

Half-Cent Sales Surtax Citizens Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 17, 2024

Opening

The regular meeting of the Half-Cent Sales Surtax Citizen Advisory Committee was called to order at 4:02p.m. on Monday, June 17, 2024, St. Johns County School District, The Fullerwood Training Center, 10 Hildreth Drive, St. Augustine, FL by Mr. Lewis, Chairman.

Attendance

CAC Members--Present: Ed Albanesi, Damian Cook, Alice Flores, Richa Jeetah, Elena Laguardia, Amy Lasswell, John Lasswell, Jason Lewis, Barbara Little, Kim McManus, and Norvie Veracruz. Alternates: Virginia Morgan. Absent: Kate Dowdie, Jack Hardman, Terence Mahoney, Jen, Stevenson, Javelyn Arvay, Heather Barnes, Derek Barrs, and Dr. William McCormick.

School District staff--Present: Nicole Cubbedge, Mike Degutis, Brennan Asplen, Logan Lowery, and Judith Harvey.

Public Attendees—None.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the March 18, 2024, regular meeting were then approved with a motion by Mr. Lewis and seconded by Ms. Little. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

Financial Reporting

The financial reporting was presented by Mr. Degutis on behalf of Mrs. Saunders. Mr. Degutis reviewed the sales tax receipts. He stated that the actual receipts were in bold. He further stated that the interest accrued was through May 31, 2024. Next, he reviewed the monthly graphs of sales tax revenue. He noted that the 22-23 and 23-24 year seemed to mirror each other or were very close. He also noted that the sales tax receipts increased in December due to Night of Lights as well as in March with festivals and spring break. He then reviewed the quarterly sales tax revenue chart which showed an increase in the last two quarters. He stated that these funds were sales tax that was paid in a different county but was for something used in St. Johns County such as a car. Last, he reviewed the combination of the quarterly and monthly sales tax graphs. Next, he reviewed the Summary of Funds which is the Sources and Uses of the sales tax receipts. He

noted that these numbers were projected through June 30, 2024. Mr. Lewis asked if it was \$60 million for schools and then \$10 million left for other projects and Mr. Degutis responded in the affirmative. Ms. Morgan asked if the \$5.3 million goes to debt service and Mr. Degutis responded in the affirmative. Mr. Lewis asked for clarification if these funds were new money and not from earlier this year. Mr. Degutis replied that these were projections for April to June and not actual receipts. Mrs. Cubbedge noted that people always ask that if the receipts are higher, then why does the District continue to offer modest projections. Mr. Degutis stated that the District wants to remain conservative in its projections so that it can always be said that there is an excess instead of saying that the projection was not made. Thus, the District has kept the projection at a 3% annual increase.

Ms. Morgan asked about another school being built and the funds for that school as well as construction costs going up and land values. Ms. Flores asked if \$60 million was for one school. Mrs. Cubbedge noted that these funds were savings for future needs. She stated that the first item would be a school but also hopefully for other things. She stated that the bids for the next two schools, QQ and RR, hovered around \$60 million but they did not go up as much. Ms. Morgan asked if the site for the southern elementary school has been identified and Mrs. Cubbedge said they are getting closer. Mr. Lewis asked if the goal was to start building the elementary school in the southern part of the county before the end of the sales tax. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that the plan was to site it and get construction started so it is visible. Mr. Lewis stated that it would be a good idea to go to the ballot with a tangible idea of it. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that they are working hard on it. Ms. Morgan asked if it would be a K-5 and not a K-8. Mrs. Cubbedge answered in the affirmative and stated that there could also be land cost. Ms. Little asked if the growth in Nocatee and SilverLeaf was fairly stable, and Mrs. Cubbedge stated that it was not. Ms. Little asked if the Shearwater school was opening and Mrs. Cubbedge stated in the affirmative. She said it was named Trout Creek Academy (TCA) and their mascot is the Terrapins. The school will open in August. She stated that the school would help with growth in Shearwater. She also stated that another K-8, Lakeside Academy (LA), will also open in August located in the Beacon Lakes area and their mascot is the Sasquatch. Ms. Little asked about another school in Nocatee and Mrs. Cubbedge stated the school will be RR which is scheduled to open in August 2026 which will help with Pine Island Academy (PIA) and the overcrowding there. Ms. Little then asked about SilverLeaf and Mrs. Cubbedge stated that school will be QQ and is also scheduled to open in 2026 as well. Ms. Morgan asked for clarification on the letters and numbers of the schools and Mrs. Cubbedge stated that NN is now Trout Creek Academy which opens in August. OO is Lakeside Academy which opens in August as well. PP is located in RiverTown and will open in August of 2025 and is under construction. QQ will be in SilverLeaf and is scheduled to open in August 2026 and the bid was just awarded. RR will be in Nocatee and is scheduled to open also in August 2026. Ms. Morgan stated also that the elementary in the southern part of the county will be somewhere by then also.

Project Reporting

Mrs. Cubbedge presented the project reporting. She gave an update on the classroom expansion at South Woods Elementary School. She stated that the expansion would be a two-story, ten (10) classroom expansion with a teacher planning/extended learning area. She said there would be upgrades to the existing interior and exterior lighting to LED as well as a chiller upgrade. She further stated that there would be site work to include additional parking and revisions to the parent pick-up loop. She stated that it would be go to bid/permit in the summer of 2024 and construction would begin in the fall of 2024 or winter 2025. She said the project should be complete by the second semester of 2025. She further stated that there would be no rezoning since the students have been in relocatables on the site. She stated that the floor plan is based one-half on Palencia Elementary School (PES) and one-half on Picolata Crossing Elementary School (PCES) and also like the addition at Crookshank Elementary School (CES). She noted that the 2nd floor will house older students and the colors will build on the colors at South Woods Elementary School (SWES) but more modern. Ms. Laguardia asked if it is attached to the existing school or across the parking lot. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that when you are looking at SWES, it is on the right side, in front. She said there would be a covered walkway towards 206 and will be in a fully secured, fenced area.

Mr. Lewis stated that he had discussed the new referendum and millage with Nicole and the decision was made to put the education regarding these measures on hold until after the primary election. He stated that if anyone on the committee would like to talk to groups about these measures to please contact Mrs. Cubbedge. Mr. Lewis stated that he had volunteered, and Mr. Cook stated that he would volunteer as well. Mr. Degutis stated that they are willing to talk to any group and that the expansion at SWES is an example of a promise made and a promise kept. Ms. Jeetah suggested using social media to also educate on the sales tax and to highlight the funds spent in the schools, possibly using principals. Mrs. Cubbedge said that using social media was a good idea and they would work on the social media aspect but need to be careful using principals. Mr. Degutis encouraged comments and ideas and stated that the District would take them into consideration. Then, a discussion followed regarding the use of social media with the marketing academies at the high schools designing presentations on different platforms and using the staff at different schools to personalize the presentation. Ms. Lasswell noted that the only concern would be to not lose control of the conversation. Ms. Morgan stated that the message would need to be customized to the audience. Ms. Flores stated that the video would tell a story. She said she does fundraising and that there is the need to marry emotion with logic and to use promotional videos with independent meetings to help tell the story. Ms. Lassell asked about going to SAC meetings and if the committee should go to them in different locations. Mr. Lewis stated in the affirmative and maybe have little cheat sheets.

Mr. Lasswell asked if the millage is separate from the sales tax. Mr. Degutis answered in the affirmative. He stated there are two different issues with a symbiotic relationship but both of equal importance. Mr. Cook noted that the District can build schools but will need personnel to run the schools. A discussion ensued regarding building schools but needing personnel and also the need to be competitive with other districts offering bonuses to teachers as well as the struggle to keep veteran teachers. Dr. Asplen explained that the DROP (Deferred Retirement Option Program)

program has now been extended which will boost veteran teachers but there is also the concern of cost of living. Ms. Little noted that she was not aware of the two-part ballot but she would like a flyer to present to various boards on which she serves. The discussion then concerned educating senior citizens who may not have children/grandchildren in the schools. There was also discussion regarding the funding of charter schools which may come up in discussions. Mr. Cook noted that it needed to be known how well the District runs things but they need the tools. Ms. Laguardia said they needed accurate numbers on the impact of the charter school vouchers and how many students we are losing. Mrs. Cubbedge said that the District received the last calculation but they don't have all that information. Mr. Degutis added that the Department of Education (DOE) did not know themselves the full impact of the vouchers.

Public Comment

None.

Next Meeting Date/Time

The next meeting will be held on Monday, September 16, 2024, at 4:00pm, St. Johns County School District, The Fullerwood Training Center, 10 Hildreth Drive, St. Augustine, Florida.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15pm with a motion by Mr. Cook and seconded by Ms. Morgan.

Minutes submitted by Judith Harvey.