

# Half-Cent Sales Surtax Citizens Advisory Committee

## Meeting Minutes

Monday, September 20, 2021

### Opening

The regular meeting of the Half-Cent Sales Surtax Citizen Advisory Committee was called to order at 4:01p.m. on Monday, September 20, 2021, via Webex at St. Johns County School District, 40 Orange Street, St. Augustine, FL 32084 by Mr. Hardman, Chairman.

### Attendance

CAC Members--Present: Susan Connor, Damian Cook, Jack Hardman, Richa Jeetah, John Lasswell, Jason Lewis, Barbara Little, Rhonda Lovett, and Norvie Veracruz. Alternates: Derek Barrs and Kim McManus. Absent: Edward Albanesi, Javelyn Arvay, Fred Danner, Michelle Dillon, Mary Ford, Amy Lasswell, Theresa Lennon, Dr. William McCormick, and Grant Misterly.

School District staff--Present: Nicole Cubbedge, Mike Degutis, Paul Rose, Gretchen Saunders, Elizabeth Moore, Greg Annucci, Miriam Testasecca, Sarah Wilcox and Judith Harvey.

Public Attendees--Web attendees: John Lowry.

### Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the June 28, 2021, regular meeting were then approved with a motion by Mr. Barrs and seconded by Mr. Lasswell. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

### Project Reporting

Mr. Rose gave the project report. He presented pictures of the Liberty Pines Academy (LPA) dining expansion. Mr. Hardman asked if most of the dining rooms looked like this one. Mr. Rose said it was pretty typical. He stated that LPA was the first K-8 school so it looks a little different because they have expanded the dining areas in the new K-8 schools. Mr. Rose also showed pictures of Pine Island Academy (PIA) which was partially funded by the Half-Cent Sales Surtax and it opened in 21-22 SY. Mr. Hardman asked if Mr. Rose could break down the three (3) stories by grade level. Mr. Rose stated that it depends because in the case of PIA, there is no 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Mr. Rose then deferred to Mrs. Cubbedge regarding the breakdown. Mrs. Cubbedge explained that the typical breakdown was Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor as well as common areas and resource rooms. She then stated that grades 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> were on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and

grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> are on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. She further explained that as the school gets bigger and relocatables are added that grades 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> would be in relocatables. She stated that middle grades would need to be in the building due to science labs and that Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade cannot be on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. She stated that PIA is not using all of the classrooms this year since they do not have 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Mr. Hardman asked about the attendance/capacity of the K-8's. Mrs. Cubbedge said that right now there were 1100 students at PIA and the capacity is 1500. Mr. Hardman asked about the growth and also when the 8<sup>th</sup> grade is added. Mrs. Cubbedge said it is too soon to call but they do anticipate growth. Mr. Hardman asked when relocatables would be needed there and Mrs. Cubbedge replied that hopefully it will be 2 years before relocatables are needed but there is a lot of growth in that area. Mr. Hardman then asked Mr. Rose if the project came in on budget and Mr. Rose replied in the affirmative. Mr. Hardman asked that Mr. Rose remind the Committee of the total cost. Mr. Rose replied that the total construction costs were \$40 million but he deferred to Mrs. Cubbedge for other costs. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that she did not have the exact amounts but that the school was funded by a mixture of sales tax, school concurrency proportionate share and impact fees. She stated that the school was originally planned to be fully funded by sales tax but was to be built a year later. But due to the growth in the Nocatee area, the staff reworked the budget and reprioritized to fund the school earlier. She further stated that Palm Valley Academy (PVA) had gotten very large.

Ms. Connor asked about flooring in the new schools and whether older schools would be upgraded with new flooring. Mr. Rose stated that yes, over time, they would replace older floors and that each year funds are set aside to upgrade. Ms. Connor then asked about the round tables in the cafeteria and that she felt they were much better for students socially and would they replace the old long cafeteria tables in other schools. Mr. Rose stated that he agreed but that the decision was left up to the principals because of space. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that you can put more rectangular tables in a space than the round ones. She further stated that schools that use their cafeteria as an auditorium, such as K-8 schools and elementary schools, it can be difficult to give presentations to the round tables so the schools have purchased chairs but then storage can also be an issue.

## **Financial Reporting**

Ms. Saunders gave the financial report. Ms. Saunders reviewed the 20-21 sales tax receipts and she noted that recently, St. Augustine has been listed in the top rankings by Travel & Leisure as well as Trip Advisor and that St. Johns County was also recently listed as the 10<sup>th</sup> fastest growing county in the United States. Ms. Saunders also reminded the Committee about the collection month and date the sales surtax is received. The County remits sales tax to the State and then the State remits funds back to the County so there is some lag time. Ms. Saunders also discussed the debt service payments and reviewed the monthly graphs. Mr. Hardman asked about the projections during Covid and not knowing the impact of Covid. Ms. Saunders stated that the projections were very conservative. Ms. Saunders then reviewed the quarterly sales tax revenues slide and then the slide that showed a combination of the monthly and quarterly slides. Mr. Hardman asked if she thought they would exceed the budget next year by this much. Ms. Saunders stated that she hoped so, but they wanted to remain conversative with projections.

## **2021-2022 Capital Outlay Revenue Budget**

Mrs. Cubbedge shared the Capital Outlay Revenue Budget for the upcoming school year that was approved by the School Board last week. She stated that the debt service is paid first. Under the heading, Meet the Needs of an Increasing Student Population, there is the savings for future school construction/expansion. She stated that the expansion of South Woods Elementary was one of the last projects left on this stipulated list. She further stated that the last item was an elementary school in southern St. Johns County. Mrs. Cubbedge also stated that costs had increased and there was \$106 million in this category with \$93 million having been spent.

Under the heading, Maintain High Quality Educational Facilities, Mrs. Cubbedge noted several roof replacements such as Osceola Elementary School, Sebastian Middle School and Pedro Menendez High School. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that \$14 million was budgeted and \$12.9 million has been spent. Mr. Hardman asked if most roofs are typically about \$2 million, and Mrs. Cubbedge answered that for middle and elementary schools that \$2 million was typical.

The next category is Provide New Technology to Prepare Children for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that a lot of funds were spent in this category last year, so the amount is smaller this year. She further stated that last year the teacher refresh was done with the old teacher laptops being recycled to students. She also noted that additional funds were for growth but that there are not a lot of computers available so those computers should carry the district for the next few years. She stated that this category was budgeted at \$25 million and \$16.8 million was spent. She stated that the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) had asked that the technology be stepped up and their request was done. Ms. Lovett asked how transportation technology fit in this category. Mrs. Cubbedge answered that the students needed to get to school to learn and that the technology that the transportation department had been using was outdated and also with growth that an update to a more automated system was needed. Ms. Lovett expressed that she felt it was more a safety issue than technology issue. Mrs. Cubbedge further explained that these funds also included computers for the employees in the Transportation department, so these computers were for the technology part of the Transportation department.

The next category is Continue to Keep Children Safe which was budgeted at \$2.6 million. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that these funds included the Centegix mobile panic alarm badges. Mrs. Cubbedge explained that after the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School tragedy, the State Legislature set up a commission to review better ways to raise alarms than just the front office. She further explained that the Legislature mandated a system be in place and offered some funding. Mrs. Cubbedge explained that the funding was not sufficient to do what the district felt was appropriate. The Legislature suggested using an app for cell phones for alerts, but this system would rely on an individual user's cell phone and the district does not provide cell phones to employees. This system would also require cell service to be available everywhere in the building. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that there are dead spots in the buildings, and it would be costly to make sure the app works everywhere as well as working with all the different cell phone carriers. The School Board felt it was not the best option but they did like the Centegix system where everyone

wears a badge around their neck. There would be different codes for different emergencies, and it would notify the front office and would not require cell phones. She stated that this system is more expensive and is more of a true emergency response system. The cost is approximately \$1.4 million for three (3) years. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that the School Board would be appreciative of the CAC's support. This category also includes security cameras and door access and other school security improvements as well as the Zonar school bus GPS Technology which tracks the buses. This category also includes the Mobile Eye Pilot which includes cameras and sensors and will help the buses navigate around things. The sensors will alert the driver. Ms. Connor asked how many buses will be covered under the pilot program. Mr. Rose answered that it was ten (10) or more. Ms. Connor then asked about the full cost if the whole fleet was equipped with it and Mr. Rose stated that he would get back to the committee with that information. Ms. Connor stated that she knew it was hard to hire bus drivers so maybe this system would help in hiring potential bus drivers. Mr. Rose stated that when they added air conditioning that it was more attractive to drivers and that buses have gotten more sophisticated but there are more distractions, so they decided to do the pilot program before putting it on all the buses. Mr. Hardman stated that these alarm badges would work to help renew the half-cent sales surtax with voters when the State did not provide a workable solution, but the sales tax funds helped to fund a better solution. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that the amount was a three (3) year number. Mr. Hardman stated that it would help with voters and Mrs. Cubbedge stated that it was a far better solution.

Mr. Lasswell stated that the design of the parent pickup (PPU) at Toco Creek High School (TCHS) was amazing and had great flow. Mrs. Cubbedge thanked him and said that they try to improve PPU each time and she would pass along his comments.

Ms. Connor said she was happy to see the numbers from Ms. Saunders even in the pandemic. She stated that many schools are facing critical staffing shortages and she asked if when the renewal is up for the facilities portion of the half-cent sales surtax if they could address salaries and professional development for teachers and the labor shortage. Mrs. Cubbedge explained that the process to get on the ballot is different and must be done during a general election. Mr. Hardman stated that he liked this idea.

### **Public Comment**

Ms. Little called in to the meeting via phone. She asked how the plans were coming along for SilverLeaf. Mrs. Cubbedge explained that there were three (3) schools as part of their mitigation package and the district is starting to feel the impact. She said she has referred to SilverLeaf as the "sleeping giant". She further stated that there is no specific timeframe, but they do have sites for the future. Ms. Little stated that yes, it is a massive area.

### **Next Meeting Date/Time**

The next meeting will be held on Monday, December 20, 2021, at 4:00pm. The format and/or location to be determined. Mr. Hardman stated that at the December meeting, the committee would

look at the draft presentation to take to the School Board in January. Mrs Cubbedge stated in the affirmative.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:06pm with a motion by Ms. Lovett and seconded by Ms. Connor.

Minutes submitted by Judith Harvey