

Workshop

Town of Cross City and BOCC

Location: Dixie County Public Library

16328 SE Hwy 19, Cross City, FL 32628

May 7, 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

David Osteen, Commissioner District 5

Jody Stephenson, Commissioner District 1

Mark Hatch, Commissioner District 3

STAFF

Paul Gaaney, Acting Assignment County Manager

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

John Jenkins, Assistant County Manager

Chana Watson, County Attorney

Leon Wright, Building and Zoning Official

Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court

Kelly Koschatzky, 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

George Edmonds, City Utilities Supervisor

Carol West, Dixie Chamber of Commerce/Dixie County Education Foundation

Karen VanAernam, Cross City Restore and Renew

Kay McCallister, Tourism Council

Ruth Ann Lovelace, Cross City Restore and Renew

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Workshop was called to order at 5:00 PM by Town Council Member Seat 3, Ryan Fulford.

2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE AMERICAN FLAG

The Invocation was led by Pastor Brooks of the Church of God and the Pledge to the American Flag was led by Town Council Member Ryan Fulford.

3. INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Fulford began the meeting with introductions.

4. Ryan Fulford

Mr. Fulford stated they have established a new local Economic Council Team consisting of the following members:

County Commissioner Mark Hatch
Karen VanAernam Cross City Restore and Renew
Carol West Dixie Chamber of Commerce/Dixie County Education Foundation
Kay McCallister Tourism Development Council
John Driggers City Manager
Ryan Fulford Town Council Member

5. RETAIL STRATEGIES

City Manager John Driggers stated Duke Energy Assistance Retail Strategies Survey awarded the County \$25,000 last year and wanted to know if the County would receive it again this year.

Ms. Karen VanAernam stated the funding is there for two consecutive years, but the County must reapply.

Mr. Driggers responded he would complete the application tomorrow.

6. JEFF HENDRY AND DIANE SCHOLZ OF THE NORTH FLORIDA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP (NFEDP)

North Florida Economic Development Partnership (NFEDP) Jeff Hendry stated he desired to bring some knowledge and education about economic development to the community. He started by explaining how Economic Development, a deliberate set of programs, policies or activities is intended to improve the quality of life.

Mr. Hendry explained that the (NFEDP) is one (1) of three (3) officially designated rural regions in the State of Florida, done by the executive order of the governor. He stated every five years they put together data built on distress factors about poverty and education rates and average wages compared to the rest of Florida. He stated they have a Board of Directors consisting of 34 members and each of the fourteen counties gets two appointments to serve on the Board, one must be a County Commissioner and the other an Economic Development Member. He said Dixie County's Commissioner on the Board is Commissioner Mark Hatch and the Economic Development Member is Karen VanAernam. He also stated that the mission of (NFEDP) is to build the competitiveness of each of the Counties to be able to recruit new business and industries to come to their County. He said they also work with existing as well as struggling businesses to find resources to help them expand.

Mr. Hendry asked the attendees what economic development meant to them. There were many answers from the group such as Growth, jobs, quality of life and bringing in new business for the county.

He said the targeted industries they're looking at are manufacturing, logistics and distribution and providing stability to the community. He stated that the program helps counties apply for grants and marketing, as well as building competitiveness and foundations up front for Counties.

Mr. Hendry shared what Economic Development is not. He said it is not an event, the actual ribbon cutting, the end result, it's doing the little things right to get there. It's not a one-off event.

Mr. Hendry defined the Strategic Sights Inventory (SSI) Program as a program that helps counties identify greenfield sites that could be viable for economic development within the County. He said the program performs analysis of the properties looking at infrastructure in place to support a particular type of business as well as analyzing the labor market in the County.

Mr. Hendry further explained the importance of relationships with those in the community as well as funders to grow. He recommended getting involved in the State of Florida meetings and such to show our need and get help with our community. He said leads can come from everywhere, be involved.

Mr. Hendry also spoke regarding confidentiality. He said that 288.075 of the Florida Statutes exempts Economic Development projects and private recruitment from the public records law. He said this is because companies participating may not want competitors to know they want to expand and relocate or their employees to get the feeling they may have to relocate, also community conversation and misinformation could ruin prospects of attracting a business. He said they don't want to violate trust with these companies.

Mr. Hendry stated that once a project comes into the County it is important for the local officials to let them know how grateful you are to have them in the County from time to time.

Commissioner Stephenson made the statement that he thought Dixie County will have to put more incentive into this than other areas because the County has no interstate, no railroad, it is out of the way unlike other counties.

Mrs. Carol West said that is true and not true, she said we have an airport and other advantages in this County that others don't have.

Mr. Hendry agreed and said we must be who we are. He said Dixie County is one of two counties that have an airport and that is a tremendous asset, and we also have a four-lane highway.

Mr. Lucas Rollison owns a local metal business and he spoke up and said they just had their Ribbon Cutting Ceremony, but before they decided to build in Dixie County, they were offered \$80,000 to go to another county and over \$100,000 to go to South Georgia. He said he stayed here because his heart is here.

Mr. Hendry stated that businesses will have to calculate the long-term advantages and goals, not just 5 or so years from now, but longer. He stated that having these types of businesses that are here because their heart is in the community is great for the County. He also added it is very important to attract industry.

Questions:

Mr. Howard Hart, owner of the Hardware and Building Supply Store in Steinhatchee stated he was born in Dixie County and started his business in 1985 as a 2,400 Sqft building, and it is now over 12,000 Sqft. He said from his point of view some of the problems with development have come from County Commissioners who have told people what they are able to build or not build on their own property.

Mr. Hendry stated that roughly 70-75% of jobs created in the County are by existing business, not by new recruitment. He also stated that there are some unbelievable opportunities for this County.

6. REFRESHMENTS

Town Council Member Ryan Fulford announced a break for refreshments.

7. JEFF HENDRY AND DIANE SCHOLZ OF THE NORTH FLORIDA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP (NFEDP) (Continued)

Mr. Hendry shared a personal story and said he got a call 3 years ago from Minnesota and it was CEO looking for relocation in parts of Alabama, Georgia, or North Florida and they decided to move and build in Suwannee County. He stated it was a three (3) year process and it didn't happen overnight. He said they had to provide an inventory of property as well as energy capacity reports prepared for the

company's review. He said it took a while, but after three (3) years it happened. He encouraged the County to hang in there and build a competitive advantage.

He said they have performed a strategic sites inventory on some potential properties, and they are working with the County and several others on the project. Mr. Hendry spoke of the Retail Strategies Group that is working with our communities to recruit retail businesses that want to come into the communities. He displayed and explained maps that show the County and the advantages of the County that can be of benefit to investment companies. He stated that one of the greatest assets to this area is the Airport and the fiber broadband internet. He said that is a huge selling point for our County. He added that people could come and work remotely from other states and Counties.

Mr. Hendry stated the grant for retail strategies for Dixie County came from Duke Energy and he thanked them for their contribution. He said Retail Strategies recruit retail businesses that are looking to come into the County. He said the process is usually about a two (2) year process. He said they also look at what market they could capture if you had a retailer come into the County. He said that Retail Strategies has stated that Dixie County can capture \$230,000,000 at its full capacity if businesses are here in this County. He also stated Retail Strategies is actively looking for urgent care, patient-first oriented business as well as fast food and hotels in Dixie as well.

Dixie County Education Foundation Chamber of Commerce, Carol West spoke and said in April of this year. Mr. Jeff Hendry was named Economic Developer of the year.

Ms. West thanked Mr. Hendry for his dedication and hard work.

Mr. Hendry says His company wouldn't be anything they are without Diane (his coworker) and he's sorry she couldn't be in tonight.

8. QUESTIONS

None presented at this meeting.

9. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned by Town Council Member Mr. Ryan Fulford.



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
DIXIE COUNTY, FLORIDA

Jodie Stephenson

Jodie Stephenson, Vice Chairman

Barbie Higginbotham

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.