



DeSoto County

Economic Development Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes - Draft

Thursday, May 28, 2026

8:30 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Neuhofer called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. DeSoto County Planning Director Misty Servia sat in on the meeting.

Present: Asena Mott, Andrew Neuhofer, Addison Reesor, Akos Jankura,
Taylor Jones, Debbie Wertz and Justin Fussell

Absent: Janet Harvin, Beth Carsten and Lynn Shelfer

MINUTES APPROVAL

Minutes for March 19, 2026, meeting

EDAC members reviewed the minutes from the March 19, 2026, meeting. Vice Chair Wertz made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Jones seconded. All approved.

REGULAR BUSINESS

Development Update

Updates provided by Sondra Guffey, Misty Servia, Beth Carsten, Daniel Sutphin
Ms. Servia provided a development update. She discussed the Harbor Lakes project, which is a single-family residential development located off Highway 17, across from the Walmart Distribution center. The project is currently undergoing review with Fire and Planning for road circulation and is on schedule. She also discussed data centers as a major focus for recent work, adding that, currently, the comprehensive plan does not currently mention data centers as it is a new industry.

Ms. Guffey discussed a recent trip to Loudoun County, Virginia, serving as a County representative for research on data centers, along with other County representatives. Loudoun County has approximately 300 data centers.

Ms. Servia also discussed the Moby Dick company. The company provides custom wheel cleaning facilities for semi-trailers and dump trucks. The company is seeking to expand its operations in the county.

Ms. Guffey mentioned a water bottling company that is performing due diligence on industrial land near the Walmart Distribution Center in the County.

Mr. Sutphin provided an update on Universal Hardscape, a paver production company that is looking at land on Wood Street to expand from its Tampa location. They will present to the board on June 23. In addition, a public meeting was held where residents addressed concerns about dust, trucks, and road damage that could result from the facility.

Mr. Jankura noted that he has a client interested in developing a Circle K on the corner

of Highway 17 and 761; however, the project was stalled due to a high asking price for the property.

Beautification Project Discussion

Ms. Guffey stated that the beautification project is moving forward with a membership application to Keep Florida Beautiful.

Central Florida Regional Planning Council presentation

Jeff Schmucker, Director of Planning, introduced the CFRPC, which serves five counties and has provided planning, transportation, emergency management, and resilience services to DeSoto County for over 30 years.

Marissa Barnaby, Planning Manager, was also present.

Together, Mr. Schmucker and Ms. Barnaby presented the latest information on the Central Florida Regional Planning project on the DeSoto County Comprehensive Plan Update to 2050.

The county's current plan (horizon 2030) must be updated every seven years per state law. The update will extend the long-term planning horizon to 2050.

The project involves analyzing the current plan, reviewing data, and conducting community engagement via a project website and survey.

The goal is to draft amendments for public meetings and state review before adoption. A participant suggested plans should be more detailed, as people now use tools like ChatGPT to analyze them.

The Board of County Commission workshops are at the concept level and will continue through July 2026. Hearings will be advertised once specific language is ready.

The comprehensive plan is a blueprint for development, economic growth, and resource protection, guiding public services and facilities.

The presentation included the following:

State-Mandated Elements: Future Land Use, Transportation, Housing, Infrastructure, Conservation, Intergovernmental Coordination, Recreation/Open Space, Capital Improvements, and Property Rights.

Optional Elements: Public School Facilities, Community Design, Public Safety, Economic Development, and others.

A suggestion was made to add a formal Economic Development element to provide more "teeth" for guiding growth, though potential restrictions from recent senate bills must be considered.

Ms. Barnaby provided an analysis of DeSoto County land and future use. For parcel analysis, nearly 74% of parcels are under five acres, and 55% are under one acre, clustered around existing infrastructure. However, 74.2% of the county's total acreage is in parcels of 100 acres or larger, which make up only 4% of the total number of parcels.

The future land use breakdown includes: Rural Agriculture is 79.7%, preservation is 10.1%, electrical generating facility is 2.0%, urban center mixed use is 1.8%, employment center and urban mixed use is 0.8%, public land is 0.6%, and commercial is 0.1%.

The low allocation for employment and commercial land was noted by committee members as a concern for economic development.

Development is influenced by wetlands (SWFWMD permits), FEMA floodplains, soil classifications, and environmental protections for flora and fauna. Higher residential densities (up to 3.5 dwelling units/acre) can be achieved through criteria like proximity to infrastructure, providing public recreation, and clustering development.

The Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program is also an option.

Ms. Wertz asked that staff provide a copy of the CFRPC presentation.

Ms. Barnaby added that the Capital Improvements Plan addresses capital needs for the comprehensive plan with a five-year expenditure schedule, but this is not detailed within the comprehensive plan itself.

A desire was expressed for a more transparent connection between planning, budgeting, and tax impact. It was noted that a financial feasibility study requirement was eliminated from state law.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. David Stevenson expressed concerns about the lack of concurrent infrastructure for a new high school and a proposed data center along Roan Street, adding that a new road should be made from Publix to the new school to support growth. Mr. Steve Fussell, representing Fussell Realty, suggested planners reintroduce the “A-5” zoning classification (or similar 2.5-acre minimums) to offer variety from the current 10-acre minimum. Ms. Anna Lazo asked if CFRPC was looking at endangered species in the area for the comprehensive plan.

COMMITTEE COMMENTS

Marketing possibilities to promote Economic Development

New EDAC member Justin Fussell was introduced to the committee.

Mr. Neuhofer asked about marketing opportunities regarding Economic Development in DeSoto County.

Ms. Guffey stated that the Economic Development Department will participate in the upcoming DeSoto County Chamber of Commerce guide. The department is also in the process of creating a “how to do business” video series with the help of grant funding.

STAFF COMMENTS

Mr. Sutphin stated that an Economic Development Advisory Committee page has been created on www.godesoto.com.

Ms. Guffey provided information on upcoming events in town, including the United Way Business Resiliency workshop, a hurricane expo, and the YMCA summer camp. Ms. Mott mentioned that the Boys and Girls Club are seeking presenters and lunch sponsors,

It was added that Leadership DeSoto applications are open.

Ms. Guffey stated that the next Comprehensive Plan workshop is set for June 9 at 1 p.m., and a public comprehensive plan is in the works for June 18, likely to start at 5 p.m.

ADJOURN

Ms. Wertz made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Fussell seconded. All approved.

NOTE: For quasi-judicial matters, any party desiring a verbatim record of the proceeding of this hearing for the purpose of an appeal is advised to make private arrangements for the production of a record and anyone wishing to present documents or other written evidence to the Board must provide eight (8) copies of the written material. If special accommodations are required in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, individuals should contact the County Administrator's Office by calling 863-993-4800 at least forty-eight hours prior to the hearing.