

Half-Cent Sales Surtax Citizens Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 16, 2024

Opening

The regular meeting of the Half-Cent Sales Surtax Citizen Advisory Committee was called to order at 4:07p.m. on Monday, December 16, 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, Richa Jeetah, Elena Laguardia, Amy Lasswell, John Lasswell, Jason Lewis, Barbara Little, and Kim McManus. Alternates: None. Absent: Kate Dowdie, Alice Flores, Jack Hardman, Terence Mahoney, Jen Stevenson, Norvie Veracruz, Javelyn Arvay, Heather Barnes, Derek Barrs, Dr. William McCormick and Virginia Morgan.

School District staff--Present: Nicole Cubbedge, Brennan Asplen, Paul Rose, Cathy Weber, Stephen Pauly, Elizabeth Moore and Judith Harvey.

Public Attendees—Charlena Retkowski.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the September 16, 2024, regular meeting were then approved with a motion by Mr. Cook and seconded by Ms. Little. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

Discussion of Referendum Approval

Mrs. Cubbedge thanked the committee and the community for passing the referendum. Mr. Cook stated that the District staff does their job well so everyone was comfortable with working on it and the District did an awesome job. Mrs. Little thanked Dr. Asplen, Mr. Degutis and Mrs. Slough. Mrs. Cubbedge announced to the committee that Mr. Degutis is retiring, so this meeting is his last CAC meeting. She then stated that the last half-cent sales surtax referendum had a critically needed project list which is almost done. She then explained that this time they did not put a list out, but they did keep the categories. She asked the committee how they wanted to move forward. For example, should they survey the community, or should the CAC solicit a list? Mr. Lewis stated that a survey might be helpful and then put some ideas together from the survey. He added

that it would need to be a precise survey. Mr. Cook concurred on the survey and suggested sending it to PTOs and administrators at schools. He noted the focus could change, for example, with school security which could be driven by a security assessment. Or they could shift to other priorities such as traffic at schools. Ms. Laguardia asked about canvassing the community, SAC, PTO and gather the information and ask for input. She stated that those groups could list important items and then check them off. Mr. Lewis stated that there should still be equity across the county. Mr. Lasswell indicated that the arts need funding, for example. Mrs. Cubbedge noted that program enhancements is in the millage and that the District cannot cross the line between operating and capital. Mrs. Cubbedge informed the committee that Mr. Rose is retiring. Mr. Rose introduced Mr. Pauly, Director for Facilities and Construction. Mr. Lewis thanked Mr. Rose for his service.

Financial Reporting

Mrs. Weber introduced herself and then presented the financial report. She reviewed slides of the 24-25 Sales Tax Receipts and noted the debt interest and principal. She reviewed the projections of \$24.6 million. She also noted that so far \$9.3 million has been collected with interest earned of \$2.3 million. Next, Mrs. Weber reviewed the graphs of Monthly Sales Tax Revenue, and she noted the trend is similar to other years. She then reviewed the Quarterly Sales Tax Revenue and the then the graph of the Monthly and Quarterly Sales Tax Revenue. Mr. Cook asked about the actuals for the year/quarter, so Mrs. Weber reviewed the actual versus projected numbers. Next, Mrs. Weber reviewed the Summary of Funds with Sources and Uses. She noted that rates went up, so the interest went up. Ms. Laguardia asked if they will maintain categories for roofs, renovations, etc and Mrs. Cubbedge answered in the affirmative. Mrs. Laguardia also asked about the critically needed projects. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that they would spend a certain amount in each category. She stated that these specifics were not put in the second referendum, but they could include them. She further stated that the District wants to be transparent and good stewards. Mrs. Laguardia asked if it would be category driven but no caps and Mrs. Cubbedge stated that there is some flexibility once they have collected more funds. She further noted that they need to review what pieces to keep and specifics and what is needed now. Mr. Cook asked about having buckets and then having a list and see which bucket it will fall into so it would be more project-driven than by bracket. Mrs. Cubbedge said the buckets are most important and especially technology and security. Mr. Cook stated then the list could be prioritized.

Annual Report

Mrs. Cubbedge reviewed the annual report which will be presented to the School Board in January. She said there were options with the presentation. She stated that the last presentation was lengthy because they reviewed everything for the School Board. She further stated that they could do that again with the whole story or they could cut some pictures and shrink the presentation. Mr. Lewis suggested starting with the shorter version. Mrs. Little stated they could just give a synopsis to the School Board. Mrs. Cubbedge stated it was up to the committee. Mr. Cook and Mr. Lewis said they would present, and then other committee members can speak if they would like. Mrs.

Cubbedge then reviewed the presentation. She noted the history of the half-cent sales surtax as well as the categories and the formation of the CAC committee. She reviewed the critically needed project list and projected revenue. She also discussed new construction and schools being built and also projects completed as of June 2024 and expansions. She also noted that South Woods Elementary School expansion is under construction. She also mentioned future projects such as Elementary N, locker expansions at Bartram Trail HS and Pedro Menendez HS, as well as a charter school on SR 207 which is opening. She stated that funds have been committed to these projects. She also noted that they are still pursuing sites and monitoring growth for Elementary N. Mr. Lewis stated that if they did not need the funds for 3 years then would the funds be held, and Mrs. Cubbedge answered in the affirmative. Mr. Lewis asked if the area of Elementary N was not growing as much, and Mrs. Cubbedge answered in the affirmative. Ms. Laguardia asked if there were not enough students for that school. Mrs. Cubbedge answered that they would need 750 students. She also noted that they were not sure how many families might take advantage of the charter school which is also a factor in the discussion. She stated that they needed to be careful and not have more seats than can afford to operate and be good stewards of the funds, so they are working through all of that information. Mr. Lewis asked if the school should be a K-8 school and if that type of school would be more efficient. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that they would need to build an elementary school because the zoning of a K-8 would be more complicated. She stated that the District is committed to the school. Ms. Laguardia asked if it was ever established as to what middle school those students would attend. Mrs. Cubbedge said that it was only listed as being located in the southern part of the county, but the middle school was not established.

Mrs. Cubbedge also mentioned whole and partial roof replacements with additional replacements. She also referenced completed projects and other facility/site improvements. She stated that technology projects were completed and that there was a teacher computer refresh, so new computers will go to the teachers in the new year. She also listed LED panels, classroom tools, wifi, and network switching as some projects under technology. She also discussed safety and security which included Centegix and other systems. She noted that they surpassed targets in each category. Next, she showed a thank you slide with the notation of promises made and promises kept. Mr. Lewis stated that it shows it all and they can move through them quickly. Mr. Cook noted that it showed \$300 million worth of work. Ms. Laguardia asked about the expectation of the timeframe. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that 2016-2025 was the timeframe and they are working off that list. She stated how they will finish and then move to the next set of promises. Ms. Laguardia noted that 60% of the county voted for it. Mrs. Weber noted that you can look on the Supervisor of Elections webpage for the breakdown of the vote. Mr. Cook noted that more people in the north voted for it, and it was about 50/50 in the southern part of the county. Mr. Lewis told Mrs. Cubbedge that she had done a good job. Mrs. Cubbedge said she would get it ready to go.

Mr. Lewis noted that the next meeting was scheduled for March 17th which was spring break, so he proposed to move the meeting to March 10th and the committee agreed. He also noted that the annual report presentation will be January 14th at 4pm. Mr. Lewis also stated that the District did a great job and to keep up the good work and not lose sight of being responsible for spending.

Public Comment

None.

Next Meeting Date/Time

The next meeting will be held on Monday, March 10, 2025, at 4:00pm, St. Johns County School District, The Fullerwood Training Center, 10 Hildreth Drive, St. Augustine, Florida.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05pm with a motion by Mr. Cook and seconded by Ms. Little.

Minutes submitted by Judith Harvey.