

# Half-Cent Sales Surtax Citizens Advisory Committee

## Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 19, 2022

### Opening

The regular meeting of the Half-Cent Sales Surtax Citizen Advisory Committee was called to order at 4:02p.m. on Monday, December 19, 2022, St. Johns County School District, The Fullerwood Training Center, 10 Hildreth Drive, St. Augustine, FL by Mr. Hardman, Chairman.

### Attendance

CAC Members--Present: Ed Albanesi, Damian Cook, Jack Hardman, Richa Jeetah, Elena Laguardia, John Lasswell, Kim McManus, Virginia Morgan, Norvie Veracruz and Linda Villadoniga. Alternates: Michelle Dillon. Absent: Susan Connor, Amy Lasswell, Jason Lewis, Barbara Little, Terence Mahoney, Javelyn Arvay, Derek Barrs, Mary Ford and Dr. William McCormick.

School District staff--Present: Nicole Cubbedge, Mike Degutis, Gretchen Saunders, Paul Rose, Mike Strausbaugh, Elizabeth Moore, and Judith Harvey.

Public Attendees--None.

### Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the September 19, 2022, regular meeting were then approved with a motion by Mr. Albanesi and seconded by Ms. Morgan. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

### Project Reporting

Mrs. Cubbedge presented the project reporting by stating that a lot of projects for safety and security had been funded by the half-cent sales surtax. She then introduced Mr. Mike Strausbaugh who is the School Safety Specialist for the district. She stated that Mr. Strausbaugh had recently presented at the FOCUS group meeting which is made up of parents and she thought the committee would enjoy seeing the presentation and meeting Mr. Strausbaugh.

Mr. Strausbaugh explained that he was the School Safety Specialist for the district and after Parkland, each school district in Florida was required statutorily to have a school safety specialist to work with first responders and to follow legislation. Mr. Strausbaugh gave a synopsis of his

background as a deputy sheriff. During his time with the Sheriff's department, he worked with the Youth Resource Deputies (YRD) and also with the PAL program. Next, he presented the District Safety & Security Assessment power point for 2022-2023. He gave a broad overview of the Florida Safe School Assessment Tool (FSSAT) and the items included in that list. He stated that all of these items were to be complete and submitted to the Department of Education (DOE) by October 1, 2022. He explained that in May and June, he and other first responders assessed campuses as far as safety and security. He said this list is protected by public record for security purposes. Ms. Morgan asked about the role of the Public Services Assistants (PSA). Mr. Strausbaugh explained that the deputies must go to the Police Academy and pass a test, but the PSA is used for non-emergency calls which helps the deputies. He said they usually handle traffic control which is critical around schools. Next, he reviewed the program costs and discussed the Safe School Allocation from the State but that the St. Johns County School District covers the difference.

Next, Mr. Strausbaugh discussed the School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting (SESIR) which are incidents that are mandated to be reported. He explained that the State monitors districts to make sure they are compliant. Mr. Hardman asked the nature of the top incidents that were being reported. Mr. Strausbaugh stated that vaping is number one and they have seen an explosion of it over the last 1 ½ years.

The Active Assailant/Hostile Intruder component was the next item on the list presented by Mr. Strausbaugh. He stated that all of the staff at the schools are trained. He further stated that drills are mandated so if there is one fire drill each month, then there will be an Active Assailant/Hostile Intruder drill each month. He stated that then the staff and students are trained to react. He stated that there are districtwide standards and non-negotiables. He does spot checks for these components. He stated that the DOE also has oversight, and they will come in unannounced to check on these components. Next, he reviewed the ALERT document which has the following options: A – Assess, L – Lockdown, E – Evade, R – Resist, and T – Tell. He also stated that each school has a Threat Assessment Team. Ms. Jeetah asked about an incident at Valley Ridge Academy and Mr. Strausbaugh said there was no threat and that to keep in mind that social media often gets a hold of these things.

Next, Mr. Strausbaugh reviewed the app available on cell phones named FortifyFL in which anyone can post an anonymous tip. He then reviewed the Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMFHA) which is a big issue. He said the goal was to have 80% of school personnel trained in YMFHA by July 1, 2023.

He also noted that with the FSSAT, they conduct campus tours. It is mandated but the funds have been reduced each year even though it is mandated. He stated that half-cent sales surtax is very important in helping with the funding needed for these items.

He next reviewed the Centegix Mobile Panic Alert system. He stated that the State chose seven applications for a schoolwide notification system but most of these seven applications were cell phone applications. He stated that these applications have a low adoption rate where the staff does not put the application on their phone. He explained that Centegix is more costly and was half-

cent sales surtax funded and that the teachers love it. He said the button can be pushed 3 times for staff assist. Or the button can be pushed 8 times for an active shooter situation. He stated that when the button is pushed 8 or more times, the strobes will go off and the system will take over the PA system and also message the Sheriff's office. Every staff that is full-time will have a panic alarm. He presented a video for the committee to see what happens when the button is pushed. He further explained that there have been some false alarms but part of the training is how to handle a stressful incident so there are growing pains. He stated that they try to gently remind the staff because they do not want to scare them off from using the alarm. Mr. Hardman asked what happens if the button is pushed nine times. Mr. Strausbaugh stated that it doesn't matter because the button is activated once they have pushed it eight times. He said he has instructed staff to keep pushing the button until the strobes go off.

He then reviewed the Single Point of Entry (SPOE) and stated that the DOE really likes it. He stated that the half-cent sales surtax really helped with this item. He stated that all exterior doors are locked, and any visitor must push the button to get in. He further stated that this locks visitors in certain areas before they can access the school. He explained that the district's job is to slow people down and make it hard for them to get in. He also explained that the half-cent sales surtax funds were very important since the funding from the State is never sufficient for these items. Ms. Laguardia asked if there was a way to keep the alarm from going off in public areas. Mr. Strausbaugh explained that the panic button sets the whole system off, including strobes and taking over the computers, so there are multiple ways that everyone is alerted.

## **Financial Reporting**

Mrs. Saunders gave the financial report. She began by reviewing the Sales Tax Receipts for 2022-2023. The report shows receipts from July, August, and September as well as the September quarterly amounts. She explained that the bold numbers are actual receipts, and the non-bold numbers are budgeted amounts. Mr. Hardman noted that when the sales tax was passed, \$13 million was projected but the proceeds have almost doubled since the inception of the half-cent sales surtax. He also noted that costs have increased. Next, Mrs. Saunders reviewed the charts of the Monthly Sales Tax Revenue and the Quarterly Sales Tax Revenue as well as the combined chart of the Monthly/Quarterly Sales Tax Revenue. Mr. Hardman noted that the monthly sales tax revenue directly relates to the economy here in St. Johns County. Mr. Hardman also noted that there has been a lot of press about a recession with a hard or soft landing and he asked about contingency plans if the revenue does not come in. Mrs. Saunders explained that the conservative projections were done with just this event in mind and that is why the staff has stayed conservative with projections. She next reviewed the Summary of Fund Sources and Uses as of November 30, 2022, with Capital Projects and Debt Service. Mrs. Cubbedge explained that in the category, Savings for Future School Construction/Expansion, that two items were included in this category. These two items are the South Woods Elementary School expansion and the elementary school slated for the southern part of the county. Mr. Cook asked if the \$35 million was the amount at the end of this budget year and Mrs. Saunders answered in the affirmative. Mr. Cook then asked where the amount stood at currently. Mrs. Moore checked and stated that the actual funds in that

fund at this time was \$31 million. Mr. Cook asked if that fund was part of any contingency plan should the economy be decimated and could that fund be utilized. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that the list would need to be finished first since a promise was made to the community. Mr. Cook then stated that the good news was that the receipts were way over budget. Mr. Degutis noted that the budgeting was at 3% annually so there was a kind of built-in reserve. He further stated that there had been some pressure to increase projections, but the decision was made to stay conservative. Mrs. Saunders noted that Mrs. Cubbedge and Mr. Rose were working on the new K-8 schools. Mr. Hardman asked about the cost of these new K-8 schools as far as in relation to previous K-8 schools. Mr. Rose stated that Pine Island Academy was under \$40 million and the new K-8 School OO was about \$65 million. Mr. Cook asked if the staff could prepare a visualization of annualized receipts. He felt that would be very helpful to the committee.

### **Presentation of Draft Annual Report**

Mr. Hardman reviewed the requirement of the Annual Report that is submitted to the School Board every year in January. He explained that he and Mrs. Cubbedge felt that more detail needed to be added to the Annual Report since this year is the 7<sup>th</sup> year of the half-cent sales surtax. He said if the School Board decided to pursue the half-cent sales surtax again, this information would be helpful to highlight the specific successes of the sales tax. Mrs. Cubbedge then reviewed the draft Annual Report and she also stated that this presentation is a draft so adjustments can be made. The Annual Report begins with the history of the sales tax and the requirement for the Annual Report to be presented every January to the School Board. Next, she reviewed the selection of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). She then reviewed the current slate of members. She also asked if they could let her know if they would like to continue on the committee if their term is up. She then reviewed the expenditures of the sales tax and also the Critically Needed Project List. The original estimate was \$150 million. The list began with a bond of \$50 million. As of January 2023, the amounts spent are close to or have exceeded the original budgeted amounts. She then reviewed a new section in the Annual Report titled Projects Completed as of 2022 Annual Report. This list included building new schools, expansions, roof replacements (which were done all across the county), other facility/site improvements, technology and safety and security. She noted that this list would demonstrate that the district has been busy and promises to the community are being kept. Mr. Hardman asked about the replacement cost of the roofs. Mrs. Cubbedge explained that each phase of a roof project is about \$1 million and that most roofs had 2 phases. She further explained that the district was doing roof projects, but the sales tax has enabled them to push through these roofing projects faster.

Mrs. Cubbedge then reviewed what has been done with the 2021-2022 budget. Under the category, Meet the Needs of an Increasing Student Population, she noted that the South Woods Elementary School expansion has encountered some issues related to water and sewer, but they are working through those issues. She also stated that the future construction was slated for the next elementary school, Elementary School N. Under the category, Maintain High Quality Educational Facilities, she explained that there are more roof projects which will spread throughout the county. The next category is Provide New Technology to Prepare Children for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning. Under this

category, funds were provided for student and teacher computers and also technology for the Transportation department. The category entitled Continue to Keep Children Safe included doors, cameras, Zonar bus technology and the Mobil Eye Pilot for Transportation. In this category were technology items such as wireless display devices, the Centegix panic alarm system, security cameras and door access. She stated that they could not put a lot of information into this category in order to keep these items secure. Mr. Rose explained that the Mobil Eye Pilot was just a pilot, and they are still evaluating it.

The financial reports previously shared by Mrs. Saunders was next in the Annual Report. Next, the 2022-2023 budget is listed in the Annual Report. Mrs. Cubbedge reviewed each slide beginning with the revenue projections and the debt service. She then reviewed each category. Under the Technology category, she noted that there would be funds for wifi, network switches, and sound upgrades. Under the Safety and Security category, she noted that they would need to add more Centegix for new schools and new relocatables. She also discussed the Zpass pilot which is a badge that is swiped when a student gets on and off the bus which helps in tracking students. It is also helpful with making sure they are on the correct bus. She also noted though, that with the little ones, there have been questions about whether the student should handle the badge or attach it to their backpack, so there are a lot of little pieces to it.

Mrs. Cubbedge then asked for any questions or comments before it is presented to the School Board in January. Mr. Hardman stated that he will be presenting the Annual Report to the School Board, and he encourages the committee to come. Mr. Cook asked for a breakdown of what has been spent with the sales tax funds by each School Board Member's district. Mrs. Cubbedge said that for specific projects that would be easy, but, for example, the single point of entry projects that it would be harder. She stated that the whole county has benefitted from the sales tax and that she is not sure they can have that ready by January 10<sup>th</sup>, but they will work on it. Mr. Hardman stated that information would be nice to have if the School Board decides to do the sales tax again. Mr. Cook agreed and said it would show how well the funds have been spent. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that the staff would work on it. Mr. Hardman also stated that it would be nice to show the needs met in all of the districts, even though there has been high growth in certain areas.

### **Public Comment**

None.

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

The next meeting will be held on Monday, March 20, 2023, at 4:00pm at the Fullerwood Training Center, 10 Hildreth Drive, St. Augustine, FL 32084.

## **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:38pm with a motion by Mr. Cook and seconded by Mr. Albanesi.

Minutes submitted by Judith Harvey.