



DeSoto County

Economic Development Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes - Final

Thursday, July 24, 2025

8:30 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Wertz called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

DeSoto Assistant County Administrator Justin Smith also joined the meeting.

Present: Asena Mott, Jacqueline Wolcott, Debbie Wertz, Lynn Shelfer, Andrew Neuhofer, Beth Carsten, Addison Reesor, Akos Jankurs and Mac Martin

Absent: Robert Womack, Mandy Hines, Janet Harvin and Eric Bautista

MINUTES APPROVAL

Minutes of May 22, 2025

Mr. Neuhofer made a motion to approve the minutes, Ms. Mott seconded. All approved.

REGULAR BUSINESS

Due to a recent vacancy in the committee's Vice Chair position, Chair Wertz asked members to appoint a new Vice Chair. Mr. Neuhofer was suggested for appointment.

Ms. Shelfer made a motion to approve Mr. Neuhofer's appointment as Vice Chair, Ms. Wolcott seconded. All approved.

Mr. Neuhofer accepted the Vice Chair role.

Development Update

With the resignation of Vice Chair Jessica Wilkes, a new vice chair needed to be appointed. Chair Wertz nominated Mr. Neuhofer. Ms. Shelfer made a motion to appoint Mr. Neuhofer as vice chair, Ms. Carsten seconded. All approved.

Ms. Guffey explained new features on the new DeSotoBOCC.com website.

The site will include features such as a calendar of county events, GIS mapping, zoning maps, and future land use designations.

There was discussion about improving the clarity of zoning codes on the site, including suggestions for hover-over explanations or direct links to policy descriptions.

Ms. Guffey provided an update on recent projects presented to the DeSoto Board of County Commissioners.

The Peace River Manasota Water Supply Authority received board approval for an expansion of the water treatment plant and a new reservoir on 6,494 acres off Kings Highway.

Cayman Lakes Phase Two, located about 1.25 miles north of the Charlotte County line on Kings Highway, had its improvement plan approved for 303 units. The developer is D.R. Horton.

There was discussion about the need for water infrastructure to support further development.

Osceola Organics on State Road 70 is currently inactive, and is involved in litigation after being denied approval for biosolids. Attorneys are reportedly working on the case, and an appeal of the decision is underway.

Allied Recycling on Highway 17 may soon be revitalized by a new group, potentially bringing about 40 jobs to the area, though details are not yet public.

Two storage unit projects were mentioned: Veteran Storage (indoor, west side of I-75) and another by Gabriel Quave. Storage units were noted as having limited economic impact.

Mr. Smith provided an update on the current Kings Highway expansion project. The Kings Highway four-laning project is underway, with the first mile estimated to cost \$28 million.

FDOT is funding more than half, and an additional \$8 million is required for the project.

Property acquisition is ongoing, partially funded by federal and state appropriations, including a recent \$3 million from the state.

The project is being split into phases due to funding constraints, with future appropriations to be requested for subsequent phases.

Temporary repairs are planned for the intersection of Kings Highway and State Road 72 due to potholes and drainage issues, with DOT verbally committing to a long-term fix.

Committee members asked about the process regarding installing traffic lights versus roundabouts.

Mr. Smith added that the process for installing traffic lights or roundabouts is lengthy, often taking 5–10 years or more.

He stated an example where a red light project in Hardee County took over seven years, only expedited by hiring a lobbyist, adding that FDOT prioritizes projects based on population and traffic volume, making it difficult for less-populated areas to receive timely improvements.

The committee discussed advocating for legislative changes to streamline FDOT rules and accelerate project timelines.

Mr. Smith stated that the roundabout at 70 and 72 is scheduled for a late 2026 or 2027 start, but there is skepticism about meeting these timelines due to slow progress.

Committee members expressed that the ongoing construction on State Road 70 has negatively affected local businesses and residents, with some avoiding certain stores due to detours and road conditions.

Poor road conditions have caused vehicle damage, including tire and rim replacements and triggering vehicle safety systems.

The group noted the negative optics and economic impact of prolonged construction, especially in small counties.

Mr. Smith stated that FDOT operates on a mandatory five-year work plan, with projects committed based on available funding from the legislature. Projects outside

the current work plan may not be addressed until 2031 or later unless they are major safety or population-driven issues.

The process is influenced by legislative priorities and available funding, leading to frequent delays and shifting timelines.

The committee debated the pros and cons of impact fees for infrastructure funding. Impact fees are common in Florida, with only about 15 out of 64 counties not using them.

Concerns were raised that impact fees can hinder development in rural areas due to tight project margins.

Impact fees are typically used for infrastructure and amenities, but there is a balance between encouraging growth and funding necessary services.

Committee members were encouraged to attend the legislative priorities meeting on Monday, August 11 at 1:30 PM, where funding requests for Kings Highway and \$5 million for wastewater will be discussed.

Representative Oliver and Senator Albritton are expected to attend the meeting, which will focus on setting county priorities for the upcoming legislative session.

Discussion of EDAC Resolution and Membership Policies

The committee currently operates under a resolution and does not have formal bylaws. It was clarified that EDAC is not governed by state statutes, unlike the tourism committee.

A recommendation was made to adopt bylaws for clearer governance, as permitted unless specifically prohibited by statute.

The resolution should be interpreted similarly to a statute, with bylaws providing more detailed guidance.

The committee agreed to seek examples of bylaws from similar committees in other counties to avoid starting from scratch.

Staff was directed to look into obtaining these examples.

Ms. Mott volunteered to convert the current resolutions into a bylaw format for review and further customization.

*DeSoto administration has since noted that bylaws will not be needed.

Members discussed the committee's attendance policy.

The current policy states that a member is considered absent if they miss three consecutive meetings or more than 50% of meetings in a year.

This policy was reviewed and compared to other organizations, such as the chamber, which requires a presentation to the board after two consecutive absences.

The committee discussed the importance of tracking attendance and proactively reaching out to members after multiple absences.

There was consensus to maintain the existing attendance thresholds but to allow for exceptions in cases of legitimate circumstances (e.g., health issues).

The group debated the use of "excused" versus "unexcused" absences and agreed that exceptions should be determined on a case-by-case basis by the committee.

Ms. Mott made a motion to add language to the policy stating that exceptions may be made as determined by the committee. Vice Chair Neuhofer seconded. All approved.

Florida First Sites Presentation

Ms. Guffey provided an update on the Florida First Sites program, facilitated by Florida Power and Light's economic development arm.

The program aims to market a selected property on Highway 17 for industrial use, with national and international outreach.

The property's proximity to a potential railroad spur and major highways was highlighted as a key asset.

The presentation included 3D renderings and targeted high-end, employment-driven users. The economic development strategy focuses on attracting industries such as agriculture, logistics, supply chain, and clean manufacturing.

Florida Commerce Representative Olivia Worley will provide state initiative update

This item was tabled due to the fact the representative was unavailable at the date of this meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

n/a

COMMITTEE COMMENTS

The committee discussed the importance of showcasing local amenities and housing options within an hour's drive to attract executives. Major local employers, including Moby Dick (a company specializing in industrial machinery cleaning), Crown Roof Tiles, and South Florida State College, were highlighted.

Mr. Jankura stated that he was told of multiple incidents where commercial prospects in DeSoto faced difficulties with city or county zoning departments, resulting in four out of seven deals failing in the past 90–120 days. He noted that while zoning staff face many challenges and potential abuse of the system, the approach at the "front door" can create unnecessary friction and deter legitimate business.

The concern was raised that inconsistent code interpretation and negative first impressions are causing businesses to abandon plans in DeSoto, potentially impacting the commercial tax base.

The committee agreed that awareness and communication are key, and that these issues should be addressed further in future meetings.

The committee will soon begin a comprehensive review and update of the local code, which will require public input and multiple meetings.

Committee members were encouraged to participate and invite others, especially those involved in real estate, to ensure the code reflects local needs and avoids unintended consequences.

The process is expected to start within the next year, with costs and logistics still being determined.

Ms. Mott mentioned that the local college offers a three-day soft skills course covering collaboration, communication, adaptive thinking, professionalism, leadership, and management. This course has been attended by groups such as the clerk of court's office from other counties and may be beneficial for county staff or other groups.

STAFF COMMENTS

Ms. Guffey provided an update on upcoming business-related events.

The Small Business Development Center is offering free classes in partnership with the chamber and Arcadia Main Street.

An upcoming class for retail operations is scheduled for July 24, 2025, at 11:30 at the Turner

Center exhibit hall.

A marketing boot camp (lunch and learn) is scheduled for August 20 and 21 at the same location.

An after-hours exchange for the chamber will be held in September, with the date to be sent out via email.

There will be a broadband call on July 25, 2025, at 2:30 PM regarding Comcast's presentation to the state, and a Broadband Summit in September in Orlando.

All relevant dates and information will be emailed to committee members.

ADJOURN

Chair Wertz called for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:48 a.m.

Ms. Shelfer made a motion to adjourn, Vice Chair Neuhofer 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.