

Half-Cent Sales Surtax Citizens Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 18, 2023

Opening

The regular meeting of the Half-Cent Sales Surtax Citizen Advisory Committee was called to order at 4:05p.m. on Monday, December 18, 2023, 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, Michelle Dillon, Jack Hardman, Richa Jeetah, Elena Laguardia, Amy Lasswell, John Lasswell, Jason Lewis, Kim McManus, and Jen Stevenson. Alternates: Heather Barnes and Virginia Morgan. Absent: Damian Cook, Barbara Little, Terence Mahoney, Norvie Veracruz, Javelyn Arvay, Derek Barrs, and Dr. William McCormick.

School District staff--Present: Nicole Cubbedge, Mike Degutis, Gretchen Saunders, Paul Rose, Christina Upchurch, Brennan Asplen, Elizabeth Moore, Logan Lowery and Judith Harvey.

Public Attendees—Kevin Sweeny.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the September 18, 2023, regular meeting were then approved with a motion by Mr. Lewis and seconded by Ms. McManus. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

Financial Reporting

Mrs. Saunders gave the financial report. She reviewed the 23-24 tax receipts and also the actual versus projected receipts. Mr. Hardman asked about the approximate total revenues and Mrs. Saunders stated that she would review those slides after this part of the presentation. She also reviewed the interest earned. Next, Mrs. Saunders reviewed the monthly sales tax revenue with a graph illustrating each year. She noted that August and September had lower sales tax revenue due to the sales tax holiday and the lower number of visitors. Next, she reviewed the quarterly sales tax revenue and the Summary of Funds with Sources and Uses. Next, Mrs. Saunders reviewed the handout regarding tax revenue from 2015 to 2023. Mr. Hardman asked about estimated revenues for this year and Mrs. Saunders replied that it was in the 2023 budget. Ms.

Laguardia commended Mrs. Saunders on her presentation at Nease HS SAC. She said there was a lot of positive feedback.

Annual Report

Mrs. Cubbedge presented a draft of the annual report. She explained that the by-laws of the committee required the CAC to give an annual report to the School Board. She said that until last year, the report was essentially the same but last year, she put information in about everything that has been done with the sales tax since there were new School Board members. She also stated that Mr. Hardman typically presents the annual report at the School Board meeting. She also explained that in June, the staff presented information to the School Board that contained over 100 slides of information. She further explained that this presentation showed the promises made and how these promises are being kept and why there was a need to continue with the sales tax in the future. She stated staff proposed to the School Board to ask again for the sales tax and additional millage and there is a group working on this proposal. She also explained that the laws have changed and that if St. Johns County School District (SJCSD) wants to keep the sales tax then it does need to be on the ballot in 2024, in the general election. She also explained that SJCSD employees can only educate on these ballot items. Mrs. Cubbedge then asked if they would like to phrase the annual report differently. She prepared a draft annual report similar to the one presented to the School Board in June with a list of promises kept which is more like the annual report from last year. She stated that she still has some pictures to sort through for the report. She also stated that they kept projections low and very conservative. She also listed original and budgeted amounts. Mr. Hardman asked about 2 new schools. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that there was the South Woods Elementary School (SWES) expansion and then a new elementary school slated for the southern part of the county. Mr. Hardman asked if roofs run about \$2 million each. Mrs. Cubbedge replied that if the roofs were two phases, then that amount is about correct. Ms. Laguardia asked about improvements to Murray Middle School. Mrs. Cubbedge explained that most of those improvements were cosmetic.

Mrs. Cubbedge then asked the committee for their thoughts on the annual report. A discussion ensued regarding how to handle the School Board presentation and thoughts and ideas about the annual report. Mr. Lewis stated that the presentation was good, but he suggested adding the handout from Mrs. Saunders. There were discussions about the number of pictures to be displayed and whether each school should be listed with improvements made to that school. Other suggestions consisted of information about what would have happened had the sales tax not passed the first time. Discussions also ensued regarding the timeframe of the annual report being presented in January and the impending deadline of the sales tax. Mrs. Cubbedge also explained that they would continue to spend the sales tax revenue after the deadline. Ms. Morgan asked about “shovel in the ground” projects before next year for the expansion or the new elementary school. Mrs. Cubbedge said that the expansion at SWES was finally moving forward, and they hoped to be moving forward on the new elementary school in the southern part of the county. Ms. McManus asked about the location of this school and Mrs. Cubbedge said they were working on it. Ms. Laguardia suggested having visuals of the SWES expansion and of the new school even if

not sited yet. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that they could show a prototype for the expansion at SWES which would be like the expansion done at Crookshank Elementary School. She also said it would be a good idea to show a prototype. Dr. Asplen stated that it would be good to speak to how to keep the sales tax moving. Mr. Lewis agreed and said it would be good to add at the end about keeping the sales tax going. Ms. Jeetah also suggested listing the projects that would be needed and why there is the need to continue the sales tax for these future needs. Mrs. Cubbedge noted that the School District had not had to defer any projects yet due to the sales tax. She also noted that there will need to be a list of projects like the critically needed projects list on the first surtax initiative. She gave the example of Centegix. If the sales tax did not pass, then other things would need to be given up in order to keep Centegix. Dr. Asplen noted that the School District would need to show things that were done and what it might have looked like if the sales tax had not passed. Mr. Degutis noted that the School District needs others to speak about the sales tax and the promises that were made and kept. He also stated that the message needs to be positive. There was another discussion about keeping the message positive as well as reiterating points such as keeping up with maintenance and also safety projects which is important to parents.

Mr. Hardman asked other CAC members to come to the School Board meeting so they can discuss how schools were impacted. He also said they could consolidate some items with just some data and Mrs. Cubbedge said she would make some tweaks. She also suggested just using the total revenue collected sheet and what had been done with it. She further suggested that Mr. Hardman do the presentation and other committee members can make comments. Ms. McManus asked about a link to the sales surtax website. Mrs. Cubbedge explained that the whole website was being overhauled.

Public Comment

None.

Next Meeting Date/Time

The next meeting will be held on Monday, March 18, 2024, at 4:00pm with location to be determined due to the Fullerwood Training Center being used as a polling location.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:03pm with a motion by Mr. Albanesi and seconded by Mr. Lewis.

Minutes submitted by Judith Harvey.