

**AT A RETREAT OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY  
COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN  
COUNTY, FLORIDA AT WEST END GRILLE ON  
JANUARY 14, 2014 AT 4:00 P.M., THE  
FOLLOWING PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ:**

**\*\*PLEASE NOTE: THIS MEETING HAS AUDIO ONLY – THERE IS NO VIDEO\*\***

Present: Eric Hinson, Chairman, District 1  
Brenda Holt, Vice Chair, District 4  
Doug Croley, District 2  
Sherrie Taylor, District 5, (arrived late and left early)  
Robert Presnell, County Manager  
David Weiss, Assistant County Attorney  
Marcella Blocker, Deputy Clerk

Absent: Gene Morgan, District 3

**1. INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE OF THE MEETING**

Commissioner Hinson called the meeting to Order at 4:25 p.m. and introduced a guest, Kimblin NeSmith, JD, CMS, from the Gadsden Leadership and Law Academy, to talk about his program. This is a program that was created in 2006 by the Gadsden County School Board and is an innovative program that has partnered with Corrections Corporation of America, Florida Department of Corrections and TCC Florida Public Safety Institute to create a secondary school dual-enrollment program to provide high school seniors workforce readiness training in high demand and high paying careers. He said this was the only program of this kind in the State of Florida and the Nation. He also expounded on the success rate of their graduates from the program. He asked the Commissioners for a Letter of Support.

Chair Hinson said this was a great opportunity for Gadsden County.

Commissioner Holt said she and Mr. NeSmith had worked together in the past and some of her students have gone through the program.

Mr. NeSmith said Major Shaun Wood had told him that there had been a reduction in the juvenile crime rate in the County and attributed it to this program.

The Board agreed to send a Letter of Support to him for the program.

Mr. Hinson said due to his crisis last week, he had been thrown off balance a little, but at this meeting he wanted to focus on economic development and discuss what the focus and niche for the County would be.

Commissioner Croley said the purpose of the Gadsden Development Council was supposed to be

developing some ideas for consideration, there were six municipalities involved and their interests have got to be taken into consideration.

Mr. Presnell said there had been a meeting earlier this morning of the Gadsden County Economic Development Council, it was very productive and all of the municipalities were present. He added that Beth Kirkland was there and had brought some State people with her.

Commissioner Croley said what was needed was a “three-legged stool”; agribusiness for the production of food, fiber and livestock as well as the distribution of it, such as refrigerated warehouses, etc.; retail/professional – doctors, real estate sales people, pharmacists, and manufacturing and distribution. He said there were sites available, just no people in them and we needed companies that wanted to move into the existing sites. He added that the City of Quincy had very low power rates and there was the Industrial Park with hardly anyone in it. He added that things were better in Gadsden County than we often hear or think about. He went on to add in Havana, there was Coastal Lumber Company.

Chair Hinson said the only thing that was not here was a community college and Commissioner Croley said there was one already here with TCC. Chair Hinson said a school was not here, they were trying to find a location to build.

Chair Hinson wanted to add that to the scope of action and Commissioner Croley explained that was TCC’s role and said the County could not tell them where to build the school. He shared with the Board they were working last year with the City of Quincy trying to get a facility under construction and ran into resistance locally on the site that was being considered.

Commissioner Holt said we had tourism, industrial, commercial and business (agribusiness being under business). She said she had spoken to the City of Quincy in the past concerning annexing the Little River and that we could possibly get the Corp of Engineers to come in and help clear the waterways and then people would be able to canoe from Highway 90 down the river and then have transportation to bring them back up the river to the origination site. She said the waterways would attract people; college kids would come to canoe down the river. She added Midway was the only place at the Interstate/Highway 90 exit, that had the interstate, Highway 90 and the railroad located at one place. She said for the industrial part, she liked the idea of a business incubator because of everything being located at one place and there was a tendency to attract more people.

Chair Hinson asked if they wanted to narrow things down to two things for the County to focus on this year.

Commissioner Croley said he was in full agreement with Commissioner Holt on the idea of promoting visits to Gadsden County. He said one of the biggest things we had going was the bicycles and one thing he wanted to promote was the bike trails. He reminded the Commissioners he had asked during this year’s budget talks for \$10,000 for an off-road bicycle park and added he was trying to get BASF or some other entity that would have the property, to create or to allow for a creation of an off-road bicycle park such as what was in Ocala. He further stated that according to the consultants that could potentially bring in 100,000 visitors a year into the area.

Commissioner Holt said the Board needed to get together and decide what they wanted to focus

on and recruit for things to come here.

Commissioner Croley said the municipalities had the utilities infrastructure, the commissioners did not, but we could support them in the economic development council. He reminded them of the sea ports and said if they were successful in getting the Port of St. Joe opened and tie it in with the A&N Railroad that was not being utilized, then they would be able to get warehouse distributions in Gretna. He added that the Board needed to focus on the railroads because that was where things were headed in the future.

Chair Hinson said the taxes were less in the State of Florida and that was why the professional athletes did not mind coming here, while they made less money, they paid less in taxes.

Commissioner Croley stated that a major faith was looking at 22,000 acres of land and bringing in 5,000 families over a period of time that would be changing the entire demographics of this county over the next coming years. He added if that happened, it would cause a lot of major changes for the county. He added, "Transportation, there is a reason Wal-Mart is in Americus. It's not cheap land. The cost of that land is one-time, irrelevant. What they are going to want is the proximity to markets. You mention a lot of times the distribution over in Jackson County. Why do you think they are there? Sure, they gave them some incentives once they decided to go there, but they want that corridor down to the coast and they want the corridor east-west. It's a perfect place to get to Panama City and all the beach areas. It had nothing to do with cheap land. That's why I'm saying if you look at this map right now with the Panama City port, we are in the fly-over country and that's what we are running into danger in the Tallahassee area and I keep preaching this all the time to the whole group over there, those four counties. If we don't capitalize on that railroad going south and if we don't capitalize on the east-west railroad, that's transportation. That's something the county can do as far as supporting them on a regional basis is transportation because it's going to affect Tallahassee. If you look at the lines, you are in a fly-over; we're going to be left in the dead zone because that's where the world is going. We are in an international market. These counties are irrelevant."

Chair Hinson said Commissioner Croley made a great point and we should send a letter letting them (the railroads) know we support them and we needed not a quick fix, but a two to three year plan right now and needed to be aggressive with things. He further said there were people that were willing to sell or lease out buildings that were already developed.

Commissioner Croley showed the other Commissioners the 850 magazine (a regional business magazine for this area) that had an article concerning *Flightline* and said they learned to fly at the Quincy airport and they would like to have commercial-like jets there and that was one reason the second phase of the by-pass was needed. Once that was done, warehouses could be placed there for the City of Quincy and when the third phase of the route was done, it would connect them to the interchange. He added that we had the Industrial parks and the four interchanges and that was what was needed to be promoted.

Mr. Presnell said the City was in the process of annexing down Pat Thomas Parkway.

Commissioner Holt said she had been trying to get them to do that and the sewer line needed to be replaced from the University of Florida with a larger line and then businesses could be added on in-between. She added that the Board needed to be aware of everything going on with that so the

County could support them and get in line to get businesses and jobs in this area. She then asked for more information regarding the church coming into the area.

Mr. Presnell said the Mormon church has bought 50% of St. Joe's land holdings, a large percentage was in this area and in South Florida they have done this with several large tracts as well and had created cities with banks, shopping centers, residential subdivisions and schools. Mr. Presnell added there was nothing on the table as far as he had heard, but added the land was purchased for a reason and in the next few years, should start hearing things.

Chair Hinson said there was a need to find the "niche" of what Gadsden County was all about, so when people would come into Gadsden County, they would know what the County was known for.

Commissioner Croley asked if Chair Hinson was familiar with a process called "swat analysis", finding out what the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities were and he said in going back to the Imagine Program in Tallahassee, they were trying to do the same thing but on a much larger scale.

Chair Hinson asked if Ms. Kirkland was going to do that for the County.

Mr. Presnell said the second meeting of the Economic Development Council was held earlier this morning and was so packed with business people and people from Florida's Great Northwest, Opportunity Florida, they had to bring in extra chairs and there was a lot of interest there.

Commissioner Holt said they needed to come up with 5 things or better and wanted to work with the Development Council. She said there were 600 bicyclists that had come in for an event and were gathered around the Courthouse square with nothing to do and she invited them into her place. She said they came with money and there was nothing in town for them to do or places for them to spend their money.

Mr. Presnell said there were 2 signed contracts with Port St. Joe with large manufacturers having to do with wood products up and down the rail line and if they could get the port opened, it was a replica of what was going on in Panama City.

Commissioner Croley said something they were missing was with agri-business, there was an interest in land because they know the population of the world is growing and food production will have to be doubled in the next 50 years. He added that we were sitting here where Coastal needed trees. He said that they did not need to overlook the opportunities that this County had for agri-business because that was the largest employer as far as a private sector and was generating the most revenue.

Commissioner Croley said they had mentioned the shooting range and said there was a company in Tallahassee whose owner had bought 200 acres of land in Gadsden County for hunting and his company makes custom hand grips for firearms that are distributed all over the country. He added that he wanted to expand his business and was looking for a new place to come and we could have accommodated that person if we had had someone out recruiting him. He said they were in the process now of constructing a building in Leon County and had been met with delays, delays, delays and we missed the opportunity to have the business relocate here and place it in the industrial park. He also mentioned the drones that were used in agriculture and asked if the

commissioners thought they had a chance to get the contract and said maybe not, but they could have swung the bat and tried.

Chair Hinson said he was OK with the small business but preferred not to put “a wash-house or liquor store in Midway on (Highway) 90 because that would kill the spirit of what we are trying to accomplish in Midway. I think a manufacturing company or water world or whatever should go there because that’s next to Tallahassee.”

Commissioner Taylor asked to speak because she had to leave for a parent expo at Havana Elementary and had some ideas she wanted to share. She said that smart economic growth development is what was needed and we didn’t need to re-invent the wheel. She went on to add that we have fishing/hunting, have antiques and tourism and we did not need to go out to create what was already here, but we needed to capitalize on it. She said, for example, with fishing, why not start a hunt for bait and tackle making fishing equipment, professional reels and rods. She said antiques were a big thing, why not have clearinghouses for antiques, a place to store them; a souvenir company because we have a lot of history here. She added that she would never vote for a chemical company to come here because it was counter-productive, for them to look at what has happened in other areas, people could not drink water because of chemical spills. She said we needed to capitalize on what we have here. She said we had the casino but did not think it would go anywhere because it was never presented right, but we needed to capitalize on what was there. She added there were poker players all over the world that would love to come into a fishing place, an antique place and we were not selling it. She said the County needed to find the companies that could enhance the tourism here and provide manufacturing jobs.

Commissioner Taylor then said she had some things she wanted to get off her chest and she was going to get personal. “I was raised in a family where I had my Mom and I had my Daddy. I didn’t see fighting, I didn’t see arguing, as a matter of fact, I was taken to Sunday School every day, that’s what my parents did for me. They didn’t teach me about being prejudiced against anybody. I didn’t know that, I never learned that from them. They were good parents, very good, upstanding parents. They didn’t have money, but they had a decent name in the community. That’s where I come from. I don’t know how to be back-stabbing. I don’t know how to be treacherous. That is not me. I am very trust-worthy until I can see different. I am very trust-worthy and that, to me in politics is a downfall, but I can’t change who I am. I trust people to do the right thing. That’s all I ever ask for. I am praying, and I do religiously, I pray for everybody in this room. I call y’all by name. I do that because I can’t handle the different personalities on my own. I know God can, that’s just how I am. So I pray that we eliminate these different agendas and look at the County as a whole. That’s all that I want. I can’t out-mind, out-think or out-strategize anyone because I don’t have strength. That’s not me. Only thing I can do is just go for face value. That’s all I know how to do and any and all other things that happen after that, I just have to pray that God cover me and that it don’t hurt me. But I trusted that we would look at this County and look at things that we need to do and prioritize that. I trust that. That’s all I know how to do is just trust that it get done right. I don’t know the agendas no more around this table, I don’t know. It boggles my mind to think of my commissioners putting that thing (aerosol spray factory) over there in that bedrock community. It just boggles my mind. I can never get my hand around that. Especially looking at TV every other night and you see spills and contamination. You see this, so it boggles my mind, because I trusted that you all would care about people no matter who we are or where we come from. I trusted that. I trust you, Robert, I fought for you and I trust that you would do the right thing, because you told me something and I will never forget it. You said ‘Know what,

Commissioner, I am not job scared. I am not job scared, if they send me home tomorrow, I'm able to take care of myself. That told me that you would stand for the truth and for what was right no matter what.' That's why I chose you and that's the only thing I need. The only thing that we should want around this Board is that everybody be above-board. That's why I can't trust some of these people now because they have not been above board and has not been above board and I just don't know what to do. I have been in politics since 2001. The last two years is the only time I ever wanted to get out and God knows I've been thinking about it for 2016 and it's because of the personality around this Board. I don't know what to do because I trust people to do what is right and I'm not vindictive, that's not me. I'm not going to come after nobody, that's not me, I've never been taught to do that. So, how do I deal with this when I can't understand y'all's way of thinking? I don't like being belittled and you do it a lot Commissioner (looking at Commissioner Croley) to me. You are a smart guy, you are, because sometimes when you express things, it's like 'y'all don't understand, y'all don't know what I do'; I don't like that and have a problem with that. Maybe I just need to adapt to be able to deal with it, but I prefer you just state your position instead of making us feel like this big (indicating with her fingers). To me, some of the things we do around the Board is vindictive, 'oh, that's a position that this person is taking so I'm going against it because it's that person'. I don't know how to deal that way, I just don't know how to deal that way. What I mean is, I want us to just do what we were hired and elected to do. That's all. Maybe I just missed it. Maybe I just missed it. If y'all can just take a little deep breath and look at what is happening in this country and the things that are happening are supposed to open our eyes and make us mindful of the decisions that we make. It's supposed to do, God, he is showing us and he's telling us 'Don't deal with these chemical companies-don't do that-don't put them in a bedrock community'. It's not good. Be careful. Treat people with integrity, because if you don't then you are up there having to pay your deeds after while by and by anyway. It's gonna come. You always brag on this Board (looking at Commissioner Hinson), I think it's a little political strategy of yours, but sometimes you better think about doing what's right instead of trying to be political strategizing, because you're missing it. You are missing it. All I'm saying is that our county is not balanced. Now, it might have been a good idea to bring something down (highway) 65 and improve it, but I'll be dog-gone if it wasn't a better idea to spread out High Bridge Road with 20-25 deaths that have happened in the last five years. You can't tell me that there's another road in this district that should have been taken care of. You can't tell me that. Sell me the bridge, sell me the bridge out there in New York and tell me it's yours first, I'll believe it before you tell me that. All I'm saying to y'all is, this is a great Board but I don't have trust anymore and I'm scared to be up there with you. I'm scared, because no longer is it 'we ain't going to vote with you, let's put her ass in jail'. That's what it is now. 'Let's strip her'. It's a scary kind of case scenario up there. You guys are tough. You are tough. At the end of the day we vote against each other, it looks like we ought to be able to say 'hey, how are you doing, I love you, love you too, see you next Tuesday'. Not with this Board. You scare me. I want to be a good Commissioner; I want to be able to work (inaudible) and trust, but I'm losing it."

Commissioner Hinson said he was not a politician, even though he smiles and says great things about everybody else. He said he learned as a quarterback, you are going to throw a couple of interceptions sometimes, but you've got to get back up and throw a first down. He told Commissioner Taylor he was more loyal to her than anybody and she had turned her back on him. He told her if she would check the record, she would see that a lot of things they had talked about, he had agreed with her. He added that regarding the transportation, he voted along with her and didn't have to, that it did not benefit him. He said that years ago when he was on the School Board and she came to speak, everyone on the school board went against her but him and he was



ostracized for it because he looked at her heart, not what someone was talking about. He added that when he got on the Board, he was the same person, the same person he was on the school board and he operated the same way. He said what they did on the school board they did not hold personally and they had respect for each other.

Commissioner Taylor said the one decision they made (regarding the placement of the aerosol spray plant at the site of the former Printing House site) had the possibility to impact almost 2,000 lives any second because that was how many people were in the area.

Commissioner Holt told Commissioner Taylor she had to let this go. She said she felt the same way with the hospital, she “had statistics with deaths with people that could not get from the Georgia line to Quincy to get to the hospital in Tallahassee and then we ended up with a contract where we were supposed to build a whole hospital for \$9.7 Million, we built a half of one, excuse me because we’re recording, we built a half-ass one for \$10.3. The math didn’t even add up. But that vote was 4-1. Now, I still have people that, after that, the school bus turned over, the girl that got killed was in my classroom. It didn’t matter to my Board that these children were spread out all over three counties because we didn’t have a facility down here and it did not matter that some other things had happened. The project for the Sheriff’s Department out there, a \$24 Million project. This Board, you were not here Mr. Hinson, but this Board that came in in ’08 fired the lobbyist on our year to get funding. We were supposed to have that facility out there with another courtroom. Threw out a \$24 Million project. Why? And that was just the building. And get this, then there were other projects, up in Mt. Pleasant was supposed to be a facility for people coming from the hurricanes, what do you call it, an evacuation center with a terrorism facility in it underground. That was thrown out. Look at that, millions of dollars of projects that we lost in one election. But I can’t hold that against you. I can’t hold that against the commissioners, I can’t hold it against anyone in this room. It’s not your fault. It’s just that you voted on those particular issues at that time. I can’t, the Sheriff and I were talking about that today. I said, ‘Well, if we can look at somehow bringing that project back up when the economy picks up, maybe we can go after \$24 Million and get the facility”, because that’s really what you want here. That would help make the facility out there less expensive at the jail. But, see, these are projects; I had two commissioners when I came on in ’02, they told me in ’03 that they were so hot, they were on fire. I told them to go out on the back porch, come on. All of us got up and went out there and I said, ‘I want to see a fight because y’all ain’t had me walk out here for nothing’.

Commissioner Croley interrupted and said he wanted to let Commissioner Taylor go as she had requested for her previous engagement, but said that a fair amount of her comments were in his direction and said, “I want you to know something, and you be honest with yourself as well as me on this point. I know your family. Y’all are good folks. Your Daddy, as you and I have talked, cooks great steaks and he has fed me many times. I’ve known you; you know my whole family, just like Commissioner Holt and Hinson, all of you. I have nothing against you personally at all. We may disagree. You know my guiding principles, but all I’m saying to you is when you start beating up on me about the roads, for instance, you didn’t know yesterday those same roads were brought up. I talked with the director, I mean the secretary of the Transportation on a one-on-one basis outside the meeting trying to help you with the roads. But you don’t make me feel very inspired when you are always hitting me on the same thing over and over, like I’ve got some kind of conspiracy against you. I don’t.”

Commissioner Taylor:

“Those roads should have been talked about 3-4 years ago. When I put you on that Board. I put you on CRTPA. I put you on it and that’s when it should have been brought up, if we are doing it the right way. I don’t want to argue with you. I’m just putting out a point that this is how I feel. It should have been discussed. It should have. If you did it yesterday, I thank God for it, because like I told you a minute ago, like I told you a minute ago, Doug, like I said a minute ago, Commissioner Croley, I pray for this Board, that’s all I know to do. That we prevail in what’s right.”

*Commissioner Holt stepped out at this juncture.*

Commissioner Croley:

“I can’t get you to appreciate the fact that yesterday was not the first time this came up.”

Commissioner Taylor:

“I appreciate that, I appreciate that.”

*Commissioner Taylor left the meeting at this juncture.*

*Commissioner Holt returned at this juncture of the meeting.*

Chair Hinson said everyone had to be professionals, respect everyone and they needed to respect each other’s ideology. He added that you didn’t have to agree with them, but respect their views and not hold it personally. He said it was good to get things off your chest and this was the best way to get it off your chest.

Commissioner Croley said Commissioner Dixon once said something, he reminded Commissioner Holt once when she and Commissioner Croley were going at it, that “somebody sent each one of us up there, somebody sent each one of us. We represent somebody. But to go whining around and acting like it’s such a personal thing if you don’t get your way shows a lack of respect for those that sent us, because each of us represents a point of view and no-body has all good ideas. You heard me complementing Commissioner Taylor’s ideas right there on the fact that those were good ideas about the sports, I mean, the hunting and fishing aspects. Very good and they ought to be one of those things we follow up on. But at the same time, no-one’s got a monopoly on that. But to make everything personal and get all mad and all of us, each of us, is not going to accomplish anything. Because even Commissioner Holt and I, we’ve partied together at different things and had good socializing. But I don’t think that any of us needs to be so personal and take it like, ‘Gee, everybody, the world’s against me if I don’t get my way, because y’all have sure beat up on me enough.”

Commissioner Holt said the legal side of things had to be looked at no matter what and if you gave a person or business the impression that they could purchase this building for a certain reason, they purchased it under what the County said in the Comprehensive Plan and even that could be litigated.

Mr. Presnell said that was tried with the Horseshoe Lounge to deviate from the master plan.

Commissioner Croley said even if they hated the Citizens Bill of Rights, it worked just the way it was supposed to in that instance. He also added that his focus was sensible economic development



and he definitely supported the transportation and infrastructure improvements and wanted to do it at the lowest, reasonable cost and he wanted what the community wanted and wanted them to have the right to know.

Commissioner Holt said under the Economic Development, must come the Tourist Development Council and they must buy into this. She added that they could meet one hour before the County Commissioner meeting at least once a month because the other Boards are representing the Board in other venues and there were not representing what the Commissioners were saying.

Chair Hinson said maybe they should have a meeting with Economic Development and Tourist Development together to talk with them and make sure they were on same page.

Commissioner Croley said he did not agree with that because he wasn't too fond of joint meetings because he didn't believe there was much unity. He said he thought they ought to give the Gadsden Development Council an opportunity, since there was already a strong interest going, to allow them to get a plan together and once they had a plan and then they could share it with the Board. He then said he was counting on Commissioner Holt, along with the Tourism Development to talk with the Economic Development Council about running ads in the 850 magazine to promote Gadsden County.

Chair Hinson asked Mr. Presnell for a list of committees, who were on them and when they met and added that he would like to attend their meetings.

Mr. Weiss said if the Board of County Commissioners had a designated representative on the councils, he cautioned him against going to the meetings if there was another commissioner present and him showing up as well.

Commissioner Holt said she had done that in the past, gone as a citizen and the reason was because she knew a lot of citizens that wasn't suited to speak at a podium in a public meeting.

Commissioner Croley said he was a little frustrated and tired of being attacked about the CRTPA board. He said he did his best to bring in as much money as possible for the County and if someone else wanted the job, fine, but he didn't know how to do it any better and fairer. He added that he could not help that he couldn't get everything when someone wanted it immediately and he disagreed with the paving of a certain road that no-one lived on, a dead-end road, but it got the votes. He said he didn't know what else to do, but it was a process with DOT.

Chair Hinson also pointed out that the website had not been updated and still listed Commissioner Croley as the Chairman.

Mr. Presnell informed the Board the new website was being unveiled on the February 18<sup>th</sup> and it also would tie into the economic development as well and would be going live that day.

Commissioner Croley asked Mr. Presnell to make an inventory of the Industrial Parks so that any business that might be interested in moving from Tallahassee would have an inventory and know where they were, along with a list of utilities that were there and the provider.

Mr. Presnell said they had the list already because of things being forwarded to them from

Opportunity Florida and they have to respond in writing within a week.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Chairman Hinson declared the meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

**GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA**

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**ERIC F. HINSON, Chairman  
Board of County Commissioners**

**ATTEST:**

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**NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk**