellness initiatives will be key topics at the August 20 workshop.

<u>KATRINA VANAERNAM, DIXIE COUNTY ANTI-DRUG COALITION</u>

Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition – Fentanyl Awareness

Sheila Frierson, Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition, addressed the Board:

- Announced that August 21 is the coalition's annual Fentanyl Awareness Educational Day.
- Reported that fentanyl remains the leading cause of overdose deaths.
- Mrs. Frierson stated the coalition:
    - Is conducting a county-wide overdose awareness campaign.

    - Has emergency Narcan kits available for businesses and community locations and is continuing distribution (noted she has kits reserved for specific local businesses/contacts).
- Requested continued community partnership and participation in fentanyl awareness activities.

The Board thanked Ms. Frierson for her ongoing work and support in overdose prevention.

NIKIE WAITS – ROAD 2 REDEMPTION

Overdose Awareness – August

- Noted that August is National Overdose Awareness Month:
    - Emphasized three goals:
        1. Remember those lost to overdose.
        2. Support grieving families.
        3. Remind those still struggling that there is hope.
- Reported that overdose awareness displays have begun going up around the community.
- Requested that local businesses, churches, and residents "light up purple" (lights/decoration) during August to:
    - Show support for families.
    - Honor those lost to overdose.
    - Visibly communicate that "their lives still matter."

National Recovery Month – September Event

- Noted that September is National Recovery Month; this year's theme is: "Lighting the Way Home – Making Waves of Hope."
- Requested Board support and permission to hold the annual community recovery event:
    - Proposed Date: Saturday, September 12
    - Time: 5:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
    - Proposed Location: Wanda Wheeler Park (city park)
- Explained the purpose of the event:
    - To celebrate recovery, reduce stigma, and connect families and individuals to local resources.
    - To show people in early recovery they are not alone, by having county commissioners, law enforcement, first responders, judges, pastors, and community leaders present and visible in support.
    - Stated that the presence of local leaders sends a powerful message: *"We see you, we believe in you, your journey matters."*
- Chairman Hatch clarified:
    - Wanda Wheeler Park is under City of Cross City authority, and the County cannot directly grant park use.
    - The Board expressed support for the event and encouraged Nikki to:

        - Request formal permission from the City Council, and
        - Consider the Board and County as supportive attendees/partners once city approval is obtained.

Road to Redemption Milestones

- Reported that Road to Redemption will mark one year as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in September.
- Announced a new partnership with the juvenile justice system:
    - The organization has received its first court-ordered juvenile referral into its Accountability and Restoration Program.
    - Additional juvenile referrals are already being discussed.
    - Program components include:
        - Accountability and restoration work.
        - Family support.
        - Positive community connections and mentorship.

Local Recovery Outcomes

- Shared that Road to Redemption has been hosting weekly recovery support meetings since 2019 at a local church.
- Reported active participants with recovery milestones ranging from:
    - A few days and 30/60/90 days up to
    - 1 year, 2 years, 4 years, and more than 9 years sober.
- Shared a representative success story:
    - A woman once trapped in severe alcoholism and despair now has over 9 years in recovery,
        - Sponsors other women,
        - Serves on Road to Redemption's Board of Directors,
        - Actively serves her church and community.
    - Nikki emphasized that such transformation was made possible by support, not judgment, and by a community willing to "fight for" individuals others had given up on.

Funding and Grant Support

- Identified sustainable funding as Road to Redemption's greatest current challenge:
    - Organization has operated its first year without grant funding, relying on volunteers and donations.
    - Demand is increasing (particularly after the juvenile program launch), and capacity is strained.
- Requested help identifying:
    - Grant opportunities, and
    - A person or partner who can assist with writing and managing grant applications, as the current workload of direct service plus complex grant systems is unsustainable for existing staff.

- Reiterated that her primary mission is helping individuals in front of her, which can conflict with the time-consuming nature of grant processes.

Detox and Treatment Access

- Added that Road to Redemption regularly helps arrange same-day or rapid access to detox:
    - When someone calls ready for help, they often cannot safely wait 24 hours or longer.
    - Nikki stated she will work to find a detox bed within a few hours when contacted, using multiple regional resources.

Board and Audience Response

- Several Board members publicly thanked Nikki and praised the impact of Road to Redemption on the local recovery community.
- Clerk of the Court Barbie Higginbotham:
    - Commended Nikki for how far she has come personally and described her as an "amazing asset" to the community.
- An audience member (noted as having a nonprofit that writes grants) invited Nikki to "come see me" to discuss grant-writing assistance and potential partnership.
- Nikki presented the Board with a certificate of gratitude recognizing the Board's continued support of the recovery community and the forthcoming placement of Road to Redemption in the old EMS building, thanking the Board for helping demonstrate that "recovery is possible."

<u>KAY MCCALLISTER, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL</u>

Nothing to present at this time.

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

Economic Development – McGriff Pass, NFEDP, and Chamber Update

McGriff Pass Project

- Updated the Board on progress for the McGriff Pass (Suwannee area) project:
    - Confirmed the County has been awarded $500,000 in funding from Florida Commerce for engineering, design, and permitting.
    - Locklear & Associates (John Locklear) will serve as project engineer and work directly with Florida Commerce.
- Emphasized the importance of the project for:
    - Dixie County,
    - The Town of Suwannee,
    - The broader tri-county region, and
    - Future commerce and economic development.
- Stated that she is a "timeline-driven" person and:

    - Hopes to move as quickly as possible through engineering and permitting, ideally seeking to have major steps completed before the November elections.
    - Noted that Congresswoman Kat Cammack has visited the area (around July 6–7), seen the pass in person, and verbally committed that funding opportunities are available if the County can move the project forward to readiness.
- Chair Hatch and Mrs. VanAernam noted strong support from:
    - Congresswoman Kat Cammack,
    - Senator Simon,
    - Representative Shoaf,
    - As well as local leaders including Chairman Hatch and Bill Lee among others.

North Florida Economic Development Partnership (NFEDP) Meeting

- Reported that Dixie County will again host the North Florida Economic Development Partnership (NFEDP) Board meeting:
    - Date: Friday, October 2
    - Time: 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
    - Location: Camp Anderson in Dixie County.
- NFEDP:
    - Represents a 15-county regional partnership,
    - The meeting typically draws about 100 attendees, including economic development professionals and regional partners.
- Sponsorship / Costs:
    - Central Florida Electric Cooperative has agreed to sponsor breakfast (approx. $1,200; about $12/person).
    - Lunch (catered by Camp Anderson, approx. $15/person, ~100 attendees) is estimated at $1,500.
    - Ms. VanAernam requested that Dixie County and the City of Cross City jointly sponsor lunch.
- Board Actions:

Motion by Commissioner Storey for the County to pay half of the $1,500 lunch cost ($750), with the expectation that the City will pay the other half. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Motion carried unanimously.

1. The Board then considered the contingency that the City might not participate:

Motion by Commissioner Storey for the County to fund the full $1,500 lunch cost if the City declines to participate. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Motion carried unanimously.

- Mrs. VanAernam stated she will:
    - Request to be placed on the City Council agenda for Monday night,
    - Ask the City to join the County in co-sponsoring lunch.
    - Noted that Cross City is also a member of NFEDP, and she expects city support.

Chamber of Commerce / Revitalization Speaker

- Mrs. VanAernam reminded the Board:

    - The next Chamber of Commerce meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 13, at the Women's Club in Cross City, at 12:00 p.m.
    - The Rotary Club will join this meeting.
    - Featured speaker: Shelly Phelps, a revitalization specialist, who will discuss:
        - Community revitalization strategies,
        - How improved aesthetics and environment can drive commerce and economic development by attracting people who want to live and invest in the area.
- Lunch will be provided; Mrs. VanAernam:
    - Encouraged all Commissioners and attendees to come,
    - Noted Board members do not need to pay for lunch at this Chamber meeting.

The Board thanked Mrs. VanAernam for the updates and confirmed support for the NFEDP event and upcoming Chamber meeting.

SCOTT NIOLET – SAVINACIOUS

Disaster Recovery / FEMA Funding and General Fund Reconciliation

- Mr. Niolet has been working with Finance Director Brenda Royal, the Clerk's staff, and County administration to:
    - Track all storm-related revenues and expenditures by Project Worksheet (PW).
    - Identify PWs where there may be shortfalls and additional funding can be requested.
    - Separate disaster recovery funds from normal operating funds in the County budget.
- Noted that:
    - This reconciliation will show which disaster projects and funds owe money back to the General Fund,
    - And which funds still have available balances.

State Match Waiver – Hurricanes Debbie & Helene

- Mr. Niolet reported that the Governor's Office contacted him regarding the County's request for a local match waiver for Hurricanes Debbie and Helene:
    - The Governor's Office requested additional information, which has been provided.
    - If approved, the State would pay the 12.5% local match on all eligible PWs for those storms, rather than the County's General Fund.

General Fund Reimbursements

- Chairman Hatch explained:
    - Many disaster projects were initially funded out of the General Fund.
    - As reimbursements from FEMA and the State are finalized and properly coded, those funds should be returned to the General Fund.

    - Early work with Scott and Finance has already identified around $750,000–$800,000 that should be repaid to the General Fund, with more expected as reconciliation continues.
- Mr. Niolet and Chairman Hatch stated:
    - A consolidated spreadsheet will be prepared, showing:
        - Each project/fund,
        - How much it owes (or is owed), and
        - How these transfers will affect the General Fund.
    - This information will be presented at the August 20 committee assignment workshop so the Board can see a clear picture of storm-related cash flows.

<u>GREG BAILEY, NORTH FLORIDA PROFESSIONAL SERVICES</u>

Capital Projects Update – Fire Stations, Evidence Building, Horseshoe Working Waterfront

Kellan Bailey reported on ongoing construction projects:

Fire Station No. 3

- A substantial completion walkthrough with County staff was held on Monday.
- A follow-up walkthrough with the design team is scheduled for this afternoon.
- Following that visit, a punch list will be developed for the contractor.
- Overall, the station is in good shape, with remaining needs limited mainly to:
    - Touch-up work,
    - Cleaning, and
    - Minor material/finish items.

Fire Station No. 6

- Interior finishes and site work are still in progress.
- The project is currently scheduled for substantial completion in early September, approximately one month away.

Sheriff's Evidence Building

- Secondary grouting of the foundation system was scheduled to be completed yesterday.
- Contractor has experienced some issues with clogs but believes the work will still be finished this week.
- Once grouting is complete, the engineer will:
    - Inspect and certify the foundation repair,
    - Allowing the project to move forward.

Horseshoe Beach Working Waterfront

- Kellan Bailey will coordinate a meeting next week with County Manager John Jenkins and Assistant County Manager Roy Bass to address DEP stormwater retention requirements for the waterfront project.
- DEP is now requiring on-site stormwater retention, so:
    - The team will adjust the site plan accordingly,

- Then submit the updated plans to DEP in order to obtain required permits and be ready to advertise the project for construction.

The Board thanked Mr. Bailey for the update; no formal action was taken on this item.

<u>JOHN LOCKLEAR, LOCKLEAR AND ASSOCIATES</u>

McGriff Pass – Engineering / Permitting Contract Assignment

- Reported that dredging in Horseshoe Beach and Suwannee is proceeding on schedule, with no significant issues to report.
- Regarding McGriff Pass, he noted:
    - Vibracore testing is scheduled to begin next week.
    - A bathymetric survey is scheduled for the third week of the month and is expected to be completed by month's end.
    - His firm has initiated contact with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and DEP to set up pre-application meetings, with the goal of streamlining the permitting process.

Board Action – Use of Existing Engineering Contract

- Chairman Hatch explained that the County has received a $500,000 grant from Florida Commerce for McGriff Pass engineering, design, and permitting and:
    - Recommended assigning this work to Lockler & Associates under the County's existing service contract, with all invoices to be billed directly to the State in accordance with the grant terms.
- Attorney Watson confirmed that this approach is permissible under the existing service agreement with Lockler.

Motion by Commissioner Osteen to utilize the existing contract with Lockler & Associates for the McGriff Pass engineering/design/permitting work funded by the $500,000 State grant, with invoices submitted to the State as required by the grant. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Motion carried unanimously.

- Mr. Locklear thanked the Board, noting that with this action he is no longer at financial risk for preliminary work already underway and can continue project activities.

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

Not present.

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

Not present.

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

There will be a code enforcement hearing in the afternoon with:

- 6 new cases, and 5 returning cases from the prior docket, for a total of 11 cases to be heard.

- The Board thanked Mr. Freeman for his ongoing work on code enforcement.

MICHAEL GAINEY, COUNTY ROAD SUPERINTENDENT

Mr. Gainey and Commissioner Osteen visited a rock crusher with the County's new mechanic, Zach:

  - Zach believes the crusher can be repaired without excessive cost, likely needing only a couple of bearings and related parts.
  - However, they do not have a parts manual, which is needed to identify and correctly install all components.
- Commissioner Osteen added:
  - A company has already torn down the shaft and taken measurements to identify the proper bearings.
  - This will allow the County to source the correct bearings quickly in the future if replacements are needed again.
- Commissioner Stephenson:
  - Offered to provide an industrial supply catalog covering pillow-block bearings and large sheaves, noting that similar bearings that cost about $600 locally can often be sourced for around $56 through his supplier.
  - Committed to getting that book to the Road Department.

The Board thanked Mr. Gainey and Commissioners Osteen and Stephenson for their efforts to repair the crusher cost-effectively.

TIM JOHNSON, SOLID WASTE DIRECTOR

Not present.

LEON WRIGHT, BUILDING AND ZONING OFFICIAL

Nothing to present at this time.

SCOTTY PENDARVIS, CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

IT / Technology Department – Staffing Need

When asked if there were any items for **Scotty** (IT/technology), staff reported he was absent due to caring for his mother.

- Clerk of Court Barbie Higginbotham spoke on his behalf, noting:
  - Mr. Pendarvis has repeatedly requested additional help in his department.
  - Given his extensive institutional knowledge, the County should have another employee cross-trained as backup in case something happens to him or he leaves.

    - Requested that the Board seriously consider adding a position in IT/technology so he can train a successor/backup.
- Finance Director Brenda Royal explained:
    - There is not yet a specific line item in the General Fund budget for an additional IT salary.
    - Staff are attempting to work it into payroll as part of the ongoing budget process.
- Assistant County Manager Roy Bass stated:
    - He has already included an additional IT position in the payroll worksheet submitted to Finance, and is hopeful it can be funded in the upcoming budget.

The Board acknowledged the need for backup in IT and indicated it will be considered during budget development.

DARIAN BROWN, DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Fire / EMS – Appreciation and Water Supply Concern

Fire Chief Darian Brown (County Fire/EMS) briefly addressed the Board:

- Commissioner Storey thanked Chief Brown and his crews for their extensive work at a recent mill fire, noting the significant time and effort involved and expressing hope that no firefighters were injured.
- Chief Brown responded by raising a concern about water supply for mill fires:
    - Stated that if the City ever has an opportunity to increase the water line size serving the mill (currently a 6-inch line), it should be upgraded to a 12-inch or 14-inch line.
    - Emphasized that a larger line is needed to provide adequate water flow for large industrial fires.

The Board thanked Chief Brown and his staff for their service and noted the water-supply concern for future coordination with the City.

GAIL CARTER, INDIGENT CARE

Nothing to present at this time.

HOLLY HOUGHTON – COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT

Ms. Houghton announced that she is leaving her position as Dixie County Extension Director and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to serve the County.

Commissioner Storey thanked Ms. Houghton for her many years of service and contributions to Dixie County and expressed hope that her successor will continue her strong record of leadership.

ANGIE CROWLEY, HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATOR

Ms. Crowley stated most of her planned comments had already been covered during Brad Hoard's health insurance and wellness report.

- She reported that the County had a great turnout for the recent employee wellness event.
- No additional items or requests were presented to the Board.

JOHN JENKINS, COUNTY MANAGER

1. Request: Approve SHIP emergency repair reimbursement for Raymond Smith in the amount of $10,000.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Wood. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved.

2. Request: Approve SHIP rehab reimbursement for Denise Foster in the amount of $17,681.50.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Stephenson. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved.

3. Request: Approve SHIP Release of Lien for E. Patrick Murray and Alberta Dale Murray in the amount of $20,000.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved.

4. Request: Approve Resolution 2026-37, amending the SHIP Local Housing Assistance Plan (FY 2026–2029) to add a mobile home strategy when funding is available.

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

5. Request: Approve the SHIP Annual Report for FY 2023–2024 closeout and FY 2024–2025 interim year.

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

6. Request: Approve the Mutual Termination and Release Agreement with Todd Benning for property identified as Parcel 10-12-25-5890-0000-002B, approximately 7 acres at the airport.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Stephenson. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved.

7. Request: Approve leasing County-owned property next to the transfer station to Randy King for cattle grazing, with the understanding that if the County needs the property for expansion, it can reclaim it on 30 days' notice.
    - Commissioners noted the land is currently unused (trees/brush) and adjoins Mr. King's fenced property; he would simply gate into it.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved.

- Attorney Watson:
    - To include a 30-day non-payment default clause (if rent is unpaid after 30 days, lease is in default and may be terminated).
- Commissioner Stephenson:
    - Requested the lease require liability insurance, naming the County as an additional insured.
- County Manager Bass:
    - Noted prior County payments for cattle lost after eating trash on nearby pasture and requested:
        - Lease language stating the County is not responsible for any livestock losses related to trash.
- Staff will draft the lease incorporating default, insurance, and hold-harmless provisions; rental amount to be determined.

8. Request: Approve purchase of a Polaris Ranger side-by-side for approximately $22,000, per Stormwater Task Force recommendation, using LPA 0279 DCFSM grant funds.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved.

9. Request: Approve purchase of a Big Tex trailer with toolbox for approximately $6,000 for transporting the side-by-side, using LPA 0279 DCFSM funds.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved.

10. Request: Approve purchase of a Brown A26-1 brush mower for approximately $13,000, per Stormwater Task Force recommendation, using LPA 0279 DCFSM funds.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Osteen. Board approved.

11. Request: Approve the lowest quote from Sunshine Outdoor Services to replace culvert “Pappy 508” on NE 165 Avenue at $155/hour, per Stormwater Task Force recommendation, using LPA 0279 DCFSM funds.

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

12. Request: Approve Grant CE 009 for the Sheriff’s Office evidence building in the amount of $750,000.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved.

13. Request: Accept Jessica Cooper (University of Florida) as Dixie County Extension Agent, effective September 9, 2026, as the permanent replacement in that role.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Stephenson. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved.

14. Request: Approve revised dates for the CareerSource notice and intent to renew lease.

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

15. Request: Approve a letter to reallocate LPA 0279 DCFSM grant funds from Task 3B (Construction – Miscellaneous) to Task 5 (Equipment Purchase), to cover the approved stormwater equipment.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved.

16. Request: Approve the lowest quote from Hinote Electric in the amount of $6,990 for electrical service work at the transfer station.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Storey. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved.

17. Request: Approve a quote from WW Gay in the amount of $8,983.90 for two-part repair of the compactor system at the transfer station.
    - Initially, the motion and second were mis-assigned; after clarification:

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Osteen. Seconded by Commissioner Storey. Board approved.

AI Data Works Workshop & Budget Workshop Scheduling

- Staff noted an AI Data Works workshop scheduled for 4:00 p.m. that day in the boardroom.

Budget Workshop – August 13, 2026

- Chairman Hatch:
  - Noted a committee assignment workshop is already set for August 20 at 4:00 p.m.
  - Proposed holding a budget workshop the prior week so Finance Director Brenda Royal can present updated budget numbers.
- Initial suggestion: August 13 at 9:00 a.m.
- Mrs. Sara Ross advised there is an LPA meeting at 10:00 a.m. that same day.
- The Board agreed to meet after the LPA session.

Motion made by Commissioner Storey to schedule a Budget Workshop for Thursday, August 13, 2026, at 10:30 a.m. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board approved.

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

Attorney's Report – Fishbone Contract, RV Park Mediation, Horseshoe Boat Ramp Strip

- Fishbone Contract (State Grant):
  - Advised that she has heard back from the State regarding the Fishbone contract.
  - The State indicated they are "working on the contract" and the County should expect to receive it, which she interprets as an anticipated approval, though no final written approval has yet been issued.
- RV Park Complaint – Mediation:
  - Informed the Board that mediation has been scheduled in the County's RV park complaint matter.
- Horseshoe Boat Ramp / Seawall – Narrow Strip of Property:
  - Reported that Mr. Rom (adjacent landowner at Horseshoe Boat Ramp) has again asked whether the County is interested in purchasing a narrow strip of his property along the seawall.
  - The strip is approximately 61 inches wide (a very narrow strip running alongside the wall).
  - Stated:
    - Existing documents and contracts show that Mr. Rom owned the property at the time the seawall was built, and it appears the seawall crosses his property line. Exact footage is unknown.
    - The seawall has been in place since around 1999.
    - Mr. Rom has suggested a purchase price of about $16,000 for the strip.
    - The County previously agreed to hold him harmless for injuries on that strip for a limited term, which has about two months remaining.
  - Asked the Board whether it is interested in pursuing purchase or not, noting she was not making a recommendation, only relaying the owner's request.

    - It was suggested that the County obtain a survey from the engineer to clarify the exact location and dimensions of the strip and seawall encroachment.

No formal action was taken; the Board directed that further information (including a survey) be obtained before revisiting the issue.

Presentation – Boyd Insurance / Preferred Governmental Insurance Trust

Michael Richter, Boyd Insurance Agency, addressed the Board:

- Represents Preferred Governmental Insurance Trust, which insures roughly 400 Florida governmental entities for:
    - Property,
    - General liability,
    - Auto,
    - Workers' compensation,
    - Cyber, and other lines.
- Reported that he:
    - Obtained Dixie County's current coverage and claims history via public records,
    - Submitted the data to Preferred's underwriting, and
    - Has a bindable quote that he believes:
        - Matches or improves coverage, and
        - Offers meaningful premium savings for the County.
- Emphasized:
    - He is not proposing mid-term cancellation of current coverage; he wants to compete for the October 1 renewal.
    - 90-day notice provisions in many programs typically address mid-term cancellation, not the ability to seek other quotes at renewal.
- Suggested two main approaches:
    1. Issue a formal RFP/ITB for the County's property/casualty package; or
    2. Piggyback on another county's recent competitively bid governmental insurance contract (for example, Jackson or Levy County), if the underlying contract allows piggybacking.

Response – FMIT / FACT (Florida League of Cities / Association of Counties)

Tom Conley, Florida League of Cities / Florida Municipal Insurance Trust (FMIT), responded:

- Explained the current structure:
    - The County's program combines:
        - FACT (Florida Association of Counties Trust) – primarily general liability.
        - FMIT – property, auto, workers' comp, etc.
- Noted:
    - The FACT contract includes a 90-day non-renewal clause, tied to their providing a projected premium by June 1 each year.

    - FMIT's property and related coverage does not have a similar 90-day requirement.
- Acknowledged:
    - This year, FACT did not provide the June 1 projected premium on time, which complicates strict enforcement of the 90-day provision.
- Stated that:
    - FMIT aims to provide renewal quotes by mid-August (approximately 45 days before October 1).
    - Property premiums across Florida are trending down somewhat, assuming no major hurricanes.
- Recommended:
    - The County follow its procurement thresholds and either:
        - Issue a formal competitive solicitation, or
        - In a more limited fashion, invite proposals from all qualified governmental trusts while still complying with County policy.

Attorney / Procurement Guidance

Attorney Chana Watson advised:

- The FACT documentation confirms:
    - A 90-day withdrawal / non-renewal requirement, and
    - A requirement that FACT provide a projected premium by June 1, which was not met this year.
- County purchasing policy requires:
    - For total annual premiums over $200,000: a competitive process (bid/RFP).
    - For over $500,000: at least 30 days of public advertisement.
- Stated:
    - Given the October 1 renewal date, the timeline is tight but feasible if the Board acts promptly.
    - Piggybacking is legally possible only if:
        - The other county's contract was competitively bid, and
        - It explicitly allows piggyback use by other public entities.

Board Discussion

- Commissioners expressed:
    - Concern about being constrained by a 90-day clause when no June 1 projected premium had been provided.
    - A desire to:
        - Honor contractual obligations, but also
        - Protect taxpayers by ensuring premiums are competitive.
- Commissioner Storey:

- Emphasized that the County must "tighten its belt" and seek savings, including in insurance.
- Clarified he was not asking to abruptly drop current carriers, but to obtain and compare other proposals.

- Commissioner Stephenson:
  - Described the mismatch between the 90-day requirement and the missed June 1 deadline as unfair to the County.
  - Supported soliciting competitive quotes.
- Several Commissioners acknowledged:
  - The value of FACT/FMIT training and legal resources but reaffirmed their duty to ensure the County receives best overall value.

Motion made by Commissioner Storey to advertise for competitive proposals (RFP/ITB) for the County's property, general liability, auto, cyber, workers' compensation, and related insurance coverages for the October 1, 2026, renewal, in accordance with County procurement policy. Seconded by Commissioner Stephenson. Board Approved

- Discussion (clarification):
  - The motion was clarified as:
  - A direction to solicit and compare proposals, not to cancel any policies mid-term.
    - The solicitation will allow: The current carriers (FMIT/FACT), preferred Governmental Insurance Trust (Boyd Insurance), and
  - Any other qualified insurers/trusts
    to compete.

Direction to Staff:

- The Attorney and County Manager were directed to:
  - Prepare and publish the insurance RFP/ITB with the required advertising period under County and statutory rules.
  - Ensure proposals are received and ready for Board consideration before October 1, so that coverage can be awarded with no lapse in insurance.

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

Nothing to present at this time.

<u>BRENDA ROYAL, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER</u>

Finance Director's Report – General Fund Pressures & Budget Direction
Ms. Royal apologized for her voice and stated she needs clear direction to move the FY 2024–2025 budgets toward balance before the first budget hearing (in about four weeks).
1. General Fund Support to Other Funds

- Reported that over the past five fiscal years (from FY 2021–2022 forward), the General Fund has transferred approximately $5,757,437 into other funds to cover shortfalls, including:
    - Transportation, Solid Waste, Fire, EMS, and other operating funds.
- Ms. Royal explained:
    - The General Fund is “the last fund to balance” because it must first cover deficits in other funds.
    - This leaves little capacity to build reserves, which is not ideal for long-term financial stability.

2. Structural Funding Issues
- Noted that several special-purpose funds cannot sustain themselves on their current dedicated revenues alone:
    - Fire assessment fund, Solid Waste assessment fund, Some millage-funded funds.
- When these funds run short, the General Fund must be used to make them whole.

3. Need for Board Direction – Millage, Assessments, and Constitutional Budgets

Brenda requested guidance on:

1. Millage Rates (Working Assumptions)
    - County-Wide (General Fund):
        - Use the rollback rate of approximately 0.94446 mills as the working figure.
    - EMS District:
        - Maintain at 3.0223 mills (maximum rate).
    - Library MSTU:
        - Use 0.024603 mills (rollback).
        - She noted the Library budget balances at this rate and even has more cash carry-forward than last year.
2. Special Assessments – Fire & Solid Waste
    - Based on prior one-on-one meetings with Commissioners, she summarized the Board’s informal consensus:
        - Fire Assessment: Increase from $125 to $205 per residential unit.
        - Solid Waste Assessment: Increase from $180 to $210 per residential unit.
        - Combined impact: $110 total annual increase per household.
    - Ms. Royal asked if this is the direction the Board wants her to use for balancing the affected funds.
3. Constitutional Officers’ Budgets
    - Asked whether to:
        - Adopt the constitutional officers submitted budgets as the starting point, or
        - Instruct her to start cutting those requests immediately.
    - Chairman Hatch and Commissioners:

        - Agreed to use the submitted constitutional budgets as working drafts for now.
        - Directed that constitutional officers be invited to a budget workshop to review their budgets with the Board.

4. Upcoming Budget Workshop

- The Board confirmed:
    - A Budget Workshop is scheduled for Thursday, August 13, 2026, at 10:30 a.m., following the LPA meeting.
    - A Committee Assignment Workshop is also scheduled for August 20, 2026, at 4:00 p.m.
- Direction to Staff:
    - County Manager John Jenkins will notify all constitutional officers to attend or be available for the August 13th budget workshop.
    - Brenda will:
        - Use the rollback millage rates,
        - The Fire/Solid Waste assessment increases described above, and
        - The submitted constitutional budgets
          as working assumptions to produce updated budget drafts for the workshop.

Several Commissioners commented that:

- The County is in a better position than in prior years, but
- Difficult decisions (including tax and assessment increases) are necessary to maintain services and repair past underfunding.

Ms. Royal thanked the Board for the guidance and confirmed she will prepare revised budget scenarios for the August 13 workshop.

<u>COUNTY COMMISSION ITEMS</u>

Commissioner Storey

- Thanked everyone for attending and for a productive meeting.
- Provided an update on a recycling / solid waste initiative:
    - Reported he has been working with a private individual who has purchased approximately 30 acres of land near the transfer station gate.
    - The plan is to develop a recycling facility / garbage recycling plant on that property.
    - The owner already operates three other similar businesses elsewhere and expects to:
        - Start by using some of his existing employees to process material until there is enough volume to justify hiring a local workforce.
        - Ultimately create around 15 jobs as operations grow.
    - Commissioner Storey expressed optimism that:

        - This project will substantially reduce the County’s solid-waste costs,
        - Provide economic development (jobs and investment), and
        - Help extend the life of County landfills by diverting recyclable material.
- Stated he will share more details with the Board and public as the project advances and legal/operational details are finalized.

Commissioner Stephenson

- Thanked everyone for a good meeting and the hard work of staff and volunteers.
- Spoke about the recycling effort:
    - Noted the County tried a recycling program in the past that did not work well, primarily because waste came in mixed, and residents did not separate recyclables at the source.
    - Acknowledged that the new facility being planned is a “whole different deal”, given the private operator’s experience in:
        - Excavating and processing old landfills,
        - Handling mixed waste streams, and
        - Recovering usable materials cost-effectively.
- Expressed appreciation for:
    - The Road Department and Stormwater Task Force for ongoing work,
    - Fellow Commissioners for “carrying” his responsibilities during his recent absence, and
    - The public’s prayers and support, stating he intends to “hang in there as long as I can.”

Commissioner Osteen

- Thanked everyone for coming and participating.
- Recognized that many decisions the Board is making, especially on budget, assessments, and infrastructure, are difficult and sometimes controversial, but:
    - Emphasized the Board must “wade through it and work together” to accomplish what is needed for the County.
- Expressed appreciation for:
    - Finance, Clerk, and administrative staff for their hard work during a challenging budget cycle,
    - The Road Department and Stormwater Task Force for their efforts in addressing flooding issues, and
    - The public for staying engaged and informed.

Commissioner Wood

- Thanked everyone for a good meeting and the hard work of all departments.

- Commented on ongoing stormwater and drainage projects, especially in areas affected by the 2021 flooding:
    - Noted that although not every road or ditch has been fixed yet, work is progressing, and the benefits are starting to show.
- Reminded everyone of the importance of voting in the upcoming election, encouraging citizens to participate.

Chairman Hatch

- Thanked:
    - All Commissioners for their active participation,
    - Staff and department heads for their reports and diligence, and
    - Citizens for attending and offering constructive input.
- Highlighted:
    - The AI Data Works workshop scheduled for 4:00 p.m. in the boardroom,
    - The joint workshop with Horseshoe Beach scheduled for Monday at 6:00 p.m. in the boardroom, and
    - The Budget Workshop set for August 13th at 10:30 a.m. and the Committee Assignment Workshop on August 20th at 4:00 p.m.
- Reiterated the Board's commitment to:
    - Continuing to work through budget challenges,
    - Supporting stormwater and infrastructure improvements, and
    - Pursuing economic development opportunities such as the recycling project.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

David Capo - Stormwater Task Force

Progress, Need for Dedicated Yard, and Future Funding
Mr. Capo addressed the Board, joking about his hat that had "floated off a couple times" during the 2021 flood work, and noting that when that happened the Board was very supportive and wanted to see progress.
He reported:

- The Task Force has:
    - Developed a "maintenance bible" documenting critical canals, ditches, and structures.
    - Nearly completed mapping of the County's stormwater system across roughly 500,000 acres (it "takes 8 days to ride across on a horse").
    - Completed substantial work with donated equipment and volunteer labor in the first six months, before grant money was available.
- Emphasized:
    - Without ongoing maintenance, the County could be back to pre-2021 flood conditions within 2 years.

- It will take about four full-time workers year-round to maintain what has now been opened and to keep key canals/culverts flowing.

Request for Dedicated Stormwater Facility

Mr. Capo asked the Board to consider:

- Establishing a separate stormwater maintenance department with:
    - A dedicated yard for equipment and materials (excavator, dump truck, skid steer, trailers, culverts, etc.).
    - Space to stockpile concrete rubble / riprap for stabilizing canal banks and headwalls.
- Suggested an initial need for 3–5 acres, preferably:
    - Near the old chip mill / County industrial area and
    - Close to the County yard and mechanic, so equipment can be serviced efficiently.
- Mentioned:
    - The City and task force are working on a multi-year Resilient Florida grant aimed at long-term stormwater improvements.
    - Having a designated stormwater yard would help demonstrate capacity for ongoing maintenance and improve the County's position for that grant.

Available County Assets and Possible Locations

Board members and staff discussed:

- A recently terminated 7-acre County lease near the old EMS/industrial area that could be repurposed as a stormwater yard.
- A large portable concrete building currently located at the Old Town Fire Station that:
    - Needs to be moved off that site, and
    - Could potentially serve as a stormwater office if the County funds the move (estimated cost around $10,000).
- Other County-owned parcels near the C&D landfill and transfer station, while noting:
    - The stormwater yard should be close to town and the County shop for practical reasons.

Board Direction:

The Board expressed strong support for establishing a stormwater yard and directed staff to:

- Inventory suitable County-owned parcels near the industrial/old chip mill area,
- Evaluate using the 7-acre tract and the portable concrete building, and
- Bring back a specific site and cost proposal for a dedicated stormwater maintenance facility.

Public Comment – Stormwater Erosion, Airport/Prison Ditches, Pumpkin Swamp, and NE 512 Ave

Bobby Davis - Stormwater Task Force:

- Thanked the Board and task force, stating:

    - Many homes that previously had water under beds during storms now remain dry.
    - Numerous residents have expressed gratitude for the County's efforts since 2021.

Erosion Near Prison and Airport Ditches

- Reported a serious erosion problem in the ditch near the prison, where:
    - Two large culverts installed to protect the prison and move water are now partially filled with sediment; erosion is undercutting the banks despite riprap.
    - Upstream work has included two new 500-foot culverts under the north end of the airport runway, which feed into this ditch.
- Also identified three remaining obstructions ("barricades") in downstream ditches that need to be removed.
- Requested:
    - Additional work by the Road Department and Stormwater Task Force to:
        - Clear obstructions,
        - Stop further erosion, and
        - Maintain sufficient capacity to protect the prison and surrounding areas.

Pumpkin Swamp / CR 351 Area

- Noted that:
    - A key ditch in the Pumpkin Swamp / CR 351 area has been reopened and is now flowing, confirmed during a joint inspection with Commissioner Bellot.
- Warned:
    - Without continued maintenance, and with another 10–15 inches of rain, water may cut a new channel through a peanut field, damaging private property and sending uncontrolled flows toward County roads.

NE 512 Avenue (Turner Point Road) – Road Shoulder & Drainage

- Described significant issues on NE 512 Avenue:
    - Road shoulders in some locations are 12–14 inches higher than the pavement, trapping water on the road.
    - Narrow pavement forces cars and boat trailers to drop off steep edges, causing:
        - Trailer hangers and frames to drag, and
        - Risk of small vehicles losing control.
- Noted increased traffic due to:
    - The Dollar General Store and its semi deliveries, and
    - Frequent use of Turner Point boat ramps.
- Requested:
    - That the Road Department:
        - Cut back high shoulders and banks,
        - Restore proper ditch depth and slope, and

        - Improve safety and drainage, even if it may upset some neighbors.

Board and Staff Response

- Commissioners:
    - Thanked Mr. Davis for his work and candid feedback.
    - Agreed that:
        - The erosion near the prison and the shoulder/ditch issues on NE 512 Ave are County liabilities if not addressed.
        - Progress since 2021 has been substantial, even though not all problem areas are finished.
- Commissioner Stephenson:
    - Stated that progress requires taking risks, and mistakes are inevitable when acting quickly, but the net results are overwhelmingly positive.
    - Emphasized appreciation for volunteers who "stick their necks out" for the County.
- Road Superintendent Mikel Gainey:
    - Acknowledged the NE 512 Avenue issues and said he would:
        - Work with the stormwater team to re-shape shoulders and ditches.
        - Consider different materials for drop-offs since previous materials have not held well.
- Chairman Hatch:
    - Clarified that when the County works on private property, it always obtains a Right-of-Entry from the landowner, typically valid for about a year and renewed as needed.
    - Noted that such permissions will be sought for the peanut field area and any other private parcels mentioned.

No formal motions were made on these items. The Board provided consensus direction for the Road Department and Stormwater Task Force to continue addressing the identified erosion and safety concerns and to bring back a proposal for a dedicated stormwater yard.

ADJOURN

Motion to Adjourn made by Commissioner Stephenson. Seconded by Commissioner Wood. Board approved.

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.