

Board of County Commissioners

Workshop

Date of Meeting: March 17, 2009

Date Submitted: February 27, 2009

To: Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board

From: Benjamin H. Pingree, County Administrator
Jessica Welch, Policy & Public Information Coordinator

Subject: Request for Ratification of Board Discussion Taken During the February 17, 2009 Workshop to Discuss Ways to Increase Citizen Information, Input, & Involvement in County Government

Statement of Issue:

This agenda item requests Board approval to ratify Board discussion taken place during the February 17, 2009 Workshop to discuss ways to increase citizen information, input, and involvement in County Government.

Background/Description:

At the December 1, 2008 Board Meeting, the Board directed staff to schedule a Workshop to enable the Board to discuss ways to increase citizen involvement.

Over the last couple of years, the Board of County Commissioners has undertaken several activities to seek citizen information, input, and involvement in Wakulla County government.

Enhanced County Website

- Our current website serves as the main point of reference for citizens to access their local Board of County Commissioners government and is the fastest method of mass communication that the Board utilizes to communicate with its citizenry. The enhanced website took place in July 2008 in an effort to communicate more efficiently with citizens.
- Specifically, the features include the ability to view not only agenda items, but also the corresponding attachments and supporting documents for each agenda item at each Board meeting prior to the Board meetings.
- In addition, a “Monthly Feature” section was added to highlight breaking news, or current events in which the County is trying to put forward on the main webpage.
- In the last few months, information has been posted to provide citizen access to information regarding capital improvement project information related to specific projects. For example, Name, Description, Funding, Status, and other related documents such as the project timeline.

Access to Board of County Commissioner Meeting Information

In other efforts to increase citizen input an agenda book is located in the County Administration Lobby, and also located at the Public Library for those citizens without computer access. Staff constantly strives to structure the website in the most user-friendly manner, and is an ongoing endeavor.

Agenda Request

In an effort to not only provide more time to review the agenda materials staff has expanded the agenda request more thoroughly to provide additional background and analysis to assist in giving the Board and citizens further history on the provided item.

Press Releases

Staff prepares press releases on newsworthy events on a regular basis, and works closely with the local media to communicate information. Press Releases are sent out to a large electronic interested parties list, the local newspaper, Wakulla News, and local community website (wakulla.com) which publish the press releases in a timely manner to reach local citizens. All press releases are placed on the county website as well.

Active Citizen Participation

On several occasions the Board has enlisted citizen participation in many local government activities. For example, the policies and procedures, which guide the Board of County Commissioners, were crafted by utilizing citizen assistance. In addition, several of the local ordinances have been vetted by citizens to enhance the local laws that govern Wakulla County. On other occasions citizens have assisted in the hiring and interview selection process from time to time.

On February 17, 2009 the Board held a Workshop to discuss further ways to increase citizen information, input, & involvement in County Government

Analysis:

At the February 17, 2009 Workshop, the Board discussed additional ways to increase citizen participation. The discussion included the following for which staff will focus on immediately accomplishing:

- Place a link on the County Website linking the Clerk of Courts website to view recorded Board Workshops;
- Aim to send press news releases/information out earlier prior to the Board Meetings;
- Create public notices in an easy to read format;
- Consideration of holding Board Meetings on Saturdays, on certain matters (Example, Historic Subdivisions) and notifying potential interested parties in advance of the meetings;
- Form additional citizen advisory groups.

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In addition, the Board discussed other topics in which staff will consider and work on achieving in the year ahead:

- Conducting a informational electronic County Government Newsletter for distribution to citizens and placed on the County website;
- Consider hiring a Public Information Officer (PIO) for specifically PIO relations;
- Distribute short mass text messages as needed through Twitter.com (internet service).

Staff is requesting ratification of the Board discussions during the February 17, 2009 Workshop.

Options:

1. Ratify Board discussion taken at the February 17, 2009 Workshop to discuss ways to increase citizen information, input, & involvement in County Government.
2. Do not ratify Board actions taken at the February 17, 2009 Workshop to discuss ways to increase citizen information, input, & involvement in County Government.
3. Board direction.

Recommendation:

Option #1