

Workshop
BOCC and Town of Cross City Council
City Hall
99 SE 210 Ave, Cross City, Fl 32628
January 17, 2024 – 5:00 PM

The Board meetings are audio recorded. The public can hear and participate in the meeting via conference call by dialing 1(917)900-1022 and enter code 32628.

COMMISSIONERS

Mark Hatch, Commissioner District 3
David Osteen, Commissioner District 5

STAFF

Paul Gainey, Acting Assignment County Manager
Martha McCaskill, Acting Assignment County Manager
and Administrative Asst/Grant Coordinator
Chana Watson, County Attorney
Leon Wright, Building and Zoning Official
Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court
Della Rhymes, Asst. Chief Deputy Clerk
Joannie Morse, Deputy Clerk

TOWN COUNCIL

Kenneth “Tank” Lee, Mayor and Town Council Member Seat 5,
John Driggers Jr., City Manager
Ryan Fulford, Town Council Member Seat 3
Kirk Merhefka, Town Council Member Seat 1
Jamey King, Police Chief
William Garner, City Fire Chief
George Edmonds, City Utilities Supervisor

Carol West, Dixie Chamber of Commerce/Dixie County Education Foundation
Katrina VanAernam, Dixie Anti-Drug Coalition
Karen VanAernam, Cross City Restore and Renew

CALL TO ORDER

The Workshop was called to order at 5:00 PM by Town Mayor, Kenneth “Tank” Lee.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE AMERICAN FLAG

The Invocation was led by City Manager John Driggers Jr. and the Pledge to the American Flag was led by Town Council Member Kirk Merhefka.

Police Chief Jamie King spoke on the partnership displayed between the City Police Department and County Sheriff's Office during the standoff in Cross City on January 16, 2024. He expressed his appreciation for everyone working together. He also stated that they had help from the Columbia County SWAT team and the Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) provided drone coverage.

Town Council Member Ryan Fulford stated the city has hired William Garner to serve as the new City Fire Chief.

Town of Cross City Fire Chief William Garner said he was happy to be here and is learning, so if anyone has any ideas for the Fire Department, please let him know. He also stated that the fire station should be receiving the new fire engine by the end of February 2024.

Council Member Fulford reviewed the Retail Strategies Activity Report. He informed the group that the city and county have been in a partnership since July 2023 and Retail Strategies have been actively recruiting new businesses on their behalf. Retail Strategies has also been working closely with interested retailers such as a regional coffee brand and a national tool and equipment retailer, to match them with suitable sites within the county. He stated their data shows most of the money coming into the county is from the North, into Cross City and then to the coastal areas.

City Manager John Driggers Jr. stated Retail Strategies would like to contact the owner of the Save-A-Lot Grocery Store. He added that he has a good contact number.

Mrs. Carol West said Retail Strategies are looking at every retailer that is looking to expand.

Council Member Fulford stated there will be a meeting in Perry, FL with Retail Strategies on February 15, 2024. The city is making plans to present something to the public to represent the partnership and their efforts to build up and change the face of our city and county. The Tourism Development Council (TDC), Retail Strategies, and the Economic Development Planning Council have all been working together for our community.

Council Member Fulford informed everyone that The Friends of the Nature Coast Concert raised over \$525,000.00. This money will go to the community members who sent in applications, totaling around sixty (60) applicants, from Cedar Key, Suwannee, Horseshoe, and Steinhatchee.

Mrs. Carol West stated that they hope to issue the checks at the end of January 2024.

Council Member Fulford asked about the status of the letter of support from the county for the city on the Felty/Train Depot property.

County Manager Paul Gainey replied that the County has already passed this, but they are waiting on directions from the city on how to prepare the letter and who to send it to.

City Manager John Driggers Jr. stated he will get the information needed to the county and will send the letters.

Mrs. Karen VanAernam of Cross City Restore and Renew informed everyone that the Rural County Days will be held in Tallahassee next on Wednesday and Thursday, January 24th and 25th, 2024. The County Commissioners will be there on Wednesday night the 24th for the "Meet and Greet" and Town Council Member Fulford and Mrs. VanAernam are planning to go on Thursday, the 24th.

County Manager Paul Gainey stated that he is planning on himself, Assistant County Manager Martha McCaskill, and all five (5) County Commissioners attending on the evening of Wednesday, January 24th. Mrs. West stated that the legislative delegation will be there on the night of January 24th.

City Manager John Driggers Jr. reminded everyone of the Centennial Celebration coming up on April 20, 2024. He stated there are several sponsors and vendors signed up already. There are sponsorship forms available for anyone who wants one and vendor spots available for those wishing to participate. There will be an event planning meeting on January 18, 2024, at City Hall at 3:30 PM.

County Manager Paul Gainey stated that the county has several projects going on at this time. The bid to build a new fire station off Chavous Road opens Tuesday, January 23, 2024. The county is also in the process of getting the final plans submitted out to bid for the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) expansion. Several road projects are coming up this year including the Mainline into Horseshoe and the southern end of the Suwannee Highway. He said the county is still working on storm water issues, focusing on Old Hwy 19. They also worked the last couple years on the Airport Canal and the Old Town residential canal system. The county is still working with FEMA on Hurricane Idalia recovery.

Building and Zoning Official Leon Wright stated that the county has been assigned a long-term Substantial Damage Representative from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for the remainder of the year 2024. This FEMA representative will be looking at the county permitting, and collecting data of all the damaged sites that the county has demoed and assessed. Mr. Wright stated that the FEMA representative will also be performing their own field work and is an auditor assigned to check permitted and nonpermitted work, both residential and commercial. He also stated that FEMA wanted 31 houses to be turned over to them for auditing and Building and Zoning turned over 75 which exceeded what they had requested.

Town Mayor Lee stated that the county was host, this past Saturday, to the VFW State Convention at The Putnam Lodge. Mayor Lee said that Mrs. Kay Macallister did a great job coordinating this through the TDC. Mayor Lee asked if there are any plans to repair the road in front of the American Legion. County Manager Paul Gainey answered that the county should be paving the road in front of the American Legion within the next few months. They are 90% plans submitted to The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). This should be going out for bid, and by mid-summer the county should have a new road out there.

Katrina VanAernam of the Anti-Drug Coalition asked what the county does to help the “housing insecure” when it is cold outside. She asked if anyone had thought of setting up shelters within the county. She stated that over the years, she has gathered supplies for the homeless and that the church on Chavous Road has asked for supplies to help with this issue within the county. The Anti-Drug Coalition has money to donate towards helping collect supplies and is willing to organize something if needed. Town Council Kirk Marhefka stated that the Steinhatchee Community Center, in Taylor County, opened as a shelter during the last few cold days.

City Manager John Driggers Jr. stated that he didn’t think the city, or the county, could fund this. He also stated that whoever is willing to organize and facilitate this would have to have money to fund it and experience in understanding and operating this kind of shelter. He noted that this would be a complex undertaking and would not be easy.

Mrs. West recommended speaking with Mrs. Beverly of the Tri County Resource Center for the contact information of the person who runs the shelter for Levy County.

Karen VanAernam stated that Beth Morrill is the contact person for the “Warming Center”. The center was open from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM for the last few cold nights. Mrs. Karen suggested maybe having a

“warming center” next year. She added that we may be able to use a church annex or the Women’s Club if possible.

Mayor Lee asked what if the “housing insecure” don’t want to go to a shelter.

Mrs. Karen VanAernam answered and stated that’s why we should have legal ramifications in place. Mrs. Katrina VanAernam stated that a local resident in town, Ms. Tan, takes in those who are “housing insecure” as needed. She suggested that we should ask if she needs help with supplies or support. Mrs. Karen VanAernam said she will reach out to Beth Morrill for directions in organizing a center, and maybe next year we might be able to do something here in this county.

Commissioner Mark Hatch informed everyone that Retail Strategies will be in Perry, FL on February 15, 2024, and they also want to have a face-to-face meeting with the county once a year. He requested looking into a time to meet and suggested sometime in June or early July. Commissioner Hatch also stated that he will meet with Mary of Duke Energy tomorrow at 10:00 AM. He also promoted attendance for the Rural County Days.

Clerk of Court Barbie Higginbotham stated that Cross City Restore and Renew is scheduled for a town cleanup on February 24, 2024, at 8:30 AM.

Mrs. West asked if school students would be able to get community hours which would go towards earning college scholarships.

Mrs. Karen VanAernam stated Gail Rains will get the word out to the schools.

Clerk of Court Barbie Higginbotham stated that last year bags were left for pick-up. City Manager John Driggers Jr. said he could facilitate someone to help pick up the bags.

Mrs. Karen Van Aernam also added that Cross City Restore and Renew is updating the county entry sign. She stated that Christy Roberts is working to coordinate with the inmate crews for the before and after clean-up for the Centennial Celebration.

Mrs. West reminded everyone of the 57th annual Dixie County Chamber of Commerce meeting on February 8, 2024, at 12:00 noon. The meal will be provided by the Anti-Drug Coalition.

Mrs. Karen Van Aernam said she and Police Chief Jamie King are planning to update the Facebook page for the Centennial event.

City Manager John Driggers Jr. said there is a need for sponsors and booths for the Centennial event.

Mrs. Karen Van Aernam spoke about the Miss Dixie Pageant coming back to the county. The pageant will be headed up by Amanda Nessmith and Maddie Kelly. She stated that this program will bring opportunities for girls to win college scholarships.

Building and Zoning Official Leon Wright wanted to inform everyone that we have three (3) new businesses coming to the county. Two (2) in Cross City and one (1) outside of Cross City. These businesses are in the process of obtaining permits from Water Management.

Mrs. Karen Van Aernam asked about the plans for the Train Depot in Cross City. She stated that Cross City Restore and Renew would love to start working with Town Council Kirk Marhefka to remove the lead paint from the Train Depot by the date of the Centennial.

Council Member Marhefka stated he has received two (2) quotes for the lead paint removal, one (1) from a company in Gainesville and the other from Tampa.

Mrs. Karen Van Aernam added that the price for one (1) of the quotes was \$15,016.00 and the other was \$68,800.00.

Council Member Marhefka said the huge difference in pricing is because one is a wet lead paint removal and the other is a dry lead paint removal.

Mrs. Karen Van Aernam asked if we are required by law to get a total of three (3) quotes.

County Attorney Chana Watson said if it is advertised with sufficient notice, you are not required to have three (3).

City Manager Driggers advised to account for mobilization when choosing a quote. He states that sometimes they charge more if they have to travel farther to perform the job.

Mrs. Karen Van Aernam asked if there is a deadline for quotes and Fire Chief William Garner answered that you usually have 30 days. Mrs. Karen Van Aernam said we would need to requote it. Mrs. Karen Van Aernam added that the original Cross City signs that were found in the old Train Depot have been put out at the county lines.

Town Council Fulford mentioned that there are funds in the Tourist Development Council (TDC) for the Train Depot.

County Attorney Watson asked if we would qualify for the Historical Society for the Train Depot.

Clerk of Court Barbie Higginbotham expressed concern for using places like the Women's Club for the "housing insecure". She stated we may have drug users access the property with needles and then have that to deal with issue.

Mrs. West stated that three (3) out of twelve (12) students are unhoused in the State of Florida school system.

Mrs. Katrina Van Aernam advised of the reinstatement of Teen Court. She said the Hanley Foundation wrote for the grant called Judicial Reinvestment. Their vision was for a grant Drug Court for adult mental health and substance abuse. She also mentioned that the new States Attorney is helping make the program work along with Judge Jennifer Johnson.

Mrs. Karen Van Aernam suggested planning the next BOCC and Town of Cross City Workshop for March 06, 2024, at 5:00 PM at City Hall.

Council Member Fulford thanked everyone for coming.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

There were no public comments or concerns at this time.

ADJOURN

Town Mayor Kenneth Lee adjourned the meeting at 6:00 PM.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
DIXIE COUNTY, FLORIDA

ATTEST:



Jamie Storey, Chairman



Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk-Auditor

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.