

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE WORKSHOP OF
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

OCTOBER 2, 2025

Present: Commissioner Michael S. Kohler, Chair, District 2
Commissioner Ashlee M. Hofberger, Vice Chair, District 4
Commissioner Steven L. Barry, District 5
Commissioner Lumon J. May, District 3
Commissioner Steven R. Stroberger, District 1
Codey Leigh, General Counsel, Clerk and Comptroller's Office
Wesley J. Moreno, County Administrator
Alison Rogers, County Attorney
Ashley Danner, Office Assistant IV, Clerk and Comptroller's Office
Jose Gochez, Operations Manager, County Administrator's Office

Location: Ernie Lee Magaha Government Building, Board Chambers, First Floor
221 Palafox Place, Pensacola, Florida

Report prepared by: Ashley Danner

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Call to Order

Commissioner Kohler, Chair, called the Committee of the Whole (C/W) Workshop to order at 9:05 a.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Commissioner Stroberger led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

3. Was the Meeting Properly Advertised?

The Board was advised by Ashley Danner, Office Assistant IV, Clerk and Comptroller's Office, that the meeting was advertised in the *Pensacola News Journal* on September 25, 2025, in the Board's weekly meeting schedule.

AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

4. Board Items

I. Discussion Concerning Economic Development and Job Growth

A. Christopher Platé, Executive Director of FloridaWest, reviewed a PowerPoint presentation, which was attached as backup and:

- Outlined the responsibilities and functions of the Pensacola-Escambia Promotion & Development Commission (PEDC) and FloridaWest Economic Development Alliance (FWEDA), to “grow and diversify the economy of Escambia County, the City of Pensacola and the Town of Century by fostering business expansion, retention, and recruitment; aligning resources; and supporting high-wage job creation”;
- Summarized the means by which PEDC and FWEDA encourage economic development including through recruiting and retaining business and industry in local areas, marketing the County to businesses abroad, assisting in problem solving for local industries, as well as other areas;
- Reviewed the progress PEDC / FWEDA has made over the last ten months, such as becoming familiar with the tools for Economic Development available in Florida; connecting with influential individuals locally and state-wide; repairing budget and financial situations; adjusting the structure of the organization, and educating and hiring more staff; and building capacity and beginning the process of rebranding;
- Explained the reports for Unemployment Rates in Escambia County compared to surrounding areas in Florida and Alabama, how the bump in local population has assisted, and how they shift seasonally;
- Reviewed several of the product development projects conducted in the last ten months, including The Bluffs, Ellyson, and the Midtown Industrial Park Area, as well as the organization’s projects for recruiting and retaining industries;
- Outlined the goals for PEDC / FWEDA for the 2026 Fiscal Year involving several construction projects, production of informative podcasts, and meeting with local industries;

B. Mr. Platé, in response to Commissioner Barry’s inquiry, clarified the potential of building a council to allow leadership from local manufacturers to better provide guidance on the direction going forward;

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AGENDA ITEMS – Continued

4. Continued...

I. Continued...

- C. Commissioner May addressed the importance of investing in the community rather than only hiring, particularly regarding the alignment of education with economic development, and the necessary part both play in retaining jobs and giving local citizens the opportunities for those jobs. He also suggested finding ways to inform citizens of the existing programs and projects to better utilize the assets already in place;
- D. Commissioner Stroberger highlighted the impact the Agreement between PEDC / FWEDA and Foiling Week has had on the perception of Escambia County in the international sailing community. Mr. Platé also clarified that other international companies are showing more interest in opening facilities in the United States;
- E. At Commissioner Hofberger's request, Mr. Platé explained the importance of both having buildable sites for companies to build upon when coming to Escambia County, and having speculative facilities already built for companies to move into, as well as the potential for funding for these facilities;
- F. In response to Commissioner Kohler's inquiry, Mr. Platé clarified the use of the Tech Park pertaining to the Bay Center, the mean salaries of the potential jobs being created, the investment in public-private partnerships, and the upward migration of PEDC / FWEDA projects per month, and he also briefly mentioned the potential use of OLF-8 property for incoming businesses; and
- G. The Board discussed the range of wages in relation to these industries, in comparison to both the community and the national averages, and the importance of having a competitive range.

5. Adjourn

Commissioner Kohler, Chair, declared the C/W Workshop adjourned at 10:05 a.m.