

Workshop

BOCC and Town of Cross City Council

Cross City Public Library

16328 SE Hwy 19, Cross City, FL 32628

June 14, 2023 – 2:00 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

Jody Stephenson, District 1, Vice Chairman

Mark Hatch, District 3

David Osteen, District 5

STAFF

Duane Cannon, County Manager

Paul Gainey, Asst. County Manager

Martha McCaskill, Administrative Asst/Grant Coordinator

Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court

Verna Wilson, Chief Deputy Clerk

Della Rhymes, Asst. Chief Deputy Clerk

Cindy Bellot, Library Director

TOWN OF CROSS CITY COUNCIL

Jerry "Ryan" Fulford, Cross City Vice Mayor

TOWN OF CROSS CITY STAFF

John Driggers, City Manager

Joseph Henderson, City Superintendent

Lindsey Lander, City Attorney

Jeff Hendry, North Florida Economic Development

Carol West, Economic Development

Karen VanAernam, Cross City Restore and Renew

Katrina VanAernam, Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition

Christy Roberts, Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition

CALL TO ORDER

The Workshop was called to order at 2:00 PM by Commissioner Hatch.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE AMERICAN FLAG

The Invocation was led by County Manager Duane Cannon and the Pledge to the American Flag was led by Commissioner Hatch.

NEXT LEVEL GROUP

Economic Development Presentation - via zoom

SARAH BETH THORNTON/STEWART, Vice-President

Business Development for Retail Strategies

Birmingham, AL

Ms. Thornton spoke to everyone present via zoom conference call.

She said they have partnered with Duke Energy. She said that retail is so many things from stores to healthcare and hospitality. She said this type of economic development creates more jobs and more sales tax dollars. She praised Duke Energy for their involvement and their commitment to provide resources to the community. She said Retail Strategies will focus on bringing jobs and more quality of life to Dixie County. She said one way they do this is through grants. She informed everyone that Duke Energy has some Foundation Grants available up to \$25,000.00 for different economic development initiatives. She said the grant has been applied for on behalf of Dixie County and the Town of Cross City to share. She said that Retail Strategies staff will recruit the appropriate retail for the county and city. She said they will begin by analyzing the community and the consumers by using a mobile data study. ***This may take about 30 days to gather the data.*** She said the goal is to add value without hurting businesses that are already in place. ***About 60 days into the study, a Real Estate analysis will be done.*** She said the real estate assets within the community will be cataloged from this data. ***The next step is to put together a Retail Recruitment Strategy to target growth for the community.*** She said these prospects will be presented to the community leaders for approval. She said the Retail Strategies team will then actively recruit the retailers on behalf of the county and city. She said they will present what the community has to offer to prospective retailers and report back to the community leaders with their findings. She said they will also represent the county and city and recruit businesses at multiple Retail Shows.

Ms. Carol West said the Dixie County Summary Report identifies the need for local healthcare. The report also pointed out several recreational opportunities and tracked traffic flow. She said the community needs to develop and implement a plan of action.

Ms. Thornton/Stewart said having dedicated staff is expensive. She informed everyone that Ms. Alex Edwards will be the Portfolio Director and Mr. Drew Coffman will be the Retail Recruiter assigned to Dixie County. She said the Data Team, Marketing Staff, and others will be working together on behalf of the county and city.

City Manager John Driggers informed everyone that Cross City has been awarded the \$25,000.00 from Duke Energy.

Mr. Jeff Hendry with NFEDP agreed that the Retail Strategies staff will be a powerful recruiter for the county and city at trade shows as he has witnessed in the past. He asked if a representative from the county or city can also attend these trade shows.

Ms. Thornton/Stewart replied that anyone can attend however, it is expensive.

Mr. Hendry requested that the community leaders be informed of all the trade shows that are coming up. Ms. Thornton/Stewart replied yes, and they will also get a Post Conference Report after the trade show.

County Commissioner Mark Hatch asked who is the point of contact.

City Manager John Driggers replied he is the contact and he will keep in touch with County

Manager Duane Cannon said the Board will partner with the city and match \$7,500.00.

Ms. West informed everyone that Jackson County is participating in a Retail Academy. City Councilman Ryan Fulford asked about the academy.

Ms. Thornton/Stewart replied six (6) to eight (8) hours of educational training for the Jackson County staff.

County Commissioner Mark Hatch asked how to get a list of numbers and businesses for Dixie County to review.

Ms. Thornton/Stewart replied this is included in the partnership with Retail Strategies. This Retail Recruitment Strategy Report is usually delivered within 100 days and is appropriate to your community.

County Commissioner Mark Hatch asked how soon they meet everyone and discuss the information.

Ms. Thornton/Stewart replied after the contract is signed, the team can meet within the first week and schedule the other meetings.

County Commissioner Jody Stephenson said that parking is an issue for businesses. He said providing a tax incentive may be necessary.

County Commissioner David Osteen said of all the businesses he approached; population was a deciding factor.

Ms. Thornton/Stewart stated that retail businesses look at trade instead of population.

***** END ZOOM CONFERENCE CALL at 2:30 PM.**

COMMUNITY PROJECTS AND OTHER COORDINATED EFFORTS

City Manager John Driggers informed everyone that a climate control storage facility will be occupying the old TG&Y building in Cross City. He said this site was chosen through a retail survey of the area. He said having a Retail Survey done would be very helpful for recruiting new business for the community.

Mr. Hendry said Retail Strategies will get in touch with the right person within the right company for potential growth.

County Commissioner Jody Stephenson said the Survey is only 50 percent right. He shared how incorporating Hunts Brothers Pizza in his convenience store was very successful.

Ms. Katrina VanAernam said the employee pool will also be evaluated.

Mr. Hendry said the trust and credibility of the data provided by Retail Strategies will encourage businesses to look at Dixie County. He said for the cost of \$40,000.00 the county and city will get an active recruiter for new businesses.

County Commissioner Mark Hatch said both the county and the city leaders agree with this new approach to economic development. He said the county will pay \$15,000.00 towards the Retail Strategies annual contract.

Clerk Barbie Higginbotham said she is happy that everyone is working together.

Ms. Karen VanAernam said she is pleased with the positive changes within the last two years.

Ms. West informed everyone of a group of female pilots that are flying into the Cross City Airport and staying at the Putnam Lodge on June 22 and 23, 2023.

County Commissioner Mark Hatch asked if anyone had put together the list of Strengths and Weaknesses for the county. His lists were as follows:

- Strengths for the county were – Dixie County has four (4) B graded schools, a couple of charter schools, a low tax base, new fiber optic cable, and teamwork.
- Weaknesses for the county were – Dixie County has no water and sewer, no medical facility, no housing, no transportation, not close to the interstate, and the small mind set/must think bigger, no retail.

County Commissioner Mark Hatch said the community needs to grow in retail services and there are jobs available here.

City Manager John Driggers said the Dollar General Market in Branford, Florida is the busiest in the North Florida area.

City Councilman Ryan Fulford said he felt they are working towards the right direction and being transparent to the public. He said they should fulfill the obligations of the office they are elected to. His lists were as follows:

- Strengths for the City were – sewer and water within the city limits.
- Weaknesses for the City were – expansion is needed for sewer and water, financial constraints, no housing, no retail.

City Manager John Driggers gave an example of financial constraints for the city. He said they were awarded a four (4) million-dollar reimbursable grant for the sewer expansion. However, the city does not have the money in their budget to front for the project. He said they have partnered with DEP to front the money for the expansion.

Mr. Hendry informed every one of the Rural Infrastructure Grant. He said the county can claim a hardship with DEO or DEP to get an advance for the money. He said the statute will change July 01, 2023.

County Commissioner Jody Stephenson asked how does this work when facilities have been awarded grants by incorporating the adjacent counties numbers with their own numbers for eligibility. For example: Gilchrist County/Fanning Springs and Taylor County/Steinhatchee to get a Water and Sewer Plant.

Mr. Hendry requested a summary so that he can look into the matter.

County Commissioner Mark Hatch said there was an interlocal agreement.

County Commissioner Jody Stephenson stated the plan was to link Old Town Elementary with Suwannee and Cross City and others.

City Councilman Ryan Fulford said they have been addressing the empty buildings within the city limits. He said several of the owners have agreed to sell the properties. For example: the old NAPA building, the house beside the H & R Block building, the Fowler Drive Thru Chicken building, etc.

City Manager John Driggers said they will be partnering with ECO Technologies for Broad Band underground fiber for the city. He said they have been awarded a five (5) million-dollar grant to pay for this. He said they are signing the paperwork now.

Ms. West informed everyone the College of Central Florida has a one-week maintenance and repair class available. Students who pass can make from \$18.00 up to \$33.00 per hour as a Fiber Optic Technician. Mr. Hendry added that the tuition is \$2,200.00 and the students get three (3) certifications in one week. He said these skills can carry over into many different fields of work. He said the last graduating class that completed this one-week course already have jobs.

County Commissioner Mark Hatch commented that Water and Sewer Certifications also pay very well.

County Commissioner Jody Stephenson said Dixie County is a sportsman's paradise with hunting, fishing, hiking, bird watching, kayaking the rivers and springs. He said more people are moving here and more infrastructure is needed for new businesses.

City Manager John Driggers said the Toll Road has been approved past Crystal River. He said several changes are being made to accept more traffic through this area. He said the speed limit has increase from 35 mph to 45 mph through town.

Mr. Hendry said the community leaders need to educate the public on what changes are coming and how it can possibly enhance the small businesses.

County Commissioner Jody Stephenson said when the Cross City Correctional Facility was flooded and then evacuated this was a huge impact to the city and county.

City Manager John Driggers said the strength of the "Mom and Pop" store is service. He said the chain stores do not offer this.

City Councilman Ryan Fulford spoke about the natural resources that are available in Dixie County. He said the Tourist Development Council (TDC) discussed how to spread the word on social media and the Visit Dixie website.

Ms. Karen VanAernam said that housing is needed in the area and they may want to partner with the Florida Housing Coalition to figure out the next step moving forward.

Mr. Hendry said the NFEC will meet in Williston, FL on September 08, 2023. He said he appreciates the participation from Dixie County on their Board. He said the NFEC will connect the community leaders with credible people to help with the issues.

Ms. West said the Dixie County Education Foundation will be meeting on August 14, 2023. She said Dixie has a National Merit Scholar and a Sunshine State Scholar this year and they will attend this meeting. She said the Foundation has applied for a \$30,000.00 grant from Chick Fillet. She said a National Merit Scholar can get \$10,000.00 per year up to \$40,000.00 if they met certain criteria thru Ramon James.

Assistant County Manager Paul Gainey presented his list of strengths for the county's Education/School System:

- Have four (4) schools which have been A or B Graded Schools over several years, with 2300 students and 300 staff.
- Partnered with Duke Energy for a Solar Panel Covered Parking Canopy which will provide 16 hours of back-up power for the High School, which is also used as a Storm Shelter.
- Purchasing 23 new Electric Buses with a \$9 million dollar grant.
- Building a School Access Road with \$1.5 million dollars in state appropriations.
- Built the new Dixie County High School four (4) years ago.
- Building a new Elementary School to replace Anderson Elementary, which is 60 years old.
- Implementing the Guardian Program in addition to the School Resource Officer Program.
- Have several CTE Programs available for students: Business, Culinary and Hospitality, Welding, Aero Space, Criminal Justice, and HOSA.
- Have an FFA Advisor on staff that is nominated for the top FFA Advisor in the state.
- The Volleyball, Basketball, Softball and Baseball Team have competed at the State Level.
- The Fishing Team is competing at the National Level.
- Offer Personal Service between Superintendent, School Board, Administration, Teachers, Students and Parents.
- Partner with the Dixie County Education Foundation, who has presented \$260,000.00 this year in Scholarships for students.
- Offering the EMS Program within the school curriculum.
- Partner with the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition for student services.
- Partner with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes for student services.
- Offer Morning Devotions.

City Councilman Ryan Fulford spoke about the Tactical Paramedic Class held at the High School with several people attending and commented the High School is a huge facility.

Ms. Katrina VanAernam with the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition said they partner with the Sheriff Office and the Alcohol Beverage and Tobacco Agency for Retail Vendor compliance checks throughout the county. She said they will be hosting several Meetings at the Cross City Library:

- Retail Vendor Training Class, tomorrow from 12:00 PM until 1:30 PM.
- Human Trafficking.
- Delta 8 Drug on June 28, 2023 from 11:30 AM until 1:30 PM.

She introduced Ms. Christy Roberts as the Strategy Planner for the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition.

County Commissioner Mark Hatch scheduled another meeting for Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 4:00 PM at the Cross City Library.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

There were no comments or questions expressed at this time.

ADJOURN

Commissioner ___ made the motion to adjourn at 4:00 PM. Commissioner ___ 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 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.