



DeSoto County

Economic Development Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes - Draft

Thursday, May 22, 2025

8:30 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Mott called the meeting to order at 8:41 a.m.

Present: Asena Mott, Lynn Shelfer and Eric Bautista

Excused: Robert Womack, Mandy Hines, Jacqueline Wolcott, Debbie Wertz, Janet Harvin, Jessica Wilkes, Andrew Neuhofer and Beth Carsten

MINUTES APPROVAL

Minutes of March 27, 2025

Ms. Mott noted that the March 27 meeting minutes were missing the list of attendees. Attendees from the meeting were reviewed and updated.

Members were asked to review the minutes from the last meeting.

No questions or comments were raised regarding the minutes.

Ms. Shelfer made a motion to approve the minutes, Mr. Bautista seconded. All approved with attendance amendment.

REGULAR BUSINESS

Development Update

This item was moved to staff report.

FDOT Commute Connector Presentation

The presentation was delivered by Dahlia Singer, Broker Manager for Commute Connector, a program of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT).

The program aims to connect individuals to transportation options and educate them, serving 12 counties in Southwest Florida.

The initiative is statewide and includes partnerships with local governments, employers, and universities.

The program offers multiple options, such as: customized commute planning software, emergency ride home program, data and employer benefits, comprehensive support and events, vanpool partnerships, employer and community engagement, transit and carpool training, and community resource connection.

Ms. Singer added that the program is designed for both employers and community members commuting to and from work. She emphasized the significant commuting distances in Florida, often 30 minutes to an hour.

Ms. Singer stated that Commute Connector aims to support citizens and employers by

improving access to transportation options and resources.

Ms. Mott asked how long the program has been established?

Ms. Singer said Commute Connector has been around just under two years and is funded through FDOT, not grants.

Ms. Mott asked a question regarding the employees and how the program reads data.

Ms. Singer stated that data shared with employers is aggregate and non-sensitive; it does not include individual employee information or home addresses.

Ms. Singer added that shared data typically includes metrics such as the number of employees participating, miles saved, and emissions reduced, calculated theoretically using EPA standards. The program does not sell data to anyone.

She said many employers use the program to support wellness and green initiatives at their work sites. The data and participation can help employers fulfill wellness components of their operations.

The program serves 12 counties from Polk County down to Collier County, covering both rural and urban areas.

Highest engagement is seen in Polk County and Lee County, with Lee County experiencing growth and a high number of vanpools, especially in the hotel sector.

Ms. Singer added that engagement is more challenging in rural counties due to factors such as lack of manufacturing presence, lower receptivity, or limited transit options.

The program values connections that help reach employers and facilitate community events, especially in rural areas.

Ms. Singer stated that the program does not exclusively target large employers; it also engages with small businesses and government entities. Initial engagement often focuses on those already using local transit services like DART in DeSoto.

Florida Commerce Representative Olivia Worley will provide state initiative update

Florida Commerce Representative Olivia Worley was unable to attend the meeting. This item was tabled.

Review of Economic Development Advisory Council Resolution

Committee members reviewed details regarding EDAC, memberships requirements and the resolution establishing the committee and requirements.

The council's membership includes: One member appointed by the county commission (currently Mandy Hines), one member appointed by the city council (currently Beth Carsten), one member representing banking or, more broadly, financial services (to accommodate the limited number of banks), one member representing agriculture, remaining seats for private business representatives, representation from the education sector is included and confirmed as already present in the membership structure.

The membership structure was reviewed and agreed upon, with clarification that the education sector was already included.

No motion was required at this time, as the structure was confirmed as suitable by those present.

The main proposed updates to the resolution include: changing "banking" to "financial services" to broaden the sector's representation.

The previous resolution specified "private sector agriculture," while the proposed

update omits "private sector," leaving only "agriculture."

There was debate about the implications of removing "private":

Some members felt omitting "private" could allow representatives from publicly traded, not-for-profit, or other non-private entities to serve, rather than local farmers with a vested interest.

Member consensus leaned toward retaining "private sector" for clarity and to ensure representation by local, vested interests.

Residency requirement was confirmed: Section B of the resolution requires each member to be a resident of DeSoto County, which would exclude out-of-county applicants regardless of sector.

The next procedural step is for the updated resolution to be approved by the County Commissioners.

The committee acknowledged that excused absences are often subjective and discussed the challenge of defining what constitutes an excused absence.

The committee currently has a maximum of 13 members, with a minimum of 9.

There are currently two open positions, with three people interested in membership.

The committee identified members who have missed more than 50% of meetings in the past year, stating that Ms. Harvin and Mr. Womack are no longer eligible for appointment due to lack of attendance.

Note: "This needs to be reviewed and moved to another meeting, per Ms. Hines. There were not enough people at the meeting to make major decisions. Also, the official attendance log was not there for review."

The committee also noted that Ms. Hines, a county appointee, has also missed the required number of meetings. The committee will seek confirmation of her intent to remain; if not, the County Commissioners will be invited to nominate a new member.

The committee compared the old and new versions of the resolution.

In the new version, "vacancies" was moved to letter E, and "conflicts" to letter F. The new resolution does not include a list of members, whereas the old one did. The intent is to have the correct terms and proposed members listed when the resolution is presented to the board.

A motion was filed to update Section 2, Letter B, changing "banking services" to "financial services."

In Section 2, Letter 7 (under Organization and Procedures), strike the sentence regarding absence from three consecutive meetings and retain the clause about being absent from more than 50% of committee meetings in a year.

Mr. Bautista made a motion to approve the resolution changes, Ms. Shelfer seconded. All approved.

Consideration of potential EDAC members Akos Jankura and Addison Reesor

Three applicants have expressed interest in joining the Economic Development Advisory Committee, all representing the private sector. Those applicants include Mac Martin, Akos Jankura, and Addison Reesor.

Mr. Martin had to leave early due to other appointments.

Mr. Jankura and Mr. Reesor also introduced themselves.

There was a motion to nominate Mac Martin, Akos Jankura, and Addison Reesor; and to remove Robert Womack, Jan Harvin, Mary K. Burns, Kathy Gamiotea, and Michael

Manwarren due to eligibility or resignation.

Mr. Bautista made a motion to approve the changes, Ms. Shelfer seconded. All approved.

Note: "This is to be reviewed."

Discussion of "Are you Lender Ready?" SBA Webinar

This item was tabled.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Singer suggested defining "excusable absence" (e.g., sickness of self or family) to clarify attendance policy.

The current organization and procedure do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences.

The committee acknowledged the suggestion but noted that the main concern is missing too much important information, regardless of the reason.

COMMITTEE COMMENTS

n/a

STAFF COMMENTS

Future Development Map

Ms. Guffey introduced a map of major developments, showing over 2,000 units in various stages of planning.

She added that none of the major developments have broken ground yet and that the map is intended to illustrate growth areas in DeSoto County.

Mr. Sutphin mentioned that the new Guiseppe's Brooklyn Oven Restaurant was planning to open in June.

Ms. Guffey stated that the Allied Recycling project is facing operational issues but under new management and making improvements (e.g., fencing). The company's plans include to employ at least 24 people in above-average-wage jobs.

Ms. Guffey said there is a company planning to develop a paver manufacturing facility in the Nocatee area. They are the pilot project for our Rapid Response Team.

Ms. Guffey also mentioned that there is a 294-acre property on 17 at SW Hull Avenue, zoned industrial/employment center. The property was submitted to Florida Power & Light's economic development agency and selected for review.

Global Location Strategies (GLS) and MWB (a marketing agency) will visit on Thursday, June 5, at 9:00 AM to review the site.

Representatives from planning, utilities, and other stakeholders will attend.

The review will result in marketing materials and feedback on site improvements (e.g., utilities, fiber).

The property is already for sale, and the goal is to attract a quality employer or end user. The event will be recorded and is open for board members to attend.

ADJOURN

Ms. Shelfer motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:05 a.m., Mr. Bautista seconded. All approved.