

**Fire and Solid Waste Assessment
Workshop
Dixie County School Board Meeting Room
May 06, 2021 – 1:30 PM**

While adhering to the CDC Guidelines and following State of Florida Executive Orders: 20-51 Establishing Response Protocol, 20-52 declaring a Public Health Emergency, 20-69 regarding Local Government Public Meetings and the Dixie County Emergency Declaration 2020-27. The Board will meet and limit access by staff and the public to the meeting room. 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

Jody Stephenson
Mark Hatch
W. C. Mills, Vice Chairman
James Valentine
Jamie Storey, Chairman

STAFF

Duane Cannon, County Manager
Michael Osteen, County Attorney
Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court
Jacki Johnson, Chief Financial Officer
Della Rhymes, Asst. Chief Deputy Clerk

CALL TO ORDER

The Board meeting was called to order at 1:30 PM by Commissioner Storey.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE AMERICAN FLAG

The Invocation was led by Commissioner Valentine and the Pledge to the American Flag was led by Commissioner Mills.

Mr. Jeff Rackley and Ms. Heather Encinosa from Nabors, Giblin & Nickerson appeared before the Board to go over the Fire and Solid Waste Assessment Presentation.

Mr. Jeff Rackley spoke to the Board and discussed Fire Services. He said that includes fire suppression, hazmat, fire prevention, emergency response and disaster preparedness and fire safety education. He said this does not include EMS type services above the level of first responder. He said there should be a fair and reasonable apportionment to spread the cost among properties within the county. He gave the current assessment rates which are \$40.00 for residential and \$45.00 for non-residential properties.

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He discussed the approximated growth over the next three years. He discussed the average number of calls that are handled. He said the residential rate should be raised to \$125.00 in order to be current. He said there is a process to go through like advertisements and public hearings before the rate can be implemented. It would be after November 2021 before the bills would be sent to citizens of the county.

Mr. Jeff Rackley spoke to the Board and discussed the Solid Waste Services. He said the current assessment is \$135.00 for residential and non-residential dwellings. He said the current revenue is \$1,100,000.00. He provided an estimated calculation for the next 5 years for expenditures, costs, additional costs and revenue. Mr. Jeff recommended the Board Split the budget between residential and commercial because commercial properties generate more trash. He said there is a process to go through like advertisements and public hearings before the rate can be implemented. It would be after November 2021 before the bills would be sent to citizens of the county.

Mr. Jeff Rackley reminded the Board that these assessments have not been updated and or raised in years.

Commissioner Stephenson inquired as to how they came up with the numbers discussed. Mr. Jeff Rackley replied they based this on the data provided by the county staff.

County Manager Duane Cannon said the current rate is \$180.00 for the Solid Waste and Mosquito Assessment.

Commissioner Hatch commented that the residential assessment will be raised from \$40.00 up to \$125.00 for Fire.

Mr. Jeff Rackley clarified that this also applies to vacant property.

Director Darian Brown said the Fire Services are being paid from the EMS Budget now.

Commissioner Stephenson asked Director Brown what could be added to the Fire Services by raising this assessment.

Director Brown replied that the Fire Services would not have to come out of the EMS Budget. They could add another ambulance. They could staff two Fire Engines completely. He said they would also be able to upgrade equipment. He said they haven't been able to do this since 2015. He said they have one Fire Engine and one Squad Truck now.

Commissioner Stephenson asked about volunteer staff.

Director Brown replied it is hard for a volunteer to commit to three months of training. He said they may be able to increase the stipend per call however, this still may not be enough.

Mr. Jeff Rackley said this issue with a lack of volunteers happens everywhere around the state.

Director Brown commented that they are all leaving, and it has been a progressive decline when more training hours were added for certification.

Commissioner Hatch stated that an increase of \$155.00 per year will be hard on those with a fixed income. He asked if the Board should consider doing increments or an all at once increase.

He said the current rates are from 1992 and the county can't continue to operate with the same Fire and Solid Waste rates.

Commissioner Mills suggested a fifty percent raise and then increase so much per year.

Ms. Barbara Cummings asked if this would go on the ballot for a public vote. Commissioner Storey replied no.

Commissioner Stephenson said he didn't think that the county can catch up at only a 10 or 20 percent increase.

Mr. Glenn Biggerstaff said this was on the ballot prior and that didn't go well. He said the county needs new Fire equipment.

Mr. Jeff Rackley informed the Board that if they chose to do an annual increase they will have to vote and notice this annually.

Director Brown said that a fifty percent increase is not enough to address staff and equipment.

Commissioner Mills said he understands the increase needs to be 100 percent however, the public will not understand.

Ms. Heather Encinosa informed the Board that they can plan to do an annual increase, but they cannot be bound by the escalator. She said the Board will have to vote and decide how much to increase every year.

Manager Cannon asked how long the Board must review this and make a decision.

Ms. Heather Encinosa informed the Board to see the schedule that was provided in the presentation. She said they would need a Resolution in place and would follow the schedule for mail and publishing. She said they would continue this every year until they get up to where they want to be. She said this can be added to the TRIM Notice, but the Property Appraiser must agree.

Manager Cannon said he has spoken to the Property Appraiser and he said no he doesn't want to do this.

Commissioner Stephenson said the Board needs to explain to the public why they are doing this assessment increase.

Commissioner Mills said that people with a fixed income will always be on a fixed income. It won't get any easier on them in the future. He suggested they go ahead and do this increase at one time.

Ms. Heather Encinosa said the Board can chose to offer a Hardship Application to those who can show documentation of low income.

Mr. Jeff Rackley said he can come back before the Board on July 15, 2021 or earlier to go over the assessments again with the Board.

Commissioner Hatch invited Mr. Jeff back to appear at the next Board meeting.

Ms. Barbara Cummings asked if this Board were to raise the assessment 100 percent could the next Board lower it.

Commissioner Hatch replied yes, they can. He said that June 17 they will meet again for the assessment. He instructed Mr. Jeff Rackley to get commercial numbers together for the Board on a Spreadsheet.

Ms. Barbara Cummings asked why agricultural land cannot be assessed.

Mr. Jeff Rackley said this is not allowed by Florida Statute.

Mr. Matt Ferguson expressed his thanks to the Board for working on this assessment.

Manager Cannon asked if this is included in their contract with Nabors, Giblin & Nickerson. He said the Board wants them to help do this.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

There were no comments or concerns expressed from the public at this time.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Mills made the motion to adjourn at 2:47 PM. Commissioner Stephenson seconded. Board approved.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
DIXIE COUNTY, FLORIDA

ATTEST:

Jamie Storey, Chairman

Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk-Auditor

PLEASE BE ADVISED that if a person decided 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.

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