

**DELEGATION ON GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY (DOGE) COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2026 – 4:00 P.M.**

**Meeting**

**Revised - MEETING MINUTES**

**Attendees:**

Paul Passarelli, Chairman  
Douglas Huberts, Vice Chairman  
Brandon Mowatt, Committee Member  
Nordra Brown, Committee Member  
Robert Morgan, Committee Member  
Kevin Passafiume, Committee Member  
Richard Ross, Committee Member  
Keith Kolasa, Committee Member  
Christina Botto, Committee Member  
Ryan Amsler, District 1 Commissioner  
Jeffrey Rogers, Hernando County Administrator  
Jessica Wright, Executive Office Manager  
Jan Houser, Human Resources Director  
Chris Linsbeck, Community Services Director  
Debbie Merritt, Finance and Budget Technician  
Brittany Scharf, County Extension Director  
Mary GaNun, Administrative Support II  
Lauren Rouhana, Hernando County Public Library System  
Julia Duke, Hernando County Public Library System  
Carla Burrmann, Natural Resources Manager  
Matthew Harrington, Natural Resources Field supervisor  
Robert Talmage, Parks and Recreation Administrator  
Robert Werts, Veteran's Services Officer Manager

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 P.M. Introductions were made.

**Meeting Minutes**

**Mr. Passarelli** – Invocation

**Mr. Passarelli** – Pledge of Allegiance

**Mr. Passarelli** – asked for a motion to approve the minutes. **Ms. Botto** motioned to approve the minutes. **Mr. Huberts** seconded the motion. All voted yes, no nays.

**Citizen Comments**

N/A

**Presentations:**

**\*Community Services\***

**Mr. Linsbeck** – Introductions were made for all Community Service Departments.

**Ms. Scharf** – presentation on University of Florida IFAS Extension. The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is a federal, state, and county partnership dedicated to developing knowledge in agriculture, human and natural resources, and the life sciences and to making that knowledge accessible to sustain and enhance the quality of human life. They can help you test your soil, identify pests, grow your own vegetables, prepare for emergencies, enrich your child's education, protect our environment, workforce development training, lower your monthly bills, find volunteer opportunities and much more.

**Ms. Rouhana** – presentation on Library Services. The Hernando County Public Library System is an innovative center for lifelong community enrichment, education, and entertainment providing quality resources and services in a welcoming, customer friendly environment. The library offers hotspots, chrome books, bird watching kits, nooks from other libraries with interlibrary loans, and steam kits. You can download eBooks, eAudiobooks, and music.

**Ms. Burrmann** – presentation on Natural Resources Department. The Hernando County Natural Resources Department safeguards the well-being of Hernando County residents and visitors by preserving and conserving its unique natural resources. Our newly unified department integrates staff expertise in coastal and open water habitats, environmental resource management, and conservation land restoration and enhancement. The Natural Resources Department addresses the complexities of our dynamic environmental conditions through comprehensive and proactive solutions. The program is responsible for the management of five County-owned or managed preserves: Chinsegut Hill, Cypress Lakes, Fickett Hammock, Lake Townsen, and Peck Sink. This includes habitat restoration and enhancement, nuisance and exotic vegetation management, maintenance of educational kiosks, and trail maintenance. The program also oversees waterways management, including maintenance of the County's network of aids-to-navigation, docks and piers, boat ramps, kayak launches, navigation lights, and buoys in accordance with state and federal regulations. Staff respond to public safety emergencies such as waterway hazards and conduct aquatic plant harvesting. In addition, the program carries out marine habitat restoration and enhancement activities and works cooperatively with partner agencies such as the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).

**Mr. Talmage** – presentation on Parks and Recreation. The Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for providing safe, clean and functional Parks and recreation facilities, and to assist in the planning and development of new and improved facilities to meet continued growth within the County. We are committed to fulfilling our mission through visionary leadership, individual dedication, and the responsible use of our available resources. The Parks & Recreation Department operates and maintains 26 parks, boat ramps and preserves. Our parks provide passive and active recreation opportunities for people of all ages and abilities. Hernando County parks feature facilities that support organized sports such as flag football, soccer, softball, and baseball. Other activities we provide facilities for are pickleball, handball, and basketball. Passive recreation opportunities include walking trails at parks as well as in our nature preserves. Our Recreation Department coordinates the use of athletic fields with local sports leagues, oversees the rentals at two community centers, and promotes community events such as the Father Daughter Dance and Camp Funshine.

**Mr. Werts** – The mission of a Veteran Service Officer (VSO) is to assist veterans, service members, and their families in accessing the benefits and services they have earned. VSOs serve as advocates, helping veterans navigate the often-complex process of applying for benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other government agencies. They provide personalized and confidential assistance to help veterans understand eligibility requirements and the claims process. VSOs are trained and accredited by the VA or other recognized organizations, ensuring they can help veteran’s complete applications correctly and avoid delays caused by missing documentation or improperly submitted forms. They also provide information about state-specific benefits, such as property tax reductions and educational programs. VSOs serve individuals connected to military service, including veterans from all eras.

**DOGE member comments:**

**Mr. Passafiume** – How many employees do you have vs what you need to be effective and efficient to serve our vets?

**Mr. Werts** – We currently have 3 employees, 2 are certified Veteran Service Officers (1 department manager, 1 service officer) and we have 1 Admin assistant.

**Mr. Passafiume** – The current building you’re in what other departments do you share it with?

**Mr. Werts** – The current building we are in is located at 621 W. Jefferson Street in Brooksville. We share this building with the Hernando County Housing Authority, and they have 5 employees, and the Hernando County Health and Human Services and they have 10 employees at this location. We currently only have 3 offices and no adequate storage for office supplies.

**Mr. Passafiume** – Your current building is it adequate to handle your clients as far as space and parking? What issues have you had?

**Mr. Werts** – The current building that we are in is not adequate to handle the parking for employees as well as clients. We have been able to park in the field next to the parking lot to open spaces for clients.

**Mr. Passafiume** – With your current budget what have you had to sacrifice in the helping of our veterans with such little budget?

**Mr. Werts** – We have had to sacrifice a timely response to our clients either by phone call, emails, and scheduling time for them to come in. We also have to sacrifice time in the field for reaching out to our clients. Being able to go to the local communities and speak to our different veteran groups about what we do and what the county has to offer for veterans.

**Mr. Passafiume** – Do some or all your clients have or need transportation to the VA and are you able to provide that with current budget ?

**Mr. Werts** – We do have veterans that do have transportation difficulties, and under the current budget we do not have any transportation services to offer.

**Mr. Passafiume** – What programs or grants do you have to help veterans?

**Mr. Werts** – The only thing that we offer are outreach to any of the local communities (if we can have the office closed to go to the event). We do not offer or have any grants to our veterans.

**Mr. Passafiume** – What do you feel you need for staff, budget, building size or anything else to help you effectively and efficiently serve or veterans?

**Mr. Werts** – With our growing community and the growing population of veterans to our county, I believe we would be able to serve our veterans more effectively and in a timeline

fashion if we had three more Veteran Service officers. Currently our registered veteran population with the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs is approximately 20,000, currently that's 1 veteran service officer for every 10,000 veterans. This would allow us to have better appointment times; more calls and emails would be answered and returned in a timely manner. Our budget would need to be increased not only for personnel, but for a larger facility that could have office space and appropriate parking for us and our clients.

**Mr. Morgan** – asked about funding for University of Florida IFAS Extension.

**Ms. Scharf** – different per agent. Case by case.

**Mr. Mowatt** – How many programs are in each class?

**Ms. Scharf** – it ranges from 10 to 15 in drone class and depends on who is your target audience. They do better with smaller classes.

**Mr. Ross** – How does the University of Florida IFAS Extension promote Florida-Friendly Landscaping and help residents identify and manage invasive species?

**Ms. Scharf** – we don't tell Lowe's or anyone they can't sell invasive species. We teach right plant, right place.

**Mr. Passarelli** – are we generating revenue from horseshoe crabs?

**Ms. Scharf** – no.

**Mr. Morgan** – Why doesn't Hernando County conduct inspections for gopher tortoises on development sites?

**Ms. Scharf** – my department does sea turtles.

**Ms. Burrmann** – she is an authorized user to move them and relocate them. Hernando County relies on FWC for this.

**Mr. Morgan** – we rely on the honor system.

**Mr. Kolasa** – has question on artificial reef after deployment was done. Did you pay contractor?

**Ms. Burrmann** – yes, we paid them.

**Mr. Kolasa** – why don't someone know there is missing materials. We made sure reefs were deployed correctly.

**Mr. Kolasa** – asked Ms. Burrmann to contact the Contractor to ask where the materials were deployed.

**Ms. Burrmann** – agreed she would.

**Mr. Kolasa** – asked Ms. Burrmann to contact FWC and the USACE to let them know about the deployment issue.

**Ms. Burrmann** – stated she would follow up with them.

**Ms. Smith** – the library budget grew in 2024-2025.

**Ms. Rouhana** – CIP project master plan project. The meeting is coming up at Utilities this Thursday.

**Mr. Huberts** – where is the Community Services Director funded from.

**Mr. Linsbeck** – split between all departments.

**Mr. Mowatt** – more cost effective to own or outsource the clean up of the tussock removal of the lakes.

**Ms. Burrmann** – it cost \$150,000 to take tussock out of just Hunter's Lake.

**Ms. Botto** – are you planning any other projects like you did with United Way.

**Ms. Burrmann** – no.

**Ms. Smith** – Do you inspect parks to make sure the work that was done is being maintained?

**Mr. Talmage** – we have a foreman that inspects daily.

**Mr. Huberts** – are park sponsor signs part of a monthly or annual sponsorship program?

**Mr. Talmage** – program has been dissolved.

**Mr. Ross** – we spent a lot of money on peck sink. Why isn't it open to the public?

**Ms. Burrmann** – we are currently working on a project out there to restore planting flowers.

**Mr. Ross** – he thinks we should raise fees on camps and leagues.

**Mr. Kolasa** – who is responsible to oversee permit compliance.

**Mr. Rogers** – we have grant compliance and then other permits the department manager. We don't permit craftsmanship or quality.

### **Team Sessions**

**N/A**

### **DOGE Information Requests Update and other communications:**

**Mrs. Wright** – provided an update on outstanding information requests.

**Mr. Hubert** – would like to know where his request is.

### **Next Meeting**

March 9, 2026 @ 4:00pm

**Mr. Passarelli** – asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. **Mr. Ross** has motioned to adjourn the meeting. **Mr. Huberts** seconded the motion. All voted yes, no nays.

**The meeting adjourned at 6:03 p.m.**