

ALACHUA COUNTY ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON RURAL CONCERNS

MINUTES – March 21, 2023

Meeting - Virtually and In Person

Alachua County Administration Building, 12 SE 1st Street

Second Floor, Grace Knight Conference Room

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

In person: Dr. Rodney Clouser (Chair), Dewayne Baines, Janet Hearn, George Mells, Juan Salva, Dr. Cindy Sanders

Virtual: Jordan Callaham, Jennie Ford, Larry Hall (Vice Chair), Sandra Werner

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT:

Ken McMurry, Planner, Growth Management, *in person*

Regina Williams, Planning Assistant, Growth Management, *in person*

Ben Chumley, Principal Planner, Growth Management, *in person*

OTHER:

James Woodard, Broadband Project Manager, Alachua County Office of Management and Budget, *in person*

Kathleen Pagan, Senior Planner, Growth Management, *virtual*

PUBLIC: no public present

In the absence of Chair Clouser and per the Committee Bylaws, Vice Chair Larry Hall started the meeting at 4:06 pm as a workshop after confirming that there were four members physically present and 3 members attending virtually through Zoom. He said that there was no physical quorum present and therefore this is a workshop at which no action would be taken by the Committee, but that if enough members arrived in person to achieve a quorum, the meeting status could be reconsidered. He said in the event there was a physical quorum that, per the County Advisory Board Guidelines, Mr. Salva as Alternate member and physically present could vote. There were no members of the public present, but Vice Chair Hall said that any members of the public that attend would have an opportunity to participate virtually and in person.

Committee members Sandra Werner joined the meeting via zoom at 4:13 and Dewayne Baines joined in person at 4:16.

Vice Chair Hall said that since there was no quorum there would be no vote on the agenda, but that the workshop would follow the draft agenda.

I. Alachua County Broadband Update – James Woodard, Broadband Project Manager, Alachua County Office of Management and Budget

James Woodard gave an overview of the County’s current work on broadband provision. He said that the goal is to make broadband available to every home in the County. He said the County was awarded \$15 million in ARPA funding in 2021 and that a Feasibility Study was done last summer. Since then, the County has applied for a USDA ReConnect grant for the southern, southwest, and southeast sides of the County known as the Phase 1 build; is in discussions to partner with IBT, a large infrastructure company, for the northwest portion of the County and is submitting a funding application in April; and is looking at Phase 2 funding awards in the fall. He said that the State announced awards in February to Cox Communications for areas of the County that overlap with the ReConnect application, and that other providers and power companies could also compete with the County’s work. He said over the next 6 months he hopes to have a better idea of the areas that the County will be serving, that the County is continuing to apply for funding as it becomes available, and that the goal remains to provide broadband service to all areas of the County.

There were questions and discussion by Committee members regarding cost caps for assisted government funding, cost controls for the consumer, feasibility and plans for connecting and subsidizing service to very remote areas, and prioritization of need. There were also questions and discussion regarding competition and coordination between service providers, service provision in rural areas adjacent to existing service in municipalities, and timing and deadlines for new service provision.

II. Attendance report

Mr. McMurry shared on the Zoom screen the current Attendance Report previously sent to the Committee. He said that no members were in jeopardy of noncompliance with the attendance policy at this time and that if members have any questions, they should ask staff. He gave an update on the two currently vacant positions and said they have been advertised and that there are two previous applicants who are interested and qualify for the Residing in the Unincorporated Area Outside the Urban Cluster vacant position. He said there are five current terms ending in September 2023 and that staff will remind the Committee as that approaches so that current members who wish to reapply can do so.

Dr. Sanders asked whether a person who owns property and farms in, but does not live in, the County could apply for a position on the Committee. Staff confirmed that, per the Board Guidelines, residency in the County is a requirement for serving on an advisory board unless its founding resolution specifies otherwise and the RCAC resolution does not.

Chair Clouser joined the meeting in person at 4:36 pm. Vice Chair Hall confirmed there was a quorum of 6 members physically present and turned the meeting over to Chair Clouser. Mr. Chumley confirmed that with a quorum physically present the Committee can vote. Chair Clouser reconvened the workshop as a Committee meeting at 4:38 pm.

I. Approval of the Agenda

Chair Clouser asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Motion was made by Ms. Hearn to approve the agenda; seconded by Dr. Sanders.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

II. Approval of minutes for 2-21-2023 meeting

Chair Clouser asked if members had reviewed the draft minutes public comment section regarding a member of the public's opposition to the proposed meat processing and training facility. There was general agreement that the minutes were accurate.

Motion was made by Dr. Sanders to approve the minutes of 2-21-2023 meeting; seconded by Mr. Mells.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

III. Chair Comments

Chair Clouser said that this meeting would be the last hybrid meeting currently offered, going forward meetings would be in-person only, and that members should be aware of attendance requirements. He said his update presentation on the RCAC to the County Commission on March 14th went well and that Commissioner Cornell asked if the RCAC could discuss the operational feasibility of the proposed meat processing facility. There was discussion by Committee members regarding the capacity of the proposed facility, the local demand for smaller scale meat processing, other comparable facilities, and the business model for the proposed facility's operation. There was also discussion by Committee members regarding the proposed funding for construction, the proposed location, and current economic leakages out of the County due to the lack of a local facility. Mr. Salva said he would ask the USDA about the availability of data on comparable facilities. Chair Clouser suggested the Committee monitor the discussion of the proposed meat processing facility at the County Commission meeting on April 4th and if it progresses forward the Committee can further discuss the operational feasibility of the facility at their April 18th meeting.

Chair Clouser discussed the potential for a recognition program for family farms in Alachua County.

IV. Committee Members Comments

Mr. Baines asked if the Committee could reconsider alternate locations for meetings due to travel distances from the east side of the County to the Extension Office. Chair Clouser said that could be brought back for discussion at the next meeting.

V. Next Meeting: April 18th Alachua County UF/IFAS Extension Office

VI. Adjourn: Motion was made by Mr. Baines to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Dr. Sanders.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Clouser called the meeting to a close at 5:13

Approved 4-18-2023.