

DRAFT
Rural Concerns Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes

February 18, 2025
4:00 pm
Community Support Services, Conference Room A
218 SE 24th St., Gainesville, FL 32641

1. Call to Order

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Dr. Rodney Clouser (Chair), Micky McMillan (Vice Chair), Jacobi Bedenfield, Lyman Conover, Janet Hearn, John Nix, Missy Norman, Amy Van Scoik, Brent Weisman

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Tyrone Johnson, Dr. Cindy Sanders

STAFF PRESENT:

Ken McMurry, Senior Planner, Growth Management
Regina Williams, Planning Assistant, Growth Management
Ben Chumley, Principal Planner
Sean McLendon, Economic Development Manager, Tourism & Economic Development
Stephen Hofstetter, Director, Environmental Protection

PUBLIC PRESENT:

Mark Goldstein
Sandra Gottschalk
Steve Lebel
Brandie McKinney

Chair Clouser called the meeting to order at 4:02 pm. There were 9 members physically present, which was confirmed to satisfy the requirement for at least a quorum physically present under County Advisory Board Guidelines. Chair Clouser welcomed the members of the public, who introduced themselves, and said that public comment would be taken at appropriate points on the agenda.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Chair Clouser asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Motion was made by Mr. Nix to approve the agenda; seconded by Mr. Conover.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously

3. New Business

3.1 Updates related to County agricultural planning and economic development – Sean McLendon, Economic Development Manager, Tourism & Economic Development

Mr. McLendon gave a short description of his office’s work and presented the following projects.

3.1.1 Climate Action Plan: Agriculture and Food Security chapter

Mr. McLendon gave a presentation on the County’s Climate Action Plan: Agriculture and Food Security chapter including threats of climate change on agriculture, improving the economic viability, sustainability, resource efficiency, and access to food of local agriculture, and creating a circular economy. Mr. Hofstetter gave an overview of the County’s draft Climate Action Plan preparation and schedule with adoption planned by end of 2025. He said staff could bring an update to RCAC in a couple of months. He said the County is advertising an opening for an agricultural land conservation planner for agricultural easement acquisitions.

There were questions and discussion from Committee members regarding information on agricultural workforce development and the County’s agricultural economic development coordinator position.

There were questions from members of the public regarding the scale of food waste recovery, PFAS testing, and involving local youth in farming.

3.1.2 Fresh Food Pathways Project/Food Hub

Mr. McLendon gave a presentation on the County’s Fresh Food Pathways Project/Food Hub project. He said it is a 30-month feasibility study for the potential development of a food aggregation and distribution facility. He said the study includes market viability analysis, operating pilot projects, conceptual design, and a business plan. He said if such a facility was found to be feasible, it would be a public-private partnership.

There were questions and discussion from Committee members regarding how to provide input on the study, how to be a part of the facility, which entities would be purchasers of local produce and at what point purchasing would start, who will be surveyed for the market analysis, scope of the local foodshed, and analysis of why the previous state farmers market failed.

There were questions from members of the public regarding the purchasing stream and the return on investment.

3.1.3 Small-Producer Agriculture Capital Support Grant Program

Mr. McLendon gave a presentation on the County's Small-Producer Agriculture Capital Support Grant Program. He said that it began in 2023 to assist farms that make under \$250K per year and produce food for people, with grants up to \$5K for capital interventions, and has an equity component. He said it will pay for courses on creating farm plans and he showed a map of the geographic distribution of awards.

There were questions and discussion from Committee members regarding the farm plan courses, the project funding source and total amount, access to past awards information, income range as it relates to awards, and grant application dates.

4. Approval of minutes for 01-21-25 meeting

Motion was made by Ms. Hearn to approve the minutes for the 01-21-2025 meeting; seconded by Ms. McMillan. Ms. McMillan said there was a spelling correction for one of the public members' names and provided the correct spelling. Ms. Van Scoik asked whether there were slides available from the Agricultural Tax Classification Assessment Process presentation. Mr. McMurry said he would ask the presenter for copies.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

5. 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 said that Committee member Leah Compton had resigned from the Member Chosen at Large position, which is now vacant and posted. Chair Clouser asked whether a vacancy affects the ability of the Alternate position to vote. Mr. McMurry said that it doesn't since alternate members serve in place of an absent regular member, including making up a quorum and voting, but not in place of a vacant position. Chair Clouser urged members to encourage people to apply.

6. Chair Comments

Chair Clouser said the Committee has recently expressed interest in current farm labor issues that might be addressed by either federal or state representatives, USDA Farm Services Agency state office, or the Florida Farm Bureau Director of Government Affairs. He said he would be making the annual Committee update presentation to the County Commission on March 25th. He asked staff for updates on other topics of interest to the Committee.

7. Staff Updates

Mr. McMurry said the Committee has expressed interest in updates on the County Forward Focus project, the Fire Rescue Master Plan, and general rural refuse, recycling, and dumping issues. Chair Clouser asked staff to request Gus Olmos, the County Director of Solid Waste & Resource Recovery, for the March meeting. Mr. McMurry said staff are working on a process for coordinating County and municipalities' land use, zoning, and development items and would be presenting an update to the County Commission on April 1st. He said the County's comprehensive plan update as required by state statute would begin in the next few weeks. He gave out copies of suggestions submitted by Ms. McMillan for recognition and appreciation of County advisory board volunteers.

8. Committee Members Comments

There were questions and discussion from Committee members regarding the County recycling program, the various agency and jurisdictional issues with emergency and law enforcement response, and the impacts that federal funding and jobs cuts are having on County agricultural producers.

There was discussion of the new "no truck" signs the County has placed on County roads. Mr. Nix said there are still issues with trucks using CR 234. Mr. Conover said he is working to get the Farm Bureau *Florida Farm & Family* magazine into County public schools.

9. Public Comments

There were questions and discussion from members of the public regarding County waste stream management and the current federal funding and jobs cuts. There were concerns regarding the potential Wildflowers music venue in the agricultural area near Melrose, including increased traffic problems, negative impacts to the farming community, and opportunities for public input. Mr. Chumley said a proposal has not been submitted to the County, but if one is submitted there would be a process for consideration of the proposal that would include a neighborhood workshop and public hearings of the Planning Commission and County Commission where public input will be considered.

Mr. Lebel spoke about the State Road 26 Corridor Safety Initiative addressing dangerous driving issues west of Melrose. Chair Clouser said an update from the Sheriff's Office to the Committee was needed to provide information and context on the issues.

10. Next Meeting: March 18th @ UF/IFAS Extension

11. Adjournment: Motion was made by Ms. Norman to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Mr. Nix.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

Chair Clouser called the meeting to a close at 6:10 pm.