

## **Half-Cent Sales Surtax Citizens Advisory Committee**

### **Meeting Minutes**

Monday, September 15, 2025

#### **Opening**

The regular meeting of the Half-Cent Sales Surtax Citizen Advisory Committee was called to order at 4:06p.m. on Monday, September 15, 2025, St. Johns County School District, The Fullerwood Training Center, 10 Hildreth Drive, St. Augustine, FL by Mr. Cook, Vice Chairman.

#### **Attendance**

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

School District staff--Present: Nicole Cubbedge, Cathy Weber, Steve Cade, Elizabeth Moore, Patrick McGee, Dr. Dresback, and Judith Harvey.

Public Attendees--None.

#### **Approval of Minutes**

Minutes from the March 10, 2025 regular meeting were then approved with a motion by Ms. Laguardia and seconded by Ms. McManus. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

Minutes from the June 16, 2025 regular meeting were then approved with a motion by Ms. Morgan and seconded by Ms. Laguardia. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

#### **Financial Reporting**

Mrs. Weber reviewed the sales tax receipts for 24-25. She also reviewed the four categories that sales tax covers. Next, she reviewed the monthly sales tax revenue. She said there was no dip in the 24-25 sales tax holiday, so it remains to be seen if the new sales tax holiday will have an impact. She then reviewed the quarterly sales tax revenue as well as the quarterly allocation which covers sales tax on items purchased outside of St. Johns County such as a car purchase. There was a 16% increase from 23-24 to 24-25. Next, Mrs. Weber reviewed the combined monthly/quarterly report.

The Summary of Funds Sources and Uses was reviewed next for the period 2015 to 2024-2025. She reviewed the uses. She then reviewed the sources which were broken out with details on the

capital projects. Ms. Morgan asked which schools were “N” and “O”. Mrs. Cubbedge explained that they are not yet built and that “N” is the elementary school slated for the southern part of the county and “O” will be discussed when she discusses the budget. Next, she reviewed amounts actually spent for 24-25 and the numbers budgeted for 25-26. Ms. Morgan asked why the budget for safety was bigger and Mrs. Cubbedge stated that she will review this item when she goes over the budget.

## **Project Reporting**

Mr. Cade presented the project reporting. He showed pictures of the roofing project at Nease High School (NHS) as well as the gym and noted that the project was staying on track. Next, he showed pictures from the Sebastian Middle School (SMS) roofing project and stated that it was ahead of schedule. Mrs. Cubbedge noted that the South Woods Elementary School (SWES) expansion was nearing completion, and they are working on a transition day. She stated that they are working with Curriculum on this transition. She stated that they would probably move into the new building by early January. Mr. Cade also noted that it’s not just the expansion because there have also been some upgrades and renovations to the school as well. Ms. Laguardia asked about the timeline on the roof for NHS. Mr. Cade stated that the roof for NHS was a challenge because of the way it is set up. He stated that they could not do the Auditorium first because students had to be in there. He also stated that they are on track, but they had to make some modifications. He said he will get a timeline for the committee, but they hoped it would be complete by the holidays. At the end of the meeting, Mr. Cade noted that the NHS roof should be complete by the end of December.

## **Half-Cent Sales Surtax Budget for 25-26**

Mrs. Cubbedge presented the Half-Cent Sales Surtax Budget for 25-26. She stated that this budget was just approved last Thursday. She also stated that the District collected more than budgeted and that they keep projections low. The new funds are based on new projections. Mrs. Cubbedge noted that the debt service for Freedom Crossing Academy (FCA) and Picolata Crossing Elementary School (PCES) has to be paid first. Elementary “O” will be the new elementary school for Rivertown. She stated that Rivertown has three (3) school sites which will be two (2) elementary schools and one (1) middle school. The current K-8 school, Hallowes Cove Academy (HCA), will eventually become a middle school. She explained that these sites were set aside prior to the District building K-8s, so this site is small for a K-8 school. Since all of Rivertown was zoned for this school, the District will need to move forward faster with the elementary school. She further stated that the school has been budgeted, so the District will be keeping that promise made to taxpayers. Elementary school “N” has its own budget but \$30 million will not build the whole school. Impact fees and proportionate share mitigation will help with the funding. Mrs. Cubbedge next mentioned the savings for the future as well as maintaining facilities. A part of maintaining facilities is the roofing projects and also the high school fields. Mrs. Cubbedge also noted that James Webster Elementary School (Webster) has gone through some master site

improvements. She stated that there was a road that ran through the property, and they needed to close that road and re-organize the site. The field at Ponte Vedra High School (PVHS) was completed first due to major maintenance for that field. A study was conducted and the District was advised to put in a turf field. They extended the study to other fields and will now examine other high school fields. Mr. Cade stated that every field needs maintenance. Mr. Cade further stated that they will look at all the fields and prioritize them and then identify the next two fields that need maintenance. He noted that Bartram Trail High School's field (BTHS) was built to NFL standards, so they will have to look at those standards. Mr. Cook asked if the study included looking at athlete safety. Mrs. Weber stated in the affirmative and that they brought samples and the fields were engineered with more cushion. Mr. Cade stated that the field was certified. He noted that turf does tend to be hotter, but they used a natural fiber that is cooler. He also noted that the Athletic Director at PVHS was not worried about water and with the rain at this last game, he normally would have cancelled. Ms. Jeetah asked about the cost and Mr. Cade said it was about \$1.8 million so they have set aside \$4 million for the next two fields.

Next, Mrs. Cubbidge stated that some elementary schools did not have covered PE facilities so they did three (3) this year and will work on more. She then reviewed technology with student computers as well as the addition of \$2 million on testing computers. She then invited Patrick McGee from IT to come up and explain the difficulties last year with testing and how these dollars will be utilized to address these issues. Mr. McGee reviewed these issues that began with AP testing. He stated that preparation for this phase of testing began in April. He stated that the majority was successful but there were power issues at one school such as popping breakers at NHS. He stated that this testing was the largest group testing at one time and that even with power upgrades, there was no space left for labs. So, for example, at Tocoi Creek High School (TCHS) they put a power drop in the gym. He stated that they also were purchasing new laptops with better battery life, but he stated that logistics and power would still have been a problem. He stated that they are meeting with school technicians and administrators at the school to see where upgrades are needed. He stated that Windows is upgrading to Windows 11 and that there are machines that are not able to be upgraded so they will need to replenish those machines. Ms. Laguardia asked about the challenges and how many machines will be new. Mr. McGee said that they keep a running spreadsheet of every laptop at every school. He stated they will not use any machines that have not been upgraded. He said they are working through the issue with the battery not lasting and it is on a school-by-school basis. Ms. Laguardia asked if the TCHS dropdown did not work. Mr. McGee stated that it worked but if they lose the use of the gym then they had to deal with computer carts. Ms. Laguardia then asked when students take exams, if they could plug in if possible. He stated that for certain tests they do plug in. Ms. Laguardia stated that she was glad that they were looking at the situation. Mrs. Cubbidge noted that they would replace all the computers for testing but not replace them all at one time so that they do not age out at the same time. Mr. Lasswell asked about the revenue from the ACT/SAT testing. Mr. McGee stated he was not sure about the revenue for becoming a Pearson site, but he said secure settings is an issue. Mr. Cook asked how the information regarding testing issues was communicated out, so everyone would have a basic understanding of the issues. Mr. McGee said that IT does not put that information out to school administration who then issues that information to parents and students. Mr. Cook suggested getting that information out so they can manage expectations in the fall for

the spring. Mr. McGee said they would look at that. He further stated that there will be issues and that he will discuss with the assessment department as well.

Next, Mrs. Cubbedge discussed maintenance. Maintenance conducts life cycle visits at each school. They meet with the Administration and Maintenance manager of the school, and they work to identify safety concerns. Maintenance completes these items. These items are not broadcast, so that weaknesses are not broadcast. The District continues to purchase Centegix. The State pays a portion but not at the level required to fund Centegix. There is some carry forward in the School Security Improvements such that if a big issue were to arise, then it could be covered. Mr. Strausbaugh, the District Safety Director, handles the FSSAT in which he walks around each school with a checklist and identifies things to be addressed. Those items are eligible for state funding, but the funding amounts are small. He works on these small projects that are safety concerns from law enforcement. Zonar, which is the GPS system, is also paid for by half-cent sales surtax funds. It is not the same as Chipmunk which is the system of locating where the buses are on routes. There are also funds designated for additional cameras and access controls which include badge swipes. These items are time-consuming to set up. The budget also includes enhanced stop arms for buses which are flashing lights on the stop arms and these items are needed. Mrs. Cubbedge expressed appreciation to the community for supporting the half-cent sales surtax and the budget for those funds. Mrs. Little asked if safety and security is handled via direct communication with the Sheriff's department. Mrs. Cubbedge answered in the affirmative and noted that there is a YRD at each school and also with the 800-megahertz radios. She noted also that the Centegix badge system as well as the Genetec door access and cameras are all seen by the Sheriff's department. Mrs. Little asked how the YRDs are paid and Mrs. Cubbedge noted that they are paid out of operating funds and also with funds from the State. Mrs. Weber noted that the State gives us \$4 million for safety, and it can be used for salary. The deputies in schools cost over \$6 million. The referendum added an additional \$2.4 million for safety. She also stated that all schools have deputies. Mrs. Little asked about the District developing its own police force. Mrs. Cubbedge stated that it was considered but it would be much more expensive when you consider uniforms, cars, vests, guns, bullets, etc.

### **Introduction of New Member**

Mrs. Cubbedge introduced and welcomed Jeralyn Forcier, who is a new member.

### **Public Comment**

None.

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

The next meeting will be held on Monday, December 15, 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 5:02pm by Mr. Cook.

Minutes submitted by Judith Harvey.