

ALACHUA COUNTY ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON RURAL CONCERNS

MINUTES – May 16, 2023

*Alachua County UF/IFAS Extension Office
22716 W Newberry Rd., Newberry, FL*

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Dr. Rodney Clouser (Chair), Larry Hall (Vice Chair), Dewayne Baines, Jordan Callaham, Janet Hearn, Juan Salva, Dr. Cindy Sanders

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jennie Ford, George Mells, Sandra Werner

STAFF PRESENT:

Ken McMurry, Planner, Growth Management
Regina Williams, Planning Assistant, Growth Management
Ben Chumley, Principal Planner, Growth Management

PUBLIC:

Tamara Robbins

Chair Clouser started the meeting at 4:11 pm. Six members were physically present, which was confirmed to satisfy the requirement for at least a quorum physically present under County Advisory Board Guidelines. Chair Clouser said that, per the County Advisory Board Guidelines, Mr. Salva as Alternate member and physically present can vote today. Chair Clouser welcomed the member of the public present and said that public comment would be taken at the appropriate points on the agenda.

I. Approval of the Agenda

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

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

II. Chair Comments

Chair Clouser congratulated Dr. Sanders on her recent appointment to the Florida State Fair Authority by Commissioner of Agriculture Simpson.

III. Attendance Report

Mr. McMurry said the current Attendance Report showed all members in compliance with the attendance policy at this time. He said the Attendance Report is always sent out with the meeting materials and that if members have any questions, they should ask staff.

He gave an update on the status of applications for the two currently vacant positions on the Committee and said that staff is planning to take those applications to the County Commission on May 23.

IV. Approval of minutes for 4-18-2023 meeting

Motion was made by Vice Chair Hall to approve the minutes for the 4-18-2023 meeting; seconded by Dr. Sanders.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

V. Old Business

a) Follow up discussion of economic feasibility of operation of the proposed Meat Processing and Training Facility

Chair Clouser asked Dr. Sanders for an update regarding the focus group on operations of the proposed facility. She said Sean McLendon met with several producers and others on creating the Request for Proposals for an operator, which should be ready around mid-June. She said the goal is to find an operator in order to move forward with the project. She said the County was looking for grant funding to cover the remaining \$750K needed since the State only funded \$1.75M of the \$2.5M request. Chair Clouser said the list of suggestions regarding economic feasibility of operation that was discussed at the last meeting was sent to the focus group, that a Committee response has not yet been sent to the County Commission, and the topic is still open for discussion.

There were questions and discussion by Committee members regarding what the RFP would include, an operator's responsibilities, terms of a contract, grant funding to cover the remaining \$750K needed, and the type of information and expertise needed for analysis of economic feasibility.

Motion was made by Dr. Sanders to invite Mr. McLendon to the June 20th RCAC meeting to give an update on the draft RFP contract and process; seconded by Ms. Hearn.

There was public comment by Ms. Robbins that there are other issues RCAC could better address and that a better qualified person could address the RFP issue for the Committee.

Vice Chair Hall called the question; seconded by Dr. Sanders.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

Vote was then taken on the original motion by Dr. Sanders to invite Mr. McLendon to the June 20th RCAC meeting to give an update on the draft RFP contract and process.

ACTION: Motion passed 5-2.

Motion was made by Mr. Baines to invite County Commissioner Cornell to speak to RCAC; the motion died for lack of a second.

b) Follow up discussion of RCAC upcoming meeting schedule and potential alternate locations

Chair Clouser said the Committee is scheduled to meet June 20th at the County Health Center and asked if there was discussion about when to take breaks this year.

Motion was made by Vice Chair Hall to not meet in July, August, or December 2023 unless needed; seconded by Dr. Sanders. Mr. McMurry said the November meeting would be 2 days before Thanksgiving. An amendment to the motion was made by Ms. Callaham to not meet in July, November, and December; seconded by Dr. Sanders.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

Chair Clouser said the Committee previously voted to have one meeting per quarter in the downtown area. He asked staff for an update on the locations they've reviewed; Mr. McMurry gave information on the Health Dept. location and an update on the other alternate locations.

Motion was made by Dr. Sanders to hold the June meeting at the Health Dept., the August meeting at the Extension Office, the September meeting at Grace Knight conference room, and the October meeting at the Extension Office; seconded by Ms. Hearn.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

VI. New Business:

a) Update on budgeting and collection of 0.5% public infrastructure surtax approved by Alachua County voters November 8, 2022

Mr. McMurry gave a summary of the new half cent public infrastructure surtax. He said that per the adopted ordinance, collection began on Jan 1, 70% of the surtax is designated to go towards roads, and that funding is distributed among the County and the 9 municipalities; it is a 10-year surtax with projections for each year, for 2023 approximately \$11M is projected, with the County's projected portion about \$4.2M. He said there would be a BoCC discussion on the County Pavement Management Program on May 23rd. Mr. Chumley said that there are specific road projects proposed for 2023 that would be part of that discussion.

There were questions and discussion by Committee members regarding the previous Wild Spaces Public Places surtax, the method used to prioritize road projects, the amount collected so far in 2023, State vs County roads, and the County's overall budget and priorities. Chair Clouser asked for staff to send information to the Committee including the Public Works Dept. road projects spreadsheet and the amount of the infrastructure surtax that has been collected so far this year.

Ms. Robbins said there is a County Infrastructure Surtax Oversight Committee that meets quarterly and has that type of information. She said there may be a bill in the legislature proposing use of Tourist Development tax revenue funds for tourism-related impacts such as roads repair.

Dr. Sanders asked if staff could invite Ramon Gavarrete to the August meeting and Mr. McMurry said they would.

VII. Committee Members Comments

There was discussion by Committee members regarding various topics of interest, including the price of farmland; the process of rezoning land from agriculture to subdivision housing and associated impacts; and rural issues such as schools, affordable housing, gas prices, and roads. Dr. Sanders said the RCAC has played a part in the County Comprehensive Plan updates; Mr. Chumley said the next update would be April 2025. Chair Clouser said he's concerned about the overall viability of agriculture in rural areas in the County and public awareness of the issue.

Mr. Baines asked if there was someone from the County that could talk to RCAC about affordable housing; Mr. Chumley said staff could ask Stephen Weeks, the County Housing Program Manager, and staff liaison to the County Affordable Housing Advisory Committee.

Chair Clouser said it is important for the Advisory Boards whose missions overlap to work together. He said with the County's limited budget and many problems to address, equitable distribution is an issue especially as it relates to the rural areas of County and that could be a topic for September or October.

Mr. Hall said he wouldn't be reapplying to the Committee when his term ends in September due to workload issues. Mr. McMurry said there are also 4 other members' positions ending this year on Sept 30th: Mr. Baines, Ms. Hearn, Dr. Sanders, and Ms. Werner. He said staff would notify the Committee when those positions are advertised.

VIII. Public Comments

Ms. Robbins said the rural nature of the County is changing and is not just agricultural. She asked if Mr. Chumley could present the map of the County Growth Management Area; he said staff could bring back a presentation of overall growth management issues. Chair Clouser said that would be a topic for the September meeting. Ms. Robbins said RCAC had previously received presentations on the County's small farmer grant program, that 3 farmers had received a total of \$10K, and that an additional \$200K has been budgeted. She said the Committee should ask for an update on the funding. Chair Clouser said he understood it to be a pilot project and that staff was working on additional funding sources.

IX. Next meeting: June 20, 2023, at Community Support Services at the Alachua County Health Department, Conference Room A.

X. Adjourn: Motion was made by Mr. Baines to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Vice Chair Hall.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Clouser called the meeting to a close at 5:53 pm.