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THE COMMUNITY

JUNE 19, 2025

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Local

SEMCO

TO REPAIR STATION #1



The Board approved the \$254,082.00 proposal by SEMCO, Inc. to repair Fire and Rescue Station #1 at 25 W. Cypress St. that has been vacant since March because of mold contamination. ServePro has already completed the first two of a three-phase remediation.



CAROL MAHLER
Independent Contractor
carolmahler22acl@gmail.com
Photos provided

At the June 10 meeting, the Board of County Commissioner approved “an emergency contract” for \$254,082.00 to repair Fire and Rescue Station #1, 25 W. Cypress St., to make it a safe working and living space for first responders. SEMCO, Inc., the company that is remodeling the County’s building on N. Mills Ave., made the proposal based on the Pyramid Engineering drawings (May 14) the Nova Engineering Report (April 15).

Condensation in the metal building had allowed mold to grow and create hazardous conditions, so in March, staff vacated the building and relocated to the north lobby and second floor of the Turner Agri-Civic Center. Staff named SEMCO as the “preferred contractor” because of their “intimate knowledge of the building’s issues” and current work on the County’s Mills Ave. Building. “Given the displacement of the staff and the time it would take to conduct a formal procurement process,” the Board approved the

“emergency contract” with SEMCO with completion scheduled by Sept. 30, 2025.

Work on the air conditioning system will include providing and installing four new air-handling units in a new location, two exhaust and one intake fans, some duct work and insulation, plus controls and drains. Building repairs will consist of sealing voids at the mezzanine-to-roof juncture, removing and replacing deteriorated foam inserts, casting in-place a concrete deck, replacing the damaged liner for attic insulation, sealing between steel faming and metal wall panels, adjusting the metal doors and adding more weather protection.

Vice-Chariperson Steve Hickox asked for an 11-month inspection before the State-mandated one-year warranty expires. As the past mold issue has developed in the hot months, Mac McMillen, vice-president of SEMCO, said, “The building will show immediately if there is a problem.” County Administrator Mandy Hines said that she will bring back a proposal for an extended warranty.

SEE SEMCO PAGE 14 >>



DESOTO COUNTY SPORTS
PAGE 4
STEVE KNAPP
sports@peacerrivershopper.com



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GOVERNMENT MEETING SCHEDULE

CITY
CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS OCCUR THE
1ST AND 3RD TUESDAY OF THE MONTH
UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED

Margaret Way Building
23 N. Polk Ave., Arcadia, FL 34266

| | |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| JUNE 24 | DESOTO COUNTY SPECIAL MASTER HEARING |
| TUE 11A | Administration Building 201 E. Oak Street, Suite 103 Arcadia, FL 34266 |
| JUNE 24 | DESOTO COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MEETING |
| TUE 3P | Administration Building 201 E. Oak Street, Suite 103 Arcadia, FL 34266 |
| JULY 1 | DESOTO COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING |
| TUE 5:30P | Administration Building 201 E. Oak Street, Suite 103 Arcadia, FL 34266 |

Active dates and times are subject to change.
County: <http://desotobocc.com/calendar>
City: <https://arcadia-fl.gov/events/>

Realtor Showcase
..... See page 11

DESOTO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
ARREST REPORT
..... See page 13

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Angie Duckett

CREATIVE DIR / AD DESIGN
Jackie Bierman

OPS / PRODUCT DESIGN
Jonathan Bruch

MARKET ENJOYS LATE HOURS THANKS TO BIZ KIDZ



CAROL MAHLER
Independent Contractor
carolmahler22a@gmail.com
Photos provided

On June 14, shoppers took advantage of late afternoon and early evening hours at the Discover Arcadia Market at the Tree of Knowledge Park and Truist Bank parking lot. The event is usually scheduled from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on the second Sat. of each month, but at a Biz Kidz promotional meeting, eight-year-old Zander suggested that the market be held later to avoid the hottest part of the day. So Arcadia Main Street (AMS) applied—and received permission—for revised hours for their special event permit for June 14 and July 12.

AMS Director Pam Ames said, “It was a nice change from daytime to nighttime, and it brought an excellent crowd. We thank everyone who came to the Market.”

Partnering with the non-profit organization Biz Kidz USA for ages 7 to 17 years, AMS is encouraging youngsters to start their own businesses. Nine Biz Kidz participated in the Market: John Bechtel, J.T. Bechtel, Ariaiah Blake, Elaisa Blake, Isabella Camacho, Hunter Lee, Nova Morris, Alison LeBeau, and Zander.

Young entrepreneurs Kyleigh Stace and Arianna Rodriguez also participated in the Market as well as many other vendors. Downtown shops and boutiques stayed open late as well. An afternoon shower did not interrupt the event, and summer thunderstorms skirted downtown.

Mark your calendars for late hours at the Discover Arcadia Market from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on July 12.



After selling 24 chicks and four dozen eggs, Zander decided that the last chick is now his mascot. At a promotional meeting, he suggested later hours for the Discover Arcadia Market. His grandfather James Lee also serves as AMS vice-president.



“I’m the soda jerk,” 12-year-old John Bechtel, right, of Fort Myers said. He mixes soda, flavorings, and garnishes while his 14-year-old brother, T.J. Bechtel works as cashier. They concocted the recipes and designed key chains, pins, and stickers. Two of their best-sellers are Sour Watermelon Gummy and Sparkling Habanero Lime sodas.



Other young entrepreneurs include 10-year-old Kynleigh Stace of Myakka who had the idea of making pens with silicone or acrylic “focals” or decorations on them. As KRS Creations, she and her mother Ashley Albritten also sell car charms, key chains, wristlets, cups, and freshies.



“The crowd is actually pretty good,” Amber Hernandez, left, said. She offers custom aprons, potholders, jewelry, salsa, pickled cucumbers and hot peppers, and jam. With her is Harley Rogan with her “Hooked on Harley” crocheted items. They are also vendors at Team Arcadia’s Friday Farmers Market starting at 1:00 p.m. at the McSwain Center, 16 S. Volusia Ave.



“I actually like the night rather than the day for the summer months,” Christina Williams, said. She described her business as an “online bakery” with homemade cake, cookies, brownies, fudge, and more. From left, her husband Gator Williams and son Lee Williams helped her fill orders.



Selling homemade jams and salsas, Kendra Birchfield is a regular vendor at the Market. “It’s been pretty good this evening,” she said. “We were lucky with the rain.”



When Arianna Rodriguez was 17 years old, she started to make pom-pom earrings. Now she also offers handmade bows or clips, Western wear, Western-themed baby blankets and clothes in her GTO Poms Boutique. “We did pretty good,” her mother Maria Rodriguez said, “better than I expected.”



At 11 years old, Hunter Lee is selling Thump and Thrive Natural Fertilizer—essentially rabbit dung. “We have six rabbits,” he said, “... and it’s good for your garden.” He also pointed out that mining phosphate to make chemical fertilizer “poisons our waterways.” His six-year-old sister Nova Morris sells Super Nova’s Slime and handmade rubber-band bracelets.

CITY HOLDS RETIREMENT BENEFIT HEALTH INSURANCE WORKSHOP



CAROL MAHLER

Independent Contractor
carolmahler22acl@gmail.com
Photos provided

On June 11, the City Council held a Retirement Benefit Health Insurance Workshop to discuss the subject in general as well as specifically applied to former employee Tara Anderson. Mayor Judy Wertz-Strickland, Deputy Mayor Luis Velasco, and Council Members Bob Heine and Dee Washington participated in the workshop. Council Member Keith Keene was absent.

In a letter to the Council, City Administrator Beth Carsten stated that the City hired Anderson in 1988, and she worked for 21 years “satisfying the service requirement for the City Health Insurance benefit. However, she did not elect to remain on the City’s health insurance plan upon separation from employment.” As Anderson is not a City employee, the City’s health insurance will not enroll her, so she is asking for reimbursement for health insurance premiums she will pay after her retirement from the County on Dec. 31, 2025, until she receives Medicare in five years. However, under City policy revisions approved in 2023, “the only exceptions for premium reimbursement apply to retired firefighters.”

Carsten also reported on her consultation with the “labor attorney” on retainer with the City, and he assured her that the Council is allowed by law to make personnel policy changes that affect current and past employees.

Anderson countered that the policy at the time she resigned from the City should be the one that City follows for her. It “pertains to past and current employees participating in the City’s health insurance program as of the effective date . . . Sept. 11, 2006.” This language was also included in the City Personnel Policy Section 15.20 for 2011. Accordingly, Anderson would be eligible for the City to pay 50% of her health insurance premium as she was—and is—under age 62. The policy also included a “case-by-case review.”

However, in 2016, the Council

HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUM PAYMENT CONTINUATION POLICY – Summary of Changes in policy (2011–2023)

| Year | Eligibility | City Coverage | Other Key Details |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2011 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Hired before Sept 11, 2006- 20 years of service- Must leave in good standing- Employees leaving employment who are eligible for benefit must maintain major medical health insurance | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 50% paid if under age 62- 100% paid if 62 or older- 100% at any age with 25 years | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Case-by-case review allowed- Must have been on plan by Sept. 11, 2006 |
| 2016 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Changes from maintaining major medical, to <u>eligible employees may opt to stay on City Insurance with premium paid for by the City.</u>- All other 2011 eligibility criteria remain the same. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 100% of premium paid- Must enroll in lowest-cost plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Must switch to Medicare when eligible- No dependent coverage- \$225/month stipend after Medicare eligibility- Changed <u>Case by case review</u> language with: <u>The City reserves the right to revise or eliminate this policy and benefit at any time....</u> |
| 2019 | Same as 2016 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 95% City paid- 5% employee paid | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- All other 2016 provisions remain unchanged |
| 2023 | Same as 2019 | Same as 2019 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Exception: Former Arcadia firefighters (from 2006 merger) may get reimbursement based on prior service- All other 2019 remain unchanged |

City Administrator Beth Carsten presented a summary of the changes to the Health Insurance Continuation Benefit for employees from 2011 to 2023 at the Retirement Benefit Health Insurance Workshop on June 11. Image provided.

changed the policy so that employees hired prior to Sept. 12, 2006, who leave in “good standing and have 20 years of continuous full-time service, may opt to stay on the City group health plan with all premiums paid for by the City.” In addition, once employees are eligible for Medicare, they must switch to Medicare and may receive a \$225.00 monthly stipend. Replacing the “case-by-case review,” the revision included the caveat: “This policy . . . does not constitute a contractual guarantee to any employee or former employee.” In addition, the City “reserves the right to revise or eliminate this policy and this benefit at any time without notice, with such changes applied to current, former and prospective employees at the City Council’s discretion. . . .”

In 2019, the policy was revised again, so that the City paid 95% and an eligible employee 5% of the health insurance premiums. In 2023, an additional paragraph was added stating “the only exception” are “former City of Arcadia firefighters who transferred to DeSoto County at the time of the merger (June 2006).” (In an effort to eliminate duplication of services, the City and County fire and rescue services

merged in 2006. Now the City contracts with the County for these services.) “Those firefighters, upon retirement from current employers, may opt to approach the City for reimbursement of healthcare benefits . . . at the percentage previously established based on length of service with the City. . . .”

Carsten noted that four former employees and one retiree receive health insurance with City-paid premiums; 15 retirees receive the \$225.00 monthly stipend; and two retired firefighters receive health insurance premium reimbursements. Ten current employees are eligible for the benefit and one firefighter is eligible for the reimbursements. The total cost to the City was estimated at \$100,000.00 per year.

Both Wertz-Strickland and Heine lamented that “past Councils did things that we have to deal with.” He compared it to the changes that the State has made governing “gain time” for prisoners; now, the State mandates that prisoners must use the policy in effect when they entered the system.

Retired City Marshal Matt Anderson, Tara’s husband, also spoke on her behalf and said that when Tara resigned

from the City and opted not to stay on the City’s health insurance plan, she saved the City money: 100% of her premiums for the past 16 years that he roughly estimated at \$250,000.00. He also acknowledged that accepting the County’s health insurance gained coverage for their sons—a benefit that the City did not offer at the time.

Captain Kevin Joens of the Arcadia Police Dept. also spoke about the 2016 policy change when the word “continuous” was added. He has 24 years of service with the City, but they are not “continuous” as he left the City’s employee for a time after the consolidation of the fire and rescue services.

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PEACE RIVER SPORTS

DESOTO LANDS 11 ON SUN ALL AREA SPRING TEAMS



STEVE KNAPP
Sports Writer
sports@peacershopper.com

With the largest number of first team players in the All Area teams from Sun Sports this past school year, the Bulldogs put 4 players on the first team. The fall sports had just two players on the team with winter sports checking in with three players.

Emery Skinner won top honors in softball with Tomiah Henry also named as a first teamer in track. Two tennis players made the first team as Ezra Moreno repeated from last year and Isabelle Zolkos made it on the girls side.

On the second team, both Daylon White and Trenton Alley earned the honors in baseball. Mya Goodnoe and Ellie Whidden earned second team honors in softball and Aaron Henning made it in tennis.



Emery Skinner



Tomiah Henry



Isabelle Zolkos



Ezra Moreno

S4G 5-6U AND 7-8U GAMES



STEVE KNAPP
Sports Writer
sports@peacervershopper.com

The Gray team in the 5-6U division doubled up on the White team with a 32-16 win. Thurland Strickland scored 8 points for the White team while Reign Nesmith knocked down 24.

The Gray team also won their game in the 7-8U division in a close 18-14 victory. Q. Luke scored 6 while Elijah R scored all 18 for the winners.



The 5-6U teams get together after their game.



Reign Nesmith led his team with 24 points while Thurland Strickland scored 8 for the white team.



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MISS DESOTO 14U WINS CHAMPIONSHIP



STEVE KNAPP
Sports Writer
sports@peacerivershopper.com

The 14U softball team shut out Punta Gorda 10-0 to claim the end of season tournament championship. It was a balanced combination of hitting, defense and pitching that brought the title to the DeSoto girls.





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SFSC INVITES THE COMMUNITY TO WALK THE WILDSTEIN



AVON PARK, Fla. – May 22, 2025 – The Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts is opening its doors for community members looking for a safe, cool venue for daytime walking. The venue will allow walkers to get in their steps Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., beginning Tuesday, June 17. While walkers are not permitted onstage or backstage, there are wide aisles, plenty of stairs, and restrooms in the air-conditioned, 1,460-seat theater.

Walkers are asked to enter through the front lobby and sign in and sign out. Water bottles are allowed. There is no cost to participate.

“Walk the Wildstein was popular last summer,” said Cindy Garren, director of cultural programs at SFSC. “Many folks enjoyed the opportunity, and one lady lost 10 pounds walking the Wildstein!”



The Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts is located on the Highlands Campus of South Florida State College at 600 West College Drive. For more information, contact the SFSC Box Office at 863-784-7178.








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BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES: GRUMBLING

PASTOR ED HOME
Pine Level Church
DeSoto County Ministerial Association

Now I don't believe this is a word for something we want to do, this is more of a let's not do this kind of word. As humans, we tend to complain more often than not. The other day I was silently complaining because the internet was not running as fast as I wanted it to be. I was trying to find specific Bible verses and the Internet decided to freeze up on me. In a short period of time (a matter of seconds), I managed to become restless, and I complained about how "slow" the Internet was moving.

I paused and then I thought it was quite ironic as to how I was searching Bible verses on patience while I myself was being anything except patient. This moment of complaining taught me a lesson—I need to slow down, choose not to complain, and be patient. The Bible verses did eventually load, I just had to wait a few

extra seconds longer than normal.

Like how I complained about the slow internet, many of us complain over frivolous things. These things do not truly matter when we look at the grand spectrum of things. Slow Internet, traffic, or something we forgot is not going to be the end of the world. This is why we must stop fretting over small things and choose to live our lives separated from a heart of complaining. Philippians 2:14-15 says:

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky

Philippians 2:14-15 (NIV)

In order to shine like stars in this warped and crooked generation, we have to let go of the habit of complaining and

arguing. So glad we have CR here. As I have said before, everyone has something they need to work on, we are human. There is no way for us to shine as stars if we are behaving in the same way as the present generation. In order to shine as glistening stars, we have to stand out from the rest of the world, and this can only be done by living for Jesus. Living for Jesus means:

We follow His teachings and commands.

Complaining does not normally bring about the beautiful life that God wants for us. The life God has in store for us is one of peace, love, and thankfulness. The exact opposite of complaining is thankfulness. The Bible repeatedly encourages us to be thankful as it tells us in Colossians 3:15:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you

were called to peace. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15 (NIV)

Instead of complaining, we need to: Rejoice and be thankful for all we have.

In my case, I need to rejoice and be thankful that I have Internet connection, and a computer to work from. I am so humbled by the pastors that I grew up listening to. They never googled a verse; they looked it up. They never googled a story to sermon illustration; they pulled books off the shelf and spent a long time looking for what they needed. I have much respect for them.

Think about what things you can change in order to turn your complaint into praise and a reason to be thankful. By changing our prone-to-complaining hearts into hearts of thankfulness, we will be able to truly serve the Lord and bring Him glory. And do it without grumbling.



With every generation, we get better at protecting our environment.

Reclamation ecologists like Ashlee work to return mined lands to productive use as wildlife habitats, public parks and more—so future generations can enjoy these lands for years to come.

BIZ KIDZ

FROM PAGE 2 >>



Since Isabella Camacho first set up her “Uniquely Izzy” booth in May, she has increased her offerings with more bracelets, plus keychains, and bows—such as the one Charlotte Dombai, left, purchased at the Market.

“I sold three paintings, all [inspired] from Shel Silverstein’s books,” Alison LeBeau said. Her Cosmic Creations booth now sells book earrings and book magnets.



Elaiza Blake added bangles to her array of handmade earrings. “I had them and thought they would be a good seller,” she said.



A returning Biz Kidz entrepreneur is Aria Blake who added dipped pretzels to her offerings of cake pops and flavored water.





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OBITUARIES

BETTY KATHERINE MCLENON



Betty Katherine McLennon passed away on Friday, June 6, 2025. She was born in Dayton, Ohio on December 19, 1954 to Charles Dye and Thelma (Sargent) Dye. She had lived in the community for 35 years and was of the Baptist faith. She was a Homemaker who enjoyed drawing, painting, spending time with her family as well as walking on the beach, reading, dancing, listening to music, watching scary movies, gardening and shopping. She will be remembered as a loving mother, wife, grandmother,

sister, aunt, and friend. Kathy loved all her family members, but most of all her children and grandchildren. She is preceded in death by her parents, Charles Dye and Thelma Sparkman and a half-sister, Kimberly Dye. Kathy is survived by her husband, Larry McLennon of Ft. Ogden, FL., stepfather Artie Sparkman, of Dayton, Oh., her children Brandi (Robert) Alderman and Marti (Samuel) McCray all of Ft Ogden, FL., brothers and sisters Babe, Bobby, Marty (Paula) Dye, all of Ft. Ogden, FL; Artie (Jody) Dye of

Dayton, OH, and her half-brother, Trent Dye. seven grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren, and eight nieces and nephews. Her grandchildren are Hannah, Kate, Sage, Sierra, Lane, Chevy, and Gus. **There was a Graveside Service on Thursday, June 12, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. at Ft. Ogden Cemetery, Pastor Ellis Cross officiated. Following the services, a celebration of life was held at Marty and Paul's house. Online condolences may be made at www.pongerkaysgrady.com**

Our Father,
who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
As it is in heaven.

Give us this day,
our daily bread.
And forgive us
our trespasses,
As we forgive them that
trespass against us.

And lead us not
into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.

While I Breathe I Hope

The Angelicos

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DESOTO COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE



ARREST REPORT | 6/6/25 - 6/12/25

Avila-Avila, Jose Antonio:

Moving Traffic Viol - Operate Motor Vehicle W/O Valid Lic 1St Conv

Buckwalter, David Allen:

Battery - Touch Or Strike

Cox, Brady Shey:

Cruelty Toward Child - Abuse Child Without Great Bodily Harm

Davis, Mariah Haley:

Drugs-Possess - Possess Controlled Substance W/O Prescription, Marijuana-Possess - Possess Less Than 20 Grams Cannabis, Moving Traffic Viol - Driv While Lic Suspend Revocation Equiv Status, Drug Equip-Possess - Drug Equip-Possess: And Or Use

Fernandes Jr., Marcio:

Moving Traffic Viol - Driv While Lic Suspend Revocation Equiv Status

Fox, Carrie Lynn:

Moving Traffic Viol - Driv While Lic Suspend Revocation Equiv Status, Battery - Touch Or Strike

Garcia-Zamora, Saul:

Simple Asslt - Intent Threat To Do Violence

Gonzalez- Morales, Miguel Angel:

Moving Traffic Viol - Operate Motor Vehicle W/O Valid Lic 1St Conv

Gooden, Kevin Leroy:

Marijuana-Possess - Possess Less Than 20 Grams Cannabis, Rug Equip-Possess - Drug Equip-Possess: And Or Use, Drugs-Possess - Possess Controlled Substance W/O Prescription

Hudson, Reginald Maurice:

Homicide - Murder Dangerous Depraved Wo Premeditation (X3), Possession Of Weapon - Or Ammo By Convicted Fla Felon, Fail To Reg As Career Off - Fail To Reg Aft Establish Perm/Temp Residence

Lopez, Ramiro:

Making False Report - Give False Information Or Reports To Police, Hit And Run - Leave Scene Of Crash Involve Damage To Prop, Dui-Unlaw Bld Alch - Dui Influence Of Alcohol Or Drugs, Moving Traffic Viol - Operate Motor Vehicle W/O Valid Lic 1St Conv

Mejia, Benjamin:

Aggrav Battery - Person Uses A Deadly Weapon, Battery - Touch Or Strike

Morales Jr., Henry Ricky:

Burgl - Burglary Unoccupied Conveyance Unarmed, Damage Prop-Crim Misch - 1000 Dols Or More, Veh Theft - Grand Theft Of Motor Vehicle, Respassing - Trespass Not Struct/Convey Viol Posted Notice, Failure To Appear - Felony Warrant (X5)

Morales, Michael:

Resist Officer - Obstruct Wo Violence (X2), Rugs-Possess - Possess Controlled Substance W/O Prescription , Drug Equip-Possess - Drug Equip-Possess: And Or Use

Neff, Damein Anthony:

Prob Violation - Prob Violation

Reyes-Reyes, Roger Ignacio:

Battery - Touch Or Strike

Rizzo, Tony Rock:

Drugs-Possess - Possess Controlled Substance W/O Prescription, Marijuana-Possess - Possess Less Than 20 Grams Cannabis, Drug Equip-Possess - Drug Equip-Possess: And Or Use, Drugs-Possess - Possess Controlled Substance W/O Prescription

Rodriguez, Johnny:

Prob Violation - Prob Violation

Rollins, Danielle Latoris:

Possession Of Weapon - Or Ammo By Convicted Fla Felon, Drugs-Possess - Possess Controlled Substance W/O Prescription, Rug Equip-Possess - Drug Equip-Possess: And Or Use

Tucker, Kosinski Ontrol:

Contempt Of Court - Viol Pretrial Release Re Dating Violence, Resist Officer - Obstruct Wo Violence, Battery - Touch Or Strike (X2)

Verzani, Brenda May:

Ailure To Appear - Felony Warrant (X3)

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NEWS FROM THE DESK OF SHERIFF POTTER

PLAN, PREPARE, PROTECT:
YOUR GUIDE TO HURRICANE SAFETY



SHERIFF POTTER
DeSoto County Sheriff

As of June 1st, the 2025 Hurricane Season has officially begun, and your safety remains our top priority. We encourage every DeSoto County resident to prepare early and thoroughly for potential storms.

During any disaster, our agency remains in close coordination with the DeSoto County Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Each storm season, we assign 4–5 team members, including deputies, supervisors, and 9-1-1 telecommunicators, to help manage emergency missions, secure support from the state, and communicate timely, lifesaving information to the public.

WE URGE YOU TO TAKE PROACTIVE STEPS NOW:

- Build a disaster supply kit with water, non-perishable food,

medications, batteries, and first aid items.

- Know your evacuation zone and stay alert to orders by visiting floridadisaster.org/evacuationorders.
- Secure outdoor items that could become dangerous in high winds.
- Prepare for power outages by charging devices and having flashlights and extra batteries on hand. Visit FPL's Power Tracker for outage info.

SHOULD EVACUATION BECOME NECESSARY:

- The General Population & Pet Shelter will be located at DeSoto County Middle School, 420 E Gibson St, Arcadia.
- The Special Needs Shelter will be at South Florida State College, 2251 NE Turner Ave #2700, Arcadia.
- Bring your emergency kit, medications, ID, comfort



items, and something to pass the time. Weapons, alcohol, and illegal drugs are not permitted.

Stay connected with DeSoto County Emergency Management by downloading their All Hazards Guide and following them online. For real-time updates from our office, download the DeSoto County Sheriff's Office App (available on iOS and Android).

If you need assistance, please call our non-emergency line at

(863) 993-4700, or dial 9-1-1 in emergencies. You may also contact the EOC at (863) 993-4831 for shelter info, road conditions, and more.

The DeSoto County Sheriff's Office is on duty 24/7 before, during, and after the storm. Stay informed, stay prepared, and together, we'll weather whatever comes our way.

Be Safe, Be Kind, and God Bless.
Sheriff James Potter

SEMCO

FROM PAGE 1 »

IN OTHER BUSINESS

Vice-Chairperson Steve Hickox abstained from the vote approving the “accounts and warrants drawn according to schedule(s) of bills payable May 13-May 22, 2025,” as a payment to his company, Copy Life, Inc., was included according to a contract established before he was elected. In his comments, he also reminded that he will not be able to attend the June 24 meeting.

The Board approved the following items:

- Amendment #2 to the agreement with the Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection (FDEP) extending the \$200,000.00 grant from June 30, 2025, to June 30, 2026, for the Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) to complete the County’s Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment as well as Addendum 2 to the CFRPC Interlocal Agreement to update the timeline accordingly;
 - Sub-recipient Agreement with Hope DeSoto Long Term Recovery Group to accept \$50,000.00 of grant funds from the Suncoast Disaster Recovery Fund through the Community Foundation of Sarasota County “to aid in the construction of a storage building to house long-term recovery-related items” as well as the Joint Use Agreement with Hope DeSoto for use and access of the building which the County will construct behind the Emergency Management building in the Turner Center complex;
 - contract for \$40,750.00 with Rankel Stillwagon Contracting, LLC, of New Port Richey—the lowest responsive and responsible bidder of five received—for renovating the pre-engineered metal building originally constructed in 1970 at the DeSoto Correctional Institute’s Water Treatment Facility: structural and exterior repairs include damaged insulation, wall panels, steel framing members, roof components, and gutters; and
- a resolution to add the fee of \$200.00 for Administrative Lot Splits to the Planning and Zoning Fee Schedule.

CONSENT AGENDA

Under the Consent Agenda, the Board approved the following seven items.

The Local Housing Assistance Plan (LHAP) for owner-occupied homes was revised as follows: rehabilitation was increased from \$65,000 to \$75,000; purchase assistance raised from not to exceed \$40,000.00 to \$70,000.00 and purchase price not to exceed \$350,000.00; and demolition/reconstruction assistance increased from not to exceed \$165,000.00 to \$200,000.00. All assistance will be forgiven half the amount half after ten years and qualify for a mortgage extension as long as the owner income-qualifies.

The use of the Florida Dept. of Law



In response to Commissioner Judy Schaefer’s expression of gratitude, McMillen, said, “Good contractors may be hard to find, but good customers are equally hard to find.” He praised both County Administrator Mandy Hines and Purchasing Director Cindy Talamantz for how easy they have been to work with as his company remodels the County’s Mills Ave. building.



Ashley Brown, Community Outreach Coordinator for the School District, reminded everyone that summer school is in session. She invited the Board “to read with the students” from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. on Tues. and Thurs. during the “Dive Into Reading” program at West Elementary School. Noting new childcare and Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) classes starting this Fall, she asked the public to check the District’s Facebook page (facebook.com/desotoschools) and Website (desotoschools.com).

How the air conditioning system was designed and installed is part of the problem at Station #1, according to Mac McMillen, vice-president of SEMCO, Inc., of Bartow. Some of the units were over-working and some were under-working. He described the problems with the metal building as “a lot of little things that added up and bit you.”

Enforcement (FDLE) Justice Assistance Grant-Countywide (JAG-C) grant of \$43,490.00 to the Sheriff’s Office split 60-40 with the Arcadia Police Dept., will be used by the Sheriff’s Office to purchase new golf carts for \$26,094.00 to be used at special events, to assist residents, and at the schools to help the Student Resource Deputies move quickly around the campuses.

Revisions of the Classification and Pay Plan, include adding a part-time Parks Technician IV position to the Parks & Recreation Dept.; a title change from Event Coordinator to Event Manager at the Turner Center; and revised position titles in Public Safety.

Agreement with Securitecture, LLC, extending the agreement for performance of services from June 15 to July 30, 2025, for a conceptual design and cost estimate for the Jail and Administrative Complex.

Declaration as surplus and approved for sale through Internet Auction the following equipment: 2018 Progeny Preva DC Dental X-ray, Cat Wheel Loader 930H, Dixie Shopper Classic 3360 mower, and 2006 Sterling leachate semi truck.

Authorization for the chairman to sign the Sovereignty Submerged Lands Easement from State of Florida’s Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund necessary for permits from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and the U.S. Army Corps. of Engineers needed to repair the Horse Creek Bridge with Community Development Block Grant Mitigation (CDBG-MIT) funds.

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR’S REPORT

Hines praised the “great work by all the departments” on the 2024 annual report. Ten hard copies were printed, and the digital file is available on the County’s Website (desotobocc.com/Archive.aspx) along with the annual reports for 2021, 2022, and 2023. She asked the Board to review the report and recommend any additional information that they would like included.

The Board agreed to set budget workshops as she proposed for 1:00 p.m. on July 8 and 22 as well as Aug. 12 and 26, with the public hearings for the tentative and final budgets on Sept. 8 and 23, respectively. She commented, “It’s going to be a tough budget year. . . . you have some tough choices to make.”

Although Property Appraiser Dave Williams gave a conservative revenue estimate increase of less than two percent, staff built the budget based on a five percent increase. Other sources of revenue are unknown as the State legislature had not yet passed a budget.

She also suggested that the pavement be “patched” at the State Road 72 and King’s Highway (County Road 769) intersection since the Florida Dept. of Transportation (FDOT) will not undertake the project until 2027. County Engineer Mike Giardullo will ask Excavation Point, Inc., for an estimate to improve the intersection’s pavement as part of the annual-paving contract.

Hines read the following appreciations received from the public:

- praising the newest employee in

Planning and Zoning Dept.: “You are exceptional at your job . . . I appreciate you and your quick responses. Keep up the great work;”

- in the Parks and Recreation Dept.: “Marilyn provided great customer service. She answered all questions when asked and made the process of reserving event space very easy;”

- to Janine in the Utilities Dept.: “I always appreciate your honest answers and explanations;” and

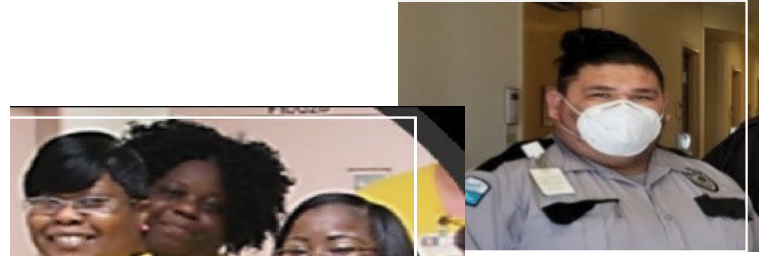
- a comment in general: “very friendly and helpful—thank you.”

COUNTY ATTORNEY’S REPORT

County Attorney Valerie Vicente said that VCH Holdings and Osceola Organics had filed with the court a “request for relief”—an alternative dispute resolution process that involves hearings before a special magistrate. The result is non-binding, and when it concludes, either party may file litigation. Two attorneys from her office—Matt Chowd and Gregory Stewart—have been assigned.

During Board comments, Commissioner Elton Langford objected to the “mediation” requested by VCH Holdings and Osceola Organics after the Board denied their request for a biosolids composting facility. “Our job as county commissioners is to represent those who elect us. . . . I think we made the right decision on that deal.” Commissioner Jerod Gross agreed with Langford’s comments.

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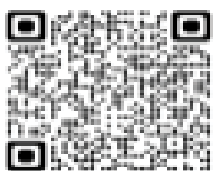
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