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Commission declares Dixie County as 2nd Amendment Sanctuary; *Special tax assessments reviewed – Tri-County Area*



Dixie County Manager Tim Alexander (left) reads as Dixie County Attorney M. Michael O'Steen looks beyond him during the meeting Thursday morning (Dec. 5).

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Dec. 6, 2019 at 11:19 a.m.

CROSS CITY – The five members of the Dixie County Board of the County Commissioners on Thursday morning (Dec. 5) unanimously declared Dixie County as a Second Amendment Sanctuary.



Two of Dixie County's leaders County Commissioner Gene Higginbotham (left) and of County Commissioner Mark Hatch are seen during the regular twice-monthly meeting Thursday.

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Dixie County Commission Chairman W.C. Mills (left) and Vice Chairman David Osteen are among this county's government leaders, and are seen in action Thursday at the regular meeting that day.



Dixie County Commissioner Jamie Storey (left) and Dixie County Manager Tim Alexander are seen Thursday as they work to help the residents and visitors of the county.

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Providing the press with a requested group photo opportunity are the members of the Dixie County Board of County Commissioners. Seen here immediately after the meeting adjourned on Thursday (Dec. 5) are (from left) Gene Higginbotham, Mark Hatch, Chairman W.C. Mills, Vice Chairman David Osteen and Jamie Storey.

At the request of County Commissioner Mark Hatch, County Attorney M. Michael O’Steen drafted the resolution, which came from a template used around the nation for this type of declaration.

There was one finer point in the Dixie County version, including the space for signatures by each of the five members of this commission – Chairman W.C. Mills, Vice Chairman David Osteen, and commissioners Gene Higginbotham, Mark Hatch and Jamie Storey.

Just as their counterparts in Levy County did two mornings earlier, this set of five elected county leaders made a statement about their support for the amendment to the *United States Constitution* and the *Florida Constitution* in regard to people having the right to bear arms.

Of course, the *United States Constitution* is the foundation for all law in this country. *The First Amendment* to this document supports free speech, a free press, the right to peaceably assemble for redress of the government and the prohibition from the government forcing any or no religion on the populace.

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The first 10 amendments to the *Constitution* are known as *The Bill of Rights*.

Meanwhile, in addition to showing its support for *The Second Amendment*, the Dixie County Commission moved effectively and efficiently through the agenda for the day.

Commissioners mentioned their appreciation for individuals as well as for all of the county employees who work on behalf of the residents and visitors of, and to, Dixie County.

Among the county staff members who spoke Tuesday was Building and Zoning Director Leon Wright. He updated the Commission on progress toward Dixie County property owners being able to secure building permits through an online process. The revisions being completed now even meet the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

(By the way, *HardisonInk.com* recently became ADA compliant. Click [HERE](#) to read that story.)

Commissioners learned about grant opportunities for improving the public libraries in Dixie County, including the potential for funding the construction of a new structure.

Payment for paving and road markings on Dixie County Road 55-A at a cost of \$312,999 was approved Tuesday.

County Manager Timothy W. "Tim" Alexander gave commissioners the update on CR 55-A, as well as speaking with commissioners about boat ramps, parking for boat ramps and certain seawalls.

County Commission Chairman Mills brought up a point where the county may need to perform a better job on collecting payments due.

Dixie County has a very active solid waste satellite transfer site program currently. Each district has at least a couple of places where people can bring their household garbage.

Some residences, businesses and churches, though, use the 90 cans provided by the county, where the county collects that garbage. The fee for the service is \$50 a month.

If all 90 can users paid the fee, it would equal \$4,500 in monthly revenue or \$54,000 a year.

According to what was said Tuesday morning, there are people waiting for use of those cans and that service. There are no more cans available. And some people who are using the cans are delinquent in payment for the service, according to what was said.

Chairman Mills said he wants to be clear that he does not want to take those cans back. He just wants the county to be more assertive in collecting the fees that are due it.

Some of the cans have bottoms that are "gone," County Manager Alexander said, and the county's repairs of those cans have taken them as far as they can go. There is a possibility, Alexander said, that the county will need to buy some number of new replacement cans.

An off-the-cuff estimate or 15 to 18 percent of the can-users not paying for the service shows the county lost at least \$7,000 in revenue annually, if the numbers mentioned Tuesday are correct.

Another funding issue for Dixie County government is the collection of fees from residents and visitors either for parking near to boat ramps, or for launching from, and landing at, certain boat ramps in Dixie County. A plan for an annual sticker to be bought did not get off the ground before, but the County Commission discussed a bit about that program on Tuesday.

Like the garbage can fee collection process, the boat sticker process did not seem to

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reach actionable points at the regular meeting of the Dixie County Commission on Tuesday.

Preliminary work to address special assessment increases is happening in Dixie County.

Special assessments are taxes that are not based on property values, and they are not exempted via Homestead Exemption.

Currently, Dixie County property owners annually pay \$135 per developed parcel for solid waste management (garbage); \$40 per developed parcel for fire protection; \$12 for vacant property; and \$5 for mosquito control – in special assessments beyond the ad valorem amounts based on property value.

Information for the Dixie County current annual special assessment payments came from the County Manager's Office and Dixie County Tax Collector Michelle Cannon.

Currently, Levy County property owners pay \$129 for developed parcels for fire protection; \$12 for undeveloped parcels for fire protection; \$119 for ambulance service; and \$116 for solid waste transfer service (garbage) (and that is when the property owner transports the garbage to a site himself or herself) – in special assessments beyond the ad valorem amounts based on property value. There are also non-residential rates for fire protection and separately ambulance service for commercial, industrial-warehouse and institutional properties, based on a per square-foot assessment, according to information provided by the Levy County Tax Collector's Office.

Information for the Levy County special assessment payments came from a couple of Levy County landowners' two tax bills for developed and undeveloped property (this is on seven lots of combined property unofficially known as The Ink Pad). The Levy County Tax Collector's Office also provided information.

Currently, Gilchrist County property owners annually pay \$80 for developed parcels for fire protection; \$10 for undeveloped parcels for fire protection; and \$80.90 for the landfill – in special assessments beyond the ad valorem amounts based on property value. Ambulance service in Gilchrist County is covered by the ad valorem property taxes. There are subdivisions within Gilchrist County, which pay special assessments for certain road paving serving those property owners; however, those are not countywide fees.

Information for the Gilchrist County payments came from the Gilchrist County Property Appraiser's Office after the Gilchrist County Tax Collector's Office transferred the request for information to that office.

As for the special assessments and the future in Dixie County, Nabors, Giblin & Nickerson, P.A., is a Florida-based law firm that concentrates its practice in representing municipalities, counties, school districts, special districts, and related financial and governmental entities in all areas of local government and state finance and tax law is working with Dixie County on updating the special assessments paid by property owners in the county.

This special assessments' revision process is at an early stage in Dixie County, as County Manager Alexander, Dixie County Emergency Services Chief Darian Brown and others gather the information to create new fees that are up-to-date with costs for services, as well as being fair and equitable to taxpayers.

In other news, among the announcements of meetings and events, County Attorney O'Steen mentioned that the City of Fanning Springs is having a daylong set of festivities on Saturday (Dec. 7) at Fort Fanning.