

Emergency Meeting - *Sheriff State Grants*

County Manager's Office
56 NE 210 Ave, Cross City, FL 32628
June 27, 2022 – 4:30 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 2020-29. 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, District 1
W. C. Mills, District 2, Vice Chairman
Mark Hatch, District 3
Jamie Storey, District 4, Chairman
James Valentine, District 5

STAFF

Duane Cannon, County Manager
Paul Gainey, Asst. County Manager
Martha McCaskill, Administrative Asst/Grant Coordinator
Chana Watson, Interim County Attorney
Barbie Higginbotham, Clerk of Court
Verna Wilson, Chief Deputy Clerk
Della Rhymes, Asst. Chief Deputy Clerk
Brenda Royal, Financial Officer

CALL TO ORDER

The Emergency Board Meeting was called to order at 4:30 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.

REVIEW AND APPROVE THE BOCC/FDLE STATE GRANT FOR LEO SALARY ASSISTANCE FOR FISCALLY CONSTRAINED COUNTIES

Dixie County Sheriff Darby Butler informed the Board about a funding opportunity from the State of Florida. He said this money is earmarked for salary assistance of correctional and law enforcement officers. He said last year the Governor met with the Sheriffs of the fiscally constrained counties and together they proposed and drafted a bill. He said this bill was passed by the legislature and was signed by the Governor. He said \$525,000.00 would be available for Dixie County. He said the Governor has requested that the starting pay for correctional officers be raised to \$41,500.00 and the starting pay for

law enforcement officers be raised to \$45,000.00. He said this was implemented to have competitive pay throughout the counties.

He said they need to think about how to receive and distribute these funds. He said that his staff has itemized how this would be distributed to each employee. He said the state funding must be tracked separately from the county funding and this will be reported quarterly to FDLE. He said the state fiscal year is from July 01, 2022 to June 30, 2023. He said the funds that have not been spent must be returned to FDLE. He said a drafted contract for funding has been presented today for review.

County Manager Duane Cannon said the contract has been sent to the Interim Board Attorney for review. He said they had a webinar last week discussing this same matter.

Clerk Financial Officer; Brenda Royal said they need to know how to track this funding and when it will be made available. She asked if this salary increase will start as of July 01, 2022.

Sheriff Butler said that was the Governor's request, but he doesn't know for sure. He said he does not want to pay out money the county does not have. He said they may need to retro-pay employees back to July.

Interim Board Attorney Chana Watson said a spending plan is needed per their requirement.

Sheriff Butler said they do have this drafted for Dixie County. He said each county will have a different spending plan. He said documentation of the spending is required.

Attorney Watson said the following things are needed to get funding: an executed contract, a detailed spending plan because it is a supplement to the employee's regular income, and a copy of the current Sheriff's Office budget.

Sheriff Butler said they will use the current Board approved Sheriff's Office Budget and the same spending plan they previously submitted.

Commissioner Hatch said the county fiscal year starts in October and the state fiscal year starts a few months earlier. He asked if un-spent funds would have to be returned to the state during this period next year.

Sheriff Butler said yes, that is correct. He said the money is paid out to the county quarterly in advance. He said they will have projected numbers to submit for the last quarter.

Commissioner Hatch asked if this is a one-time opportunity or is this funding reoccurring.

Sheriff Butler said the bill is constructed to be reoccurring annually.

Commissioner Hatch said the county had this type of funding situation with EMS before. He said they got the funding, hired more staff, and then the funding was no longer available, and they had to lay off staff.

Commissioner Stephenson said he recalled when the funding was no longer available from the state, the public voted to not keep the newly hired staff.

Director of Emergency Services Darian Brown said yes, that is correct. He said they had to lay off nine employees.

Commissioner Stephenson said if the grant is no longer available the taxpayers do not need to cover this burden.

Sheriff Butler said his intention is to move forward with the county pay raise and this funding would be in addition to that.

Commissioner Hatch said he does not want a short-term fix.

Sheriff Butler said the legislature voted 114 to 3 to support this bill. He said he would like to not have to depend on state money in the future. He said they currently have a hard time competing with the pay scale offered by other counties.

Attorney Watson said this is a problem within all departments compared to other counties.

Commissioner Stephenson said he wants a stipulation added to the contract so that the county does not have to cover the possible loss of future funding.

Manager Cannon said the contract was drafted by FDLE.

Attorney Watson said this contract is drafted as a supplement to their pay and the employees need to understand this.

Manager Cannon said his concern is if funding is no longer available, either the county would have to cover the costs, or the Sheriff would have to cut back on his budget.

Attorney Watson said the contract is for one year; however, they are projecting this supplemental funding would be re-occurring annually. She said this contract does not cover the base salary for employees.

Commissioner Mills said if the Board doesn't sign the contract, they may not get the money at all. He said this is like a stimulus check. He said the employees need to be made aware of that.

Sheriff Butler said he will make his staff aware that this is a supplement and it may not be available in the future.

Commissioner Hatch said they don't have a lot of funding sources for the Sheriff's Office.

Commissioner Stephenson made the motion to move forward and accept the state supplemental funding for the Sheriff's Office. Commissioner Mills seconded. Board approved.

Commissioner Hatch asked if there is anything else the Board can do to help deter littering within the county.

Commissioner Mills said that more signs are needed.

Sheriff Butler said the problem is, if trash falls out of a truck and is not intentionally thrown out, it is hard to make a case in court.

Sheriff Butler said with the holiday weekend coming up, there will be more traffic within the coastal communities.

Commissioner Hatch said the roll off sites are looking better.

Manager Cannon said the county has placed 16 “No Littering” signs, at a cost of around \$8,000.00, at the beginning and ends of every paved road within the county.

Commissioner Mills said they need to do a survey of where the signs are most needed.

Sheriff Butler said that his staff must prioritize the calls because he is short on staff.

SHERIFF TO DISCUSS THE RADIO SYSTEM AND POSSIBLE FUNDING FOR UPDATED EQUIPMENT

Sheriff Butler informed the Board about the need for upgrading the county public safety radio communications system. He said the Florida House of Representatives has supported a Local Support Grant Program through the General Appropriations Act for \$175 million dollars in available funding. He said they would need \$2 million dollars to upgrade communications for the Dixie County Sheriff, EMS, Fire, and Cross City Fire and Police. He said this would cover additional emergency radios, a five-year warranty and maintenance.

Commissioner Hatch asked if there was funding for radios in the past.

Director Brown said there was not any funding available. He said they secured a bank loan for the 2017 system that was installed; and this should be paid off soon.

Manager Cannon said that was paid off this year in February or March.

911 Communications Director & I.T. Administrator Scott Pendarvis said the School Board, the Town of Cross City, and the Town of Horseshoe all contributed to cover the cost.

Sheriff Butler said this new mandated statewide system will be online in 2024 or 2025 and will start in South Florida and move up the West coast. He gave an example of the constraints of the current communications system. He said a blue alert triggers all counties to respond to the call. He said that you cannot communicate or coordinate with these other counties through the current system. He said that you may also have to step outside of a building to get better service.

Director Brown said they experience these same limitations with communications between the Fire Department and the Forestry Department. He said in 2012 it was mandated that all emergency systems be P25 compliant. He said currently none of them are. He said that Taylor County has this system and had to give Fire radios to the Forestry Department to be able to communicate with each other. He said this is an issue. He said the maintenance fee is \$14.00 per month per radio for the Road Department, Solid Waste Department, School Board, and everyone on this system. He said this works good for the Sheriff because all law enforcement throughout the state use this system; however, it is not good for the Fire Department and Forestry. He said that Forestry uses a VHF channel.

Sheriff Butler said the funding application deadline is July 15, 2022. He said there will be a two year plus a three-year extension for radio maintenance. He said communication is important.

Director Brown said this is only a letter to apply for the funding.

Sheriff Butler added it is not a commitment to spend any funds.

Sheriff Butler said this would combine all the emergency systems as one and everyone would always be able to communicate with each other. He said that Lafayette County still has separate communications for their Fire and EMS.

Commissioner Stephenson made the motion to move forward to apply for the funding application to upgrade the public safety radio communications system. Commissioner Hatch seconded. Board approved.

Commissioner Hatch asked how many emergency radios do Fire and EMS carry.

Emergency Management Chief Scott Garner said they have one radio, but they must change channels to communicate.

Director Brown added they use four channels to communicate with Fire and EMS Staff, Fire and EMS dispatch, Forestry staff, and Forestry dispatch.

Chief Garner said that the P25 mandate for Miami will be complete in August and then they can test the system to make sure it works correctly.

Director Brown said the maintenance fees need to be lower and the communication with Forestry needs to be fixed.

Commissioner Hatch asked about the statute on state mandated programs. He said if it's mandated by the state, then they must fund the program.

Chief Matt Ferguson asked about the schools being on the old system and how will they communicate.

Mr. Scott Pendarvis said only the school resource officer will be able to communicate.

Commissioner Stephenson said they need more answers to these questions.

Sheriff Butler said he will continue to gather information for the Board.

Commissioner Hatch asked about law enforcement presence at the Board approved road closure on Saturday.

Commissioner Stephenson asked about law enforcement presence on Hwy 349 for his fireworks display on Monday.

Sheriff Butler asked for more information so he can schedule staff to cover these areas. He said they can also use the message boards and personnel.

Chief Garner said they can also get message boards from FDOT for traffic safety related issues. He said they need at least one-hour notice.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Mills made the motion to adjourn at 5:35 PM. Commissioner Hatch seconded. Board approved.



ATTEST:

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
DIXIE COUNTY, FLORIDA

Jamie Storey

Jamie Storey, Chairman

Barbie Higginbotham

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.