

DOMES Meeting Minutes – April 12, 2023

Meeting Date: April 12, 2023
Facilitator: Dan Schebler, Director of Operations

Time: 2:00pm
Location: Santa Rosa County Board of
County Commissioners Office
Conference Room

Attendees:

Dan Schebler (Chief Operating Officer (COO))
Eric Gilmore (Escambia County)
Brad Baker (Santa Rosa County)
Craig Coffey (Okaloosa County)
Melissa Thomason (Walton County)
Dr. Deanna A. Oleske

Meeting called to order at 2:00pm

Public Forum Comments:

- No public comments

Approval of the Minutes

- March 1, 2023

~ Mr. Coffey called for a motion to approve the March 1, 2023; minutes “As Is”; Ms. Thomason moved to approve; Mr. Baker seconded. All in favor.

Agenda Items

Discussion on Item I (MEO Facility Project Update)

Capital Funding Agreement

Mr. Schebler opened and provided a brief recap:

3 Counties have voted a total of six times 27-1 in favor of the new facility project and the project location in Santa Rosa County (SRC).

Funding Profiles:

- To-date no board action has been taken by Escambia County - asked since August of 2022, for a BOCC vote.
- Mr. Coffey and Mr. Schebler attended the Escambia County Board meeting in March 2023, where discussion continued around the D1MEO morgue remaining at SHH.
- Mr. Coffey, Mr. Schebler, Dr. Oleske, and Dr. Lopez met with the SHH team recently to review options for another autopsy space.
- According to the architects and civil engineers the cost to renovate would be approximately \$4 million dollars, mainly due to the required HVAC upgrades and air handlers that would be required to make the space work. The current equipment was installed around 1998.
- Mr. Schebler stated the discussion about investing in SHH to make it a functional facility is complete.
- What role will SHH play in the future of the Medical Examiner’s facility? Unclear on the role SHH will play in the future

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- DOMES February minutes reflect previous discussion of the DOMES Board agreeing that three of the four counties are on board to move forward and spoke of paying more, somewhere in the range of 60% with a twenty-year program to keep costs affordable to the three counties.
- Florida Statute states, “Autopsy and laboratory facilities can be provided by the counties on a permanent or contractual basis.” It does not say one County; it does not say all Counties; it just says “the” Counties.
- District 2 has one County that provides their facility, and they bill the other counties \$850.00 dollars for each body from the other counties sent to the District 2 facility.

Dr. Oleske added, there are no medical examiner’s offices in the entire united states that work out of two separate offices mainly due to:

- Lack of available doctors
- Leaves room for inefficiencies and mistakes such as:
 - Mishandling of bodies
 - Lost evidence
 - NAME accreditation difficult if not impossible
 - Doctors do not want to work in the basement of a facility
 - Recruitment is difficult and newer facilities can help compete for available doctors and show a good faith effort by offering to work in a new facility, which shows the Medical Examiner’s office is respected and valued

Task Orders:

Mr. Schebler stated:

- Two Task Orders were received from Caldwell & Associates. The plan is to ask for the DOMES Boards approval of the following:
 - The first Task Order is for:
 - Planning and utility extensions
 - Construction of the utility extensions, depending on the timing, to work with Santa Rosa County on site laydown and where this facility would be built
- \$450,000.00 thousand dollars remaining on the FDLE grant
 - Will request an extension on the FDLE grant from June 30, 2023, to September 30, 2023, or out to the end of the year
- The second Task Order is for approval to:
 - Rescope the schematic design to downsize the facility
 - Re-price costs of downsized facility

Mr. Schebler stated he is asking the DOMES Board to approve moving forward with the site Task Order which is approximately \$100,000 thousand dollars and the Task Order to work on the schematic design and repricing with an understanding that once the drawing is complete it comes before the DOMES Board for approval.

Mr. Coffey stated before calling for a motion he wanted to highlight concerns and to try to narrow the focus a bit. Stating it is known that:

- 1) Each County has agreed to pay for a new facility.
- 2) Each County has agreed to locate the new facility in Santa Rosa County and;
- 3) Each County has agreed to build a new facility.

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- 4) DOMES Board votes to-date have been conceptual and show good faith that this is what we all counties agree to.
- 5) Updated cost estimates are needed for moving forward with only three counties to ensure the three counties can manage the funding.
- 6) If all four counties are on board, then we know it is an easier lift and we can move forward without having to do heavier math.

Areas of concern:

- 1) Right sizing the facility and still providing everything we need to do in affording the facility
- 2) Rule out there is no chance of Escambia County being on board

The DOMES Board agreed that right sizing the facility is needed. It was suggested the use of the SHH facility could phase out over time as the new facility is in use.

Dr. Oleske's response to why working out of two facilities is not ideal:

- Doctor coverage would be needed in each location. D1MEO currently has three doctors, and the doctors cannot work every week in the morgue at one location or the other due to workforce shortage.
- Working at two locations would mean the doctors would be on service twice as much
- Currently the doctors are on service one week a month, which allows enough time for the doctors to catch up on other duties, i.e., paperwork, answer emails, go through the unidentified cases; determine jurisdiction for investigators; authorize thousands of cremations that are received every year and sign off on death certificates on people that aren't coming into our facility and go through stacks of medical records in addition to preparing for court testimony and depositions.
- Facilities would be at least a 20-minute drive from one to the other

Mr. Coffey recommended providing a good faith effort to explain what can potentially be done at the SHH facility other than surge capacity such as:

- Provide a general protocol of D1MEO's approach to handling certain cases in Escambia County

Mr. Schebler reiterated:

- Escambia County was presented same terms as SRC, Okaloosa and Walton Counties, still no vote has been taken
- Good faith effort is costs savings on transportation fees for the deaths in SHH that travel to the SHH morgue for care
- Currently three years into the facility discussion
- Re-scaled facility design plan to be presented to BoCC's

Ms. Thomason added, before the Walton County BoCC reviews again they will need to see the scaled down facility plan and a new cost estimate. Escambia does need to come up with a plan of what could work for everyone because I keep hearing what Escambia wants to do, but it doesn't seem like they are even factoring in the other three counties. We've all got to work together.

Mr. Baker asked Mr. Gilmore if Escambia had offered any land or if there is any land in an industrial park and if Escambia BoCC was open to options or only interested in staying at SHH?

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Mr. Gilmore stated the only thing offered was a satellite option of remaining at SHH as the DOMES Board heard, and to do most autopsies out of SHH.

Mr. Schebler added, this didn't make the previous minutes, but my boss is here in the meeting today and can speak about this, but if the DOMES Board goes back to site selection discussion, they will likely have a resignation letter. I think she would nod and stand by that.

Mr. Schebler stated he is asking the DOMES Board for direction on Task Order and a motion to reduce the reduce the size of the facility.

Mr. Coffey added, if I was to make a motion it would be hypothetical to right size the facility to conceptually put in new updated estimates.

Second thing is for Santa Rosa County to also do the permitting and let's work on authorizing to do the construction of the line extension could take nine months depending on DEP permitting. Start the procurement process to bid out for the line.

- SRC is currently behind on every permit that we are trying to acquire right now.
- Wait to authorize the construction until the final is done, then when have the Interlocal agreement.

Mr. Coffey asked if there was anything else we needed specific in the Task Order?

~Mr. Coffey entertained a motion to hypothetically right size the facility and to conceptually put in new updated estimates. Mr. Baker moved to approve, Ms. Thomason seconded, All in favor.

Mr. Gilmore asked are we still moving forward with trying to find common ground or is the discussion for the Medical Examiner office and the SHH site completely off the table?

Dr. Oleske responded:

- 1) SHH is off the table if we are understaffed.
- 2) Need to have five doctors on staff.
- 3) Last time District 1 had five doctors was in 1985 and 2003. They were all full-time local doctors / 2 investigators.
- 4) Mr. Schebler will draft some parameters aligned with Ms. Thomason's comments around what would allow SHH to be an available satellite option for some level of work.
- 5) Mr. Coffey stated he would like authority from D1MEO to continue to try and work with the parties to see if he can bring Escambia back onboard.
- 6) Recommended meeting in May to meet with the four respective BoCC Chairman and County Attorneys to work through the agreement.

No Action Required

Discussion on Item III (Other Business)

Resignation/Termination

Dr. Gallagher's resigned for end of April, citing no specific reason. He provided a notice, and D1MEO did not have him on the schedule for the remainder of the month, which moved the termination date to April 11, 2023.

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ANDE DNA Update

Mr. Schebler thanked the DOMES Board and the four respective counties for their approval of purchase of the DNA machine. D1MEO had an unidentified case from 2019, in Escambia County and it will be our first case for potential positive identification once the system is installed. ANDE Rapid DNA training is scheduled for tomorrow and next week.

- The D1MEO office and genetic genealogy through a grant from BJA facilitated identification of another person in a case that is thirty years old. Press release to be held in conjunction with the Okaloosa Sheriff's Office once their work is completed on this unidentified case.

Payment

Mr. Schebler added there is one more issue. Eric Gilmore has only been on some of these emails, but at some point, his email was dropped off the email chain by administration.

- The second payment has been made by three of the four respective counties.
- Interlocal Agreement has not been amended, which is required annually.
- Escambia County has not made their second payment due to the fact the Interlocal Agreement has not been amended and adopted by their BoCC.
- Funding was appropriated in each respective Counties approved budget.
- The Escambia County Administration and the Finance Director used a purchase order to BoCC in Escambia County for the total annual amount of \$2.89M and issued payment to D1MEO for half of that amount.
- Escambia County is now asking to see a breakdown of Escambia County expenditures to issue the remaining second half of the purchase order funding. D1MEO financials are not kept by breakdown of individual expenditures by County. The decision to discontinue the books in the manner was made over two years ago when SRC became the Administrator of the records.
- A monthly report is provided to the DOMES Board for approval.
- The Escambia County Clerk's Office is not satisfied with this response and process and is now asking for a general ledger (37 pages) from October 1, 2022, through February 28, 2023, which is the last reconciled statements that we have and to which I can provide.
- No direct emails have come from the County Clerk, but emails have come from the Administrator and Finance Director that are working with Clerk to resolve this.
- Plan is needed by the end of May to prepare for the fiscal year.
- \$400,000 thousand dollars is in the rollover fund; however, the DOMES Board has approved at the end of the fiscal year for the money to be kept as reserves.

Accounting

- New accounting firm hired
- Draft report provided for DOMES Board to review new format
- Mr. Schebler will be meeting with the accountant to review February and March financials in preparation for the next DOMES meeting.

Discussion on Item IV (Meeting Schedule)

- Hansen with the Navarre press is normally in attendance, in his absence he has requested a copy of the meeting recording from today.

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Next DOMES meeting – May 17,2023 at 2:00pm
Okaloosa County Board of Commissioner’s Office
Crestview, FL

Next Steps:

- Review February and March financials for at May meeting

Meeting adjourned at 3:12pm