

**Emerald Coast Regional Council
Executive Committee Meeting**

Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce
34 Miracle Strip Parkway
Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548
GoTo Webinar
March 14, 2025 10:00am



Executive Committee Members Present:

Kurvin Qualls, Chair
Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton, Vice Chair
Mayor Pamn Henderson, City of Callaway
J.D. Smith, Governor Appointee

Members Absent:

Commissioner Danny Glidewell

Others Present:

Katie Busch, HRCC (Virtual)
Gary Huston, ECRC Legal Counsel (Virtual)
Mayor Dick Rynearson, City of Ft. Walton Beach
Commissioner Kerry Smith (Virtual)
Mayor JB Whitten, City of Crestview (Virtual)
Kandase Lee, ECRC CEO (Virtual)
Dawn Schwartz, ECRC CFO (Virtual)
Renee Quick, ECRC HR Director (Virtual)
Annie Arguello, ECRC Marketing & Outreach Director
Leandra Meredith, ECRC Marketing & Outreach Coordinator
Tammy Neal, Executive Administrative Assistant, ECRC

Call to Order

Chair Qualls called the meeting to order.

Call for Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance

The prayer and Pledge of Allegiance was led by JD Smith.

Public Forum:

Mayor JB Whitten requested that the Chair provide clarification on the members who make up the Executive Committee.

Chair Qualls asked Tammy Neal, Executive Administrative Assistant ECRC, to provide the information.

Tammy Neal stated that the following were members of the ECRC Executive Committee:

- Chair Kurvin Qualls

- Vice Chair April Sutton
- Mayor Pamn Henderson
- Commissioner Danny Glidewell
- JD Smith, Governor Appointee

Mayor Whitten commented that he was unclear why Item 1 – CEO Position – Classification and Compensation Study Results was being discussed, as it had been discussed and voted upon at the August 5, 2024 ECRC Board meeting. The items from that same meeting that were tabled to be discussed at a future executive committee meeting were the CEO Severance Package and Annual Leave Policy, according to the meeting minutes.

Mayor Whitten stated with the Severance Package it wasn't the question of a twenty (20) weeks of severance but a question of providing health insurance as part of the twenty (20) weeks of severance as the reasoning behind tabling the item until legal counsel could further review.

Mayor Whitten commented the Annual Leave Policy was also tabled but he had missed the meeting. Mayor Whitten stated had he attended the meeting, he would have voted against the approved motion during the last meeting, as he felt it goes against the policy.

Public Comment was closed.

Item 1: CEO Position – Classification and Compensation Study Results

Chair Qualls stated at the August 2024 ECRC board meeting, it was discussed that ECRC would be using a third-party firm to conduct a classification and compensation study. With the study completed, Chair Qualls introduced Katie Busch of HR Compensation Consultants, LLC to present the results.

Katie Busch stated HR Compensation Consultants, (HRCC) LLC has had the opportunity to work with ECRC since 2015 and to develop a pay plan and establish compensation for all positions within the organization. Further stating pay plan updates are typically conducted every two (2) years in an effort to trend what is happening within the labor market.

Katie Busch briefly described and explained the process and goals for jobs and pay framework completed by HRCC, LLC.

Katie Busch provided a 2024 Compensation Survey with a market range for the position of Chief Executive Officer from around the state of Florida. This market range would typically be used to attract candidates for the position should one become available.

Chair Qualls stated this information would be extremely helpful during annual evaluations.

Item 2: CEO Position – Severance Package

As part of the CEO evaluation during the August 5, 2024 ECRC Board meeting it was brought to the Board's attention that ECRC did not have a formalized CEO Severance Package as do

many organizations within the industry. Section 215.425, Florida Statutes includes language that established a maximum twenty (20) weeks of severance.

Per the ECRC Board's recommendation, ECRC Legal Counsel, Gary Huston provided written legal review.

The executive committee discussed a 20-week salary severance package including health insurance and agreed this was reasonable and to industry standard.

The executive committee discussed and agreed to recommend a graduated 20-week severance package for the CEO to include an immediate twelve (12) weeks' severance package upon hire, then accrue two (2) weeks for each calendar year thereafter, up to twenty (20) weeks.

Gary Huston clarified that the (20) weeks outlined in statute, includes compensation and benefits that would be paid to the employee, which may include leave and any benefits outlined in an employment contract for the CEO. Gary Huston suggested the CEO severance package be looked at as a recruitment and retention method and does need to be included in the bylaws but can be outlined in an employment contract.

Item 3: Annual Leave Policy

Kandase Lee explained that during a previous ECRC Board meeting, discussion of ECRC's annual leave policy ensued. The ECRC allows for 200 hours of earned annual leave to be carried over to the next fiscal year with any unused earned annual leave in excess of 200 hours be forfeited, and that all ECRC staff are strongly encouraged to use their earned annual leave.

Kandase Lee stated as such, the Board recommended staff explore possible policy updates as well as develop a more specific earned annual leave policy. Staff feels the current policy is adequate for the organization and employees and recommends maintaining the current policy. Kandase Lee further stated if there were any concerns or desire to change the current policy, it would be recommended to seek an outside firm to complete that study.

The executive committee recommends maintaining the current policy for earned annual leave for staff and allowing 200 hours to be carried over to the next fiscal year.

The executive committee discussed the amount of earned annual leave for the CEO. The executive committee agreed to recommend adding an additional Administrative Leave category for the CEO in the amount of 40 hours, plus 200 hours Annual Leave per calendar year, for a total of 240 hours allowable for carryover.

Gary Huston asked for clarification, Chair Qualls summarized the recommendations:

A supplemental employment contract that would include:

- A severance package with 100% pay which includes health insurance, leave (annual and admin leave), benefits (not including retirement and life).
- An Administrative Leave of 40hrs annually to be in addition to the Annual Leave for CEO.

It was recommended the contract be in place by next FY.

Adjourn

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:04am.

Duly passed and approved by the Emerald Coast Regional Council on this 21st day of May 2025.

By:



Kurvin Qualls, ECRC Chair

Date:

