

DOMES Roundtable Meeting With Senator Broxson Minutes

July 20, 2022

Meeting Date: July 20, 2022

Time: 3:00pm

Facilitator: Dan Schebler, Director of Operations

Location: Santa Rosa County Administration
BOCC Boardroom

Attendees:

- Honorable Doug Broxson, Senator, District 1
- Dan Schebler (Chief Operating Officer (COO))
- DeVann Cook (Santa Rosa County Administrator)
- Bob Cole (Santa Rosa County BOCC Chairman)
- Craig Coffey (Okaloosa County Deputy Administrator)
- John Hofstad (Okaloosa County Administrator)
- Mel Ponder (Okaloosa County Commissioner, District 5)
- Melissa Thomason (Walton County Finance Director)
- Tony Cornman (Walton County Interim Administrator)
- Michael Barker (Walton County BOCC Chairman)
- Eric Gilmore (Escambia County Public Safety Director)
- Steven Berry (Escambia County Commissioner, District 5)
- Debbie Bowers (Escambia County Assistant County Administrator)

Mr. Schebler (D1MEO) opened the meeting and stated the meeting today is a discussion with Senator Broxson and there are two topics of discussion:

- 1) New D1MEO Facility Land Acquisition
- 2) New D1MEO Facility Funding Allocation

Mr. Schebler (D1MEO) then introduced Senator Doug Broxson and turned the meeting over to Senator Broxson for comments.

Senator Broxson (District 1) recognized the Medical Examiner and asked her to introduce herself and staff.

Dr. Oleske (D1MEO) introduced herself and stated she brought with her to the meeting, the newest District One Associate Medical Examiner, Dr. Lorraine Lopez who recently relocated from Puerto Rico and the senior investigator, Chrissy Nieten.

Senator Broxson (District 1) stated the reason for his visit today is to discuss a need in the four respective District One counties that is an extremely important subject for a growing area like ours; and secondly, the State of Florida has a sizeable investment in the Medical Examiner's (ME) Office, which to his knowledge is unprecedented. He went on to state, after speaking with the staff director of Appropriations Committee today and inquiring if there were any similar situations such as the ME's office where the district has received state dollars for a medical examiner office and the answer was "No." **Senator Broxson (District 1)** went on to state this is a

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phenomenal opportunity for the state and the four respective counties to do something new and refreshing, which will respond to a critical need as population increases along with deaths. He added, if this group were to convene ten years from now, the population of each respective county will be much different. **Senator Broxson (District 1)** asked the roundtable members to consider the following:

- Look at the D1MEO New Facility project as a collaborative effort
- Look for ways to provide additional funding
- Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) could be a tenant in the new facility.
 - Opportunity to train FDLE officers, not only to understand forensics investigations but also be able, to testify and supplement what the ME says in court testimony
- University of West Florida and their staff confirm nationwide shortage of medical examiners, death investigators and autopsy technicians and no known recruitment process currently in place to bring these skillsets to Florida
- Internship opportunities
- Identify what each four respective counties propose as a fair solution, collaboratively, to contribute as capital funding to accomplish goal
- Propose central location (Santa Rosa County) for the four respective counties in District 1, to be approved by the four respective BOCC Boards
- SRC Commissioner Bob Cole expressed that Santa Rosa County is offering up a site location and in good faith is willing to purchase
- Senator Broxson proposed consideration by each county to give \$3 Million dollars for half the construction cost, DOMES would borrow the remainder and enter into an MOA to get the best credit rating possible and start construction.
 - The state would advance money for the starting point of it the project
 - Counties would pay based on usage
 - American Rescue Plan money could be used for a portion of the cost

This is a fair proposal for a needed facility. Collaboration shows that Florida District 1 can come together and do positive work for the community and this does not put you in the crosshairs of constituents.

Senator Broxson (District 1) opened the floor for questions and discussion.

John Hofstad (Okaloosa) asked if there was an opportunity for a re-opener of the allocation. Looking back at the last census report and where the most deaths are occurring, I just want to make sure that things are fair.

Mr. Coffey (Okaloosa) added, John's point is the population or a flat fee is half the equation, as the Senator mentioned. The annual amount could be more based on the previous years' service and we are also trying to tie it to the origin of residence, so if that person were a residence in that county regardless of where they passed away, that allocation would be from

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that residential county. If the person is visiting Florida, wherever that person was last alive in the county allocation would be from that county.

Mr. Schebler (D1MEO) stated, the new database purchased by D1MEO will assist in tracking more accurate data by the counties and deaths. There is 8-12% of the cases that are just passing through Florida when a death occurs.

Commissioner Ponder (Okaloosa) asked, what is the total estimated cost of the building?

Mr. Schebler (D1MEO) responded, \$24 million dollars; State funds contributed are \$750,000

Additionally, **Commissioner Ponder (Okaloosa)** asked if Santa Rosa already had a parcel of land acquired or is it still in negotiations?

Commissioner Cole (Santa Rosa) stated options are on the table and an appraisal would be completed before moving ahead as part of the process. Santa Rosa would intend for cost of the land and appraisal be counted towards the \$3 million dollars in contributions. The realization of having nine (9) acres of land taxes come off Santa Rosa's tax books could be beneficial. There was some earlier conversation that Santa Rosa would donate the land, for clarity it was always the plan for the land to be counted towards Santa Rosa's \$3 million dollar contribution of the project.

Senator Broxson (District 1) stated he and Commissioner Barry (Escambia) had a conversation yesterday and Commissioner Barry (Escambia) asked a couple of good questions:

- 1) Is a current facility at SHH property an option?
 - a. Answer: There is a complicated corporate design they have as far as tenants go they have to use real value. The property that would potentially be available would be over budget and SHH has little flexibility on how to circumvent that.
- 2) Does FDLE and their new facility have options or land available?
 - a. FDLE is leasing their entire project and the flexibility is pretty limited.

Commissioner Barry (Escambia) asked, if FDLE leases the entire footprint, to include outside the building even the adjacent land?

Senator Broxson (District 1) replied yes, to my understanding, they have a promise that they can have access to the property that is adjacent and will not be developed however I do not know the details. Janice do you know?

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Janice Gilley (District 1) responded: There is extra property at the location, but the owner is planning to retrofit the property for warehouse and office space. That property does not actually belong to FDLE.

Commissioner Barry (Escambia) went on to ask, if the former Baptist facility has been considered for re-use?

Senator Broxson (District 1) stated he had conversation with Baptist, the main issue with Baptist is the building does not have useful life anymore, the building has asbestos, which to retrofit would be very costly. Secondly, Baptist is not in any position to donate that property. The Baptist Board has turned down request for donation of that property by the City for affordable housing. Currently Baptist has current offers out and expected back by October. They are already down the road on negotiations for the property. Based on appraisals Baptist has had on the property an acre or two would cost several hundred thousand of dollars. Price per acre would exceed the Santa Rosa land option.

Commissioner Barry (Escambia) stated, please forgive him but he has not been part of the recent discussions. Sometime back the Escambia Board committed to 25% of the construction costs of the facility in Santa Rosa County. He stated he was not especially keen on that idea at the time, but in good faith that is what everybody was willing to do and he ultimately supported the idea in trying to be a good partner. The Escambia BOCC certainly has an interest in the facility being in Escambia county, it may not work out that way but it is our interest. If things could work out at one of the other facilities discussed then Escambia would not expect the other counties to contribute large amounts of dollars into the improvement into Escambia County. He mentioned he had not been a part of the discussions and thought everything was progressing really well until 6-8 weeks ago. Much of this information is new and had not heard the Senator's proposal until now.

Senator Broxson (District 1) stated to Commissioner Barry (Escambia) that he is glad he is here and able to hear this information first hand. District 1 is a growing region and it will continue to grow. It will be less of a burden to pull the load as they pulled it the last 30 years. I like the idea of having a central location. I know for some it is a heavy burden but I think its fair. The remainder goes into an operational type sharing infrastructure and will be based on usage and each county pays no more than its fair share. This process will balance itself out over the years, I do not know how it can get any fairer than that. I would like to position myself in Tallahassee to be a contributor, I would like to have each county provide information to me on their position with this project as soon as possible.

Ms. Bowers (Escambia) asked **Senator Broxson (District 1)** about FDLE's plans to have office in their facility, as a state agency will FDLE contribute operationally or towards capital?

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Senator Broxson (District 1) responded FDLE could be a tenant in the facility and whatever that means for the four respective county BOCC's agreeing to being a square foot costs to any tenant, including the University of West Florida would be built into their allocation.

Commissioner Cole (Santa Rosa) asked Commissioner Barry (Escambia), where does Escambia feel the benefit is? I see the benefit in central and whether it was Santa Rosa county or right on this side of Okaloosa puts us central.

Commissioner Berry (Escambia) stated honestly, in the reduced costs. The places identified were a Baptist Hospital. I understand Baptist Hospital may have other plans but they also ask for a lot from the county. We are not a retail tenant requiring a donation or something.

Commissioner Cole (Santa Rosa) stated so it is mainly that it is cost effective? If you were in our shoes and said Escambia is going to buy the piece of dirt there is really no reason to keep in Escambia other than expanding an existing function?

Commissioner Barry (Escambia) responded yes, SHH would be an expansion; Baptist Hospital potentially would be moving into a facility that is outdated. Baptist Hospital is still using the facility so it is not completely outdated. They are still doing work there. The FDLE comment, mentioned yesterday to the Senator is due to knowing they were undertaking a new project and sometimes the synergies and efficiencies, especially if they have an appetite to be a part of the footprint in the new facility. I did not necessarily know all the details. It is going to be exceedingly difficult to put \$9 million dollars of commitment into the facility that would be located in Santa Rosa county.

Commissioner Cole (Santa Rosa) stated if we start looking at the project like that then each county would need to have a facility in their own county. This is not a project where money is just being given to Santa Rosa county. As the Senator mentioned we have to start viewing this project from a regional view for a facility. It is a responsibility of the counties.

Commissioner Ponder (Okaloosa) agreed that this should be a regional view and will be a homerun for the counties to participate.

Senator Broxson (District 1) asked Commissioner Barker to weigh in on Walton County's position.

Commissioner Barker (Walton) stated he will be listening to see how the conversation goes, and states that Walton County is at the toe end of the leg. I agree it has to be some sort of agreement and I will take it back to my BOCC for further discussion.

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Senator Broxson (District 1) stated he knows Walton County has some concerns and asked Commissioner Barker based on what he has heard today, could you recommend this to Walton BOCC for discussion?

Commissioner Barker (Walton) replied he thinks the BOCC would be open to discussion. There have been some strong opinions. I will share the sentiment here today.

Senator Broxson (District 1) asked Commissioner Cole if he would be willing to take this to the SRC BOCC for a vote?

Commissioner Cole (Santa Rosa) responded he would ask the County Administrator to put it on the agenda for the next SRC Board meeting.

Senator Broxson (District 1) asked Commissioner Barry (Escambia) if he was ready, given the information today, to take the request to his BOCC Board?

Commissioner Barry (Escambia) stated, it is worse financially on the construction side than the previous deal was from our point of view. The initial 25% of the construction costs the further east you might get a little bit more pro rata weight in the population with moving that way. So, you know if it is financed over 20 years that would have a little bit of a less proportionate cost share to the county. It is reasonable that we would go from 25% in the cost share based on the conversation a year and a half ago.

Senator Broxson (District 1) stated even if you pay more proportionate based on usage the county would be paying more for the facility and the operation.

Commissioner Barry (Escambia) stated we would end up at approximately 35% of total construction costs. So, we are not looking at 50% of the operational cost. If we are looking at 50% of the operational costs we end up funding 37.5% of the construction costs.

Senator Broxson (District 1) asked Commissioner Barry (Escambia), the \$3 million dollars down, sharing the additional 12% plus the operational charge would be 37% for Escambia?

Commissioner Berry (Escambia) stated, he is disregarding the operational costs percent. He stated if he recalled correctly when he and the BOCC had discussion, the BOCC members did not dispute the operational costs. The BOCC understands that the County only pays for what it uses.

Commissioner Cole (Santa Rosa) stated right out the gate we are at 25% for each county at \$3 million dollars, which equals \$12 million. Is there anyway a matrix can be created, to show the debt service is paid based on usage?

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Senator Broxson (District 1) stated he would like to get to an investment; however, two counties agree and two counties are not in agreement, which is the purpose of today's meeting.

Commissioner Barry (Escambia) stated every other county is winding up in a better position than Escambia county by the facility moving to the east.

Senator Broxson (District 1) suggested **Commissioner Barry** go back to the BOCC to come up with a number the BOCC thinks would be fair and that number could be added to the construction costs. The proportional share could be a higher amount.

Mr. Coffey (Okaloosa) added that he thinks the site that was identified is five miles outside of the county.

Mr. Schebler (D1MEO) confirmed that is correct and added that all four sheriffs' have provided support and it is close to the county as possible.

Commissioner Barry (Escambia) stated we fund our share, I understand that the sheriff has a lot of constitutional authority and has the ability to do whatever, but we pay it all.

Senator Broxson (District 1) stated having a motivated D1MEO Director who would like to keep bodies from being stacked up on top of each other and being an embarrassment to all of us. Another anomaly like the pandemic would make it worse. The four respective counties need to be on a different path and start thinking about this facility regionally. Take my position in Tallahassee, when we work together as a panhandle team it makes life much easier for us and I think Commissioner Ponder will echo that when we can come to one voice it makes a big difference in what gets accomplished. This thought processed was used during the oil spill and the results turned out really good. When we are divided it really plays into the hands of people in other parts of the state who are going to end up getting it anyway.

Senator Broxson (District 1) asked, Commissioner Barry (Escambia), would you commit to giving us a formula that Escambia is willing to consider? Could you give some idea of a timeframe of how quickly you can get this proposal on your BOCC agenda?

Commissioner Barry (Escambia) responded honestly, I will do what I say I will do, I think that has been your experience and Bob's for the last 10 years or so. I am motivated to come up with something. The BOCC has had five meetings in the last 4-5 days and some of the BOCC members are off for a couple of weeks so it will be in August before we as a BOCC are back together again. Senator, I am happy to stay engaged with you personally and hopefully we can

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have some conversations internally over the next weeks and I can take information to the BOCC in September.

Senator Broxson (District 1) then asked Commissioner Barker (Walton) his next steps.

Commissioner Barker (Walton) stated I will put it on the agenda for Tuesday.

Senator Broxson (District 1) stated to Commissioner Barker (Walton) he would like to talk with him directly sometime as this is an important issue to him and he would like to be in a position to help Walton County work it out and be able to show the rest of the state that we can resolve our issues. He stated the same to Commissioner Barry (Escambia).

Senator Broxson (District 1) asked Mr. Hofstad (Okaloosa) if he would put the issue on his BOCC's agenda.

Mr. Hofstad (Okaloosa) stated certainly, there has been discussion based on this recent proposal. The BOCC meets on Monday, but based on negotiations needed with Escambia county it will go before the BOCC the first week of August

Commissioner Cole (Santa Rosa) added that SRC BOCC will meet on Monday but based on negotiations needed with Escambia county this will go before the BOCC the first week of August.

Mr. Coffey (Okaloosa) added that we all the DOMES members answer to their respective county BOCC and if there is additional information needed that the DOMES Board can assist with, regarding calculations or background on the project of the work done of the past 12 months of trying to bring the facility to light, we are happy to help. We have the facility designer present today, but if needed we could have a more detailed presentation.

Commissioner Cole (Santa Rosa) had a question, when you say you have consensus from the DOMES member from Santa Rosa County, but who from Escambia county can give that consensus? Was that something their board did?

Mr. Coffey (Okaloosa) stated that the DOMES Board does not have the authority to make the final decision on the things that require a BOCC board vote.

Commissioner Cole (Santa Rosa) then stated so realistically all four BOCC Boards need to put this on their agenda before we can give Dan an answer? As individual Commissioners none of us have consensus from our boards, we cannot take a vote today to say we are going to put it in Santa Rosa county, am I right or wrong?

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Mr. Hofstad (Okaloosa) stated his Board had consensus for approval for Santa Rosa County, what the Board did not have was a cost per acre acquisition in Santa Rosa County. Our board had the understanding all along that Santa Rosa county was an acceptable location.

Commissioner Coles (Santa Rosa) stated he always thought the site would be in Santa Rosa County and so did the BOCC.

Mr. Coffey (Okaloosa) stated his understanding is it would be in Santa Rosa county and the initial discussion started around the industrial park and eventually lead to the discussion of other sites. If you want to provide a site from the SRC Industrial Park, Okaloosa County is good either way.

Senator Broxson (District 1) stated so what I am hearing is that there are two decisions to be made:

- Vote on a commitment to the funding plan presented and if not approved what options would/could each Board approve?
 - Vote to donate the \$3 million. If not, what are your options?
 - Vote on facility location
 - Santa Rosa County
- 1) With a 3:1 vote, figure out financing either a conclusion of someone not wanting to participate; that gives you the authority to move forward with full financing; partial financing and build proportionately.

Comments:

Commissioner Cole (Santa Rosa) stated he does not know why they could not put this on the agenda for the Santa Rosa Board to decide next week for location and that would help moving forward.

Commissioner Barker (Walton) stated that is a question I am going to have to navigate through regarding the location. The BOCC will ask where the facility will be located?

Commissioner Ponder (Okaloosa) asked Commissioner Barry (Escambia) based on his stance to keep the facility in Escambia county, to recommend the best way he could best describe to his board the rational as to why Escambia will not come to the table.

Commissioner Barry (Escambia) stated, he did feel that statement was an accurate reflection of the conversation, Escambia is at the table now. It is a cost thing. It is frustrating to not have had more options vetted in Escambia county or expansions in the habitations you know, like Baptist Hospital, considered costs wise. Even if retrofitting is the issue, doing it a cost of \$7 million dollars means you are retrofitting from the ground up. The conversation is not without

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the other side of the coin which is the expense. I do not know if you have the counties financial positions upfront, I do not know if the \$3 million is upfront and debt services, I do not know if it is a burden of some sort. If it is not a burden then it does not matter, but if it is a burden of some sort then that is the other side of the coin. I am not trying to be obstinate, but it is Escambia counties point of view that is the benefit and we would be willing to give up, the revenue input from the other counties, which equates to something. Our board thought we were paying 25% of the construction at the time, so we did give Eric Gilmore the authority to approve Escambia to contribute 25% for construction costs. I do not think it is a fair assessment to say we approved something and now the costs for construction are different than it was when we approved the 25% at the time. Like I said, I will do the best I can.

Commissioner Ponder (Okaloosa) asked with all that has gone on in discussions has a property been decided on?

Senator Broxson (District 1) thanked everyone for attending today and looks forward to finalizing this in some fashion

Other Business

Next DOMES Meeting Date – August 24, 2022 at 3:00pm
Okaloosa County Board of Commission Office
Bracken Building
302 N. Wilson St., Suite 302
Crestview, FL 32536

Adjourned