

Workshop

Workshop with the BOCC and Emergency Management

Commission Board Room

Dixie County Courthouse

214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City, FL 32628

February 15, 2024 – 4:00 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

Daniel Wood, District 2

Mark Hatch, District 3

Jamie Storey, District 4, Chairman

David Osteen, District 5

STAFF

Martha McCaskill, Acting Assignment Asst. County Manager/
Administrative Asst/Grant Coordinator

Chana Watson, County Attorney

Angie Crowley, HR Administrator

Leon Wright, Building and Zoning Official

Darby Butler, Sheriff

Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court

Joannie Morse, Deputy Clerk

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Board Meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM by Commissioner Storey.

2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE AMERICAN FLAG

The Invocation was led by Commissioner Hatch and the Pledge to the American Flag was led by Commissioner Osteen.

Commissioner Storey introduced Mr. Jason Benoit and Mr. Marty of Alternative Recovery Consulting.

Mr. Jason spoke first and stated that the purpose of their company is to help storm damaged communities maximize the monies available and find funding that can be obtained through various grant programs. He also stated that there are still some grant opportunities within our county even sixth (6) months after the storm. He said that he would appreciate the opportunity to work with Dixie County to help repair and make the County stronger.

Mr. Jason introduced Mr. Marty, the owner of the company (Alternative Recovery Consulting).

Mr. Marty further explained what the company does and what they can do for Dixie County. He stated that the company is currently assisting the Town of Horseshoe Beach with their storm repair grants. He said they would like to help relieve the workload of our county employees and help with the limited resource availability and maximize opportunities. He added that there is a lot of funding out there that could help the communities and the county.

Commissioner Storey expressed that he had previously asked how the company would get paid and was told that if the County decides to have Alternative Recovery Consulting help, they will only charge us five (5) percent of the amount of the grant received. He stated if the company can get a fully funded Grant, the County doesn't have to pay them, their pay comes out of the grant money. If their company doesn't produce any funding, it doesn't cost the County or the taxpayers anything. He also stated that he is willing to give these guys a chance. He said they are willing to write a contract and have our attorney go over it with a fine-tooth comb before any work is done.

Commissioner Storey opened the floor for questions.

Commissioner Osteen asked how bringing Alternative Recovery Consulting aboard would affect what some of the other County employees, such as Emergency Management Director Darian Brown and Emergency Management Chief Scott Garner and others have already accomplished. Mr. Osteen said that Director Brown and Chief Garner have gone above and beyond in working to get grants for our county for storm recovery.

Mr. Marty states that they would jump in and help the County but are not here to take jobs away from anyone.

Commissioner Hatch said that he did not want anyone's work to be in vain and it wouldn't be in vain. He also stated there were a couple of benefits that the company may bring to our County.

1. Infrastructure money. The County lost 100 plus homes in Hurricane Idalia and next year when the County's tax roll is certified the County will be 100 plus homes minus on our cashflow. He said he spoke to our Senator Cory Simon and Representative Jason Shoaf, and they are in one hundred percent agreement on this route.

2. Puts a layer of protection on the County, meaning that if it's not handled correctly, Alternative Recovery Consulting will be responsible, and it wouldn't come back on the County.
3. It would allow County Employees like Emergency Management Director Darian Brown and Emergency Management Chief Scott Garner to be able to concentrate on their jobs instead of processing these grants. Mr. Hatch reminded the board that hurricane season is almost upon us once again.

Chief Garner stated they are about ninety percent done with recovery.

Commissioner Hatch called Emergency Management Director Darian Brown and Emergency Management Chief Scott Garner up to the podium to address the Board.

Mr. Brown stated that the EOC has been meeting with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) daily to weekly concerning storm damage repairs. He said they have verified sixty projects that need repair and/or replacement after hurricane damage. These items have been submitted to FEMA, ten (10) of the projects are already in the cost estimate process. He states that each project that requires a site visit has been completed. The Emergency Management team have been through the programs and processes and have verified insurance and coverage amounts for all these projects; however, some of the projects were not able to be picked up by the insurance, like Shired Island, because it's a non-engineered beach.

Mr. Brown also said the County has a Contractor on staff with AtkinsRealis that performs similar duties as the gentlemen with Alternative Recovery Consulting and is provided by the State at no cost to the County.

Mr. Brown also informed the Board that Chief Garner and himself and other staff have handled these types of events for the past twenty years and have processed the grants, recovered funds, and kept records of all funds recovered. He stated that the process is not new to them, and Grant Funding is one of the things the County pays them to do. Mr. Brown added they have also hired a new staff member to assist with the grant processing as well. He said this new employee is reimbursed out of these funds that are available.

Mr. Brown said that he meant no disrespect for the gentlemen from Alternative Recovery Consulting, but he is concerned that if they get involved, the County will lose five (5) percent of the grant money that the County should be getting very soon. He stated that Dixie County is the only County that he is aware of that has all their site visits complete. He said now we are just waiting on FEMA at this point. He said that if Alternative Recovery Consulting can find new grants and funds to help the County, he would be willing to take the help, but he doesn't want to slow down the process of the ones already almost complete and states that is what would happen if someone else got involved with those at this point.

He informed the Board that he would be happy to sit down and go over these items with them so they would know the status of these projects.

Mr. Brown also stated there is other funding that became available immediately following the storm. The Senators and Legislators took fifty million and set it aside for the effected storm counties within the State of Florida. He said that as of two weeks ago they have applied for several different items and have been told that these are on the top of the pile on the Governor's desk. These projects include 2.25 million to dredge the Horseshoe Beach Canal System, another portion of money for dredging of the Suwannee Canals, 4.5 million for the Horseshoe Beach Fire station response area, 1.5 million to rebuild the First District Fire Station. This totals around 10.1 million dollars out of the 50 million dollars that was set aside for the effected counties.

Director Brown stated they have a running list of projects and a process in handling all the projects. Most of the projects have a match associated with the grants and he said that if Alternative Recovery Consulting can help with the match money that would be great; however, everything on the list is approved to be done.

Director Brown informed the Board that he has been speaking with the State of Florida Legislators, Senators and the Director of Emergency Management and said they have assured us that the twenty-five percent match is going to be taken care of if they can find a way to do it. He said it's federal funding, so it must be matched with other money beside federal. He stated that he is happy to have help, but with the process already this far he doesn't want to slow things down.

Director Brown also brought it to the attention of the Board that we already have a contractor on staff who helps with these types of projects, and he said they would be happy to answer any questions that the Board may have for them. He also reminded that the time to submit to FEMA for projects related to the storm damage has passed.

Mr. Brown announced that there is an upcoming meeting with our State and Federal partners on February 21, 2024, at the Emergency Management Office in Cross City to discuss what they may be able to provide as far as help to Dixie County. He also stated there will be a meeting with Representative Kat Cammack regarding grants available for Dixie County such as fire related, rural county, storm related ideas, and implementation processes.

Commissioner Hatch asked for more explanation on the provided list of repair projects.

Chief Garner explained the list in detail to the Board and said the projects on the list are projects damaged due to Hurricane Idalia which have been submitted and are waiting for FEMA to approve the amounts. He also explained that it is beneficial for the county to keep the projects listed as small projects and keep them in the small projects realm and try and get our County staff to complete the work if they can do it for a lower cost than an outside agency to help keep costs down.

Commissioner Hatch inquired about the building and equipment for the Suwannee Community Center.

Chief Garner said that one is complicated because the engineers are saying it is repairable, but the insurance says it's not repairable, but needs to be demolished.

Director of Human Resources Angie Crowley stated that she talked to the insurance company today and they told her that the County can do what they want to with the money from the insurance, but if the County chooses to repair the building it has to be elevated.

Commissioner Hatch asked where the insurance money from these projects is located.

Chief Garner said that the insurance money that the County has already received is in an account in finance. He also stated that FEMA will only make up the difference between what the insurance pays and the remainder. Mr. Garner stated they have submitted all insurance policies, copies of checks received from insurance and all the breakdowns of each building payment to FEMA.

Commissioner Hatch asked how many Suwannee projects are there out of the sixty projects presented on the list.

Chief Garner said the only damage in Suwannee was Suwannee Community Center.

Commissioner Hatch said that he counted one (1) project on the list for Suwannee and was concerned about that. He stated that there was more damage than that in Suwannee.

Director Brown stated that the reason why some of the other projects in Suwannee were not listed was because the County couldn't document that the damage was storm related and FEMA requires proper documentation to that effect to be approved.

Commissioner Hatch asked what they are submitting in regard to Hazard Mitigation DR4734 that is due on April 30, 2024.

Chief Garner answered that the submission is for 40 miles of canal in Old Town Hammack area, Three (3) roads in Suwannee, and a generator for the Courthouse.

Commissioner Hatch stated that he has been told that Suwannee will not get any paving or seawalls.

Commissioner Hatch asked the Mayor of Horseshoe, Mr. Jeff Williams, how the City of Horseshoe is doing regarding their damaged road repairs.

Mayor Jeff Williams said they have had three (3) inspections on the roads and a consultant has completed and submitted an analysis.

Commissioner Hatch asked what resilience is and what is the purpose.

Director Brown said that it is to make those items hardened and better.

Mr. Greg Bailey stated that Mr. Brown is referring to a different program. Resiliency is done through the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and John is doing a study for the County. Mr. Bailey also mentioned that the County was not successful in the last cycle, and they must complete a report before resubmitting. Mr. Bailey said that they need to schedule a meeting with the Board to discuss future hardening projects which are unrelated to any specific projects. He states they can get together to submit more specific types of money through that program to become more shovel ready once we become eligible after the vulnerability assessment.

Director Brown stated that he was talking about the storm related programs and Mr. Bailey was talking about more grant funded, hardening projects.

Attorney Chana Watson asked if the deadlines for the FEMA submissions are closed.

Chief Brown said yes that the section to report damaged inventory has been closed.

Attorney Watson asked how the County can justify emergency contracts, such as this one, if there are no deadlines pending. She states that is why she needs a deadline.

Chief Garner said there are no deadlines other than the one for the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funds that are due by April 29, 2024.

Attorney Watson stated that from an attorney's standpoint the County is talking about entering an emergency contract; however, because the deadline has already closed, we can't enter an emergency contract. She said the Federal Code regarding the methods of procurement states five (5) ways to go about a non-competitive procurement and are the only avenues to move forward without going through competitive procurement procedures. She stated her concern that the County has already passed the deadline and asked how it is exigent to hire these gentlemen without competitive bidding.

Commissioner Hatch asked Mayor of Horseshoe Beach Jeff Williams how they did this process in Horseshoe Beach.

Mayor Williams said they did competitive bidding.

Attorney Watson said it was her recommendation to the Board that the County does competitive bidding.

Commissioner Hatch asked Building Official Leon Wright if the Building and Zoning Department has a deadline.

Mr. Wright said yes, and their deadline had not expired.

Attorney Watson stated that we could possibly use Alternative Recovery Consulting for Building and Zoning's needs, but it would have to be tailored to specific issues within that department.

She also said the County could only do this short term under special exigency circumstances for Mr. Wright.

Clerk of Court Barbie Higginbotham stated that Counties can sometimes piggyback off other counties.

Attorney Watson agrees that is a possibility.

Mr. Wright said that he will take all the help he can get.

Commissioner Storey asked if Alternative Recovery Consulting has been helping in Horseshoe.

Mr. Wright said yes, they have been helping down in Horseshoe.

Commissioner Hatch stated that he would like to see if we can piggyback off horseshoe.

Attorney Watson said that she would have to look at the contract to make sure it's not unique to Horseshoe for the County to piggyback.

Mr. Marty of Alternative Recovery Consulting said it must be scope to scope otherwise the County wouldn't be able to piggyback.

Commissioner Hatch asked what is being done in Horseshoe.

Mr. Marty said everything is included in the scope.

Attorney Watson stated that she recently spoke with the Acting County Manager Paul Gainey and was made aware that we do have a consulting firm, DSI, that we use a lot on these types of projects, but she is not exactly sure of their scope.

Mayor Williams said that he utilized the Alternative Recovery Consulting and they have been a huge benefit to the City of Horseshoe.

Director Brown said that Horseshoe is a little different because they are their own entity and unlike them, the County has the Emergency Management team to help.

Mr. Jason of Alternative Recovery Consulting spoke to the Board and affirmed that there are deadlines with these grants, but these deadlines can be extended, and their company has had success in extending deadlines in the past. He also said that if the County needs them to start with the specific departments like Building and Zoning, they can do that to get in the door. He also assured the Board that they want to make sure that the County follows all processes of procurement because if the County doesn't get paid, they don't get paid.

Commissioner Storey opened the floor to the audience members for discussion or questions.

27. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

Kay MaCallister said she would like to see some things happen within the County such as a Civic Center that can also function as an evacuation building. She asked if that was something that the County would do through FEMA grants.

Chief Garner stated that is to be done under the appropriation side and he is not sure if it will get funded or not, but other USDA funds are out there, but they all have matches.

Mrs. MaCallister asked that if we couldn't get these projects completed through appropriations can the County utilize other companies like Alternative Recovery Consulting.

Mr. Marty said they could administer grants for the County.

Acting Assistant County Manager Martha McCaskill stated that she just wanted to reiterate that no fees whatsoever will be coming out of the county budget.

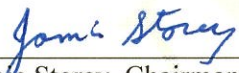
Attorney Watson reminded that the Board couldn't vote tonight because it is only a Workshop and not a Regular Board Meeting.

28. ADJOURN

Commissioner Hatch made the motion to adjourn at 5:58 PM. Commissioner Osteen seconded. Board approved.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
DIXIE COUNTY, FLORIDA

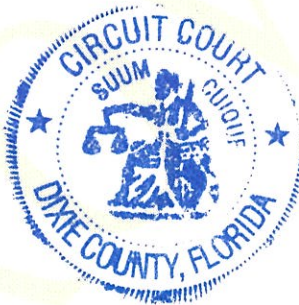
ATTEST:



Jamie Storey, Chairman



Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk-Auditor



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“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.

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