



Final Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Florida Defense Support Commission

Minutes for the Florida Defense Support Commission Meeting held in Milton on Friday, January 17, 2025

The Florida Defense Support Commission (FDSC or Commission) held a publicly noticed meeting at the Santa Rosa County Administration Building at from 9 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. central time. For Agenda: See Page 3.

Commission Members Present:

Senator Tom Wright, Chairman
Mr. Tom Neubauer, Bay Defense Alliance, Vice Chairman
Brigadier General Chip Diehl, USAF, (Ret)
Major General Richard Haddad, USAF, (Ret)
Rear Admiral Don Quinn, USN, (Ret)
Ms. Kay Rasmussen, One Okaloosa Economic Development Council (EDC)
Mayor Jim Scholl, Monroe County

Commission Members Present Virtually via Microsoft Teams:

The Honorable Thomas Bowman
Dr. Emilio González
Major General James Hartsell, USMC, (Ret), Florida Department of Veterans Affairs (FDVA)
Major General John Haas, USA, The Adjutant General (TAG) of Florida
Major General Karl Horst, USA, (Ret)

Commission Members Absent:

Representative Patt Maney
Representative Tyler Sirois
Secretary Jamal Sowell, Fidelis Monroe Group, LLC
Mr. S. Reeves Valentine, Lockheed Martin

Speakers Present:

Ms. Kellie Jo Kilberg, Florida Defense Alliance (FDA) Chair

Others Present in Person:

Scott Davidson, Hurlburt Field Community Planner
Elaine LaJeunesse, Eglin AFB School Liaison Manager
Ron LaJeunesse, 96 Range Group/96th Test Wing
Debi Graham, NW Florida Defense Coalition
Anna Turlik, Salas O'Brien Engineers
CDR Stephanie Biehle, NAS Whiting Field
Chandra Newman, NAS Pensacola
Theodore Elkins, NAS Whiting Field
Jonathan Lewis, NAS Whiting Field
Dale Marks, 96th Test Wing, Eglin AFB
Gabe Myers, 96th Test Wing, Eglin AFB
Trevor Huff, Office of State Representative Michelle Salzman
Bobby Burkett, Santa Rosa County Commission
Joy Brown, NW Florida Sentinel Landscape
Gene Valentina, Candidate for US Congress
Marilynn Farrow, Milton City Council
Stephen Prestesater, City of Milton
Ed Spears, City of Milton

Melissa Stoker, Space Florida
Dave Murzin, First Place Partners
Sal Nodjomian, Matrix Design Group
Charlie Perham, Matrix Design Group
Danita Andrews, FloridaWest Economic Development Alliance
Steve Strawberger, Escambia County Commission
Dave Hoxeng, New Radio 92.3 Pensacola

Others Present via TEAMS:

Christopher Weller, FloridaCommerce, Office of Military and Defense
Jim Philpitt, US Special Operations Command/J77 and Tampa Bay Defense Alliance
Adrian Lowndes
Tina English
Dave Dahl, U.S. Navy Region Southeast
Jesse Williams-Houchin, Santa Rosa County Administration
WFSU-TV The Florida Channel
Tim Proctor, Staff Director, Florida Senate Committee on Military, Veterans, and Space Affairs and Domestic Security
Gary Moore
Eric Christianson
Sue Burke, Office of Monroe County Mayor Jim Scholl
Christian Caron, Matrix Design Group
Nicholas Melfi
Mark McManus, Naval Air Station Jacksonville/Naval Station Mayport
Katie Allan, Deloitte Consulting LLP
Rick Miller, South Florida Defense Alliance
Anna Startzell
Sheila Poland, EDC of the Space Coast
Harrison Conyers, City of Jacksonville, Supervisor, Military Affairs and Veterans Department
Ron Demes, Key West Military Affairs Committee
Brad Johnson
Brooke Trawick-Gilbert
Carlicia Collins, GrayRobinson, P.A.
Guy Swan
Rob Lawrence, Florida Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, Military Outreach Director

Staff Present:

Tim MacGregor, Director, Office of Military and Defense, FloridaCommerce
Ray Collins, Office of Military and Defense, FloridaCommerce
Takesha Ware, Office of Military and Defense, FloridaCommerce
Steve Wood, Office of Military and Defense, FloridaCommerce



**FLORIDA DEFENSE
SUPPORT COMMISSION**

**Santa Rosa County Administration Building
6495 Caroline Street, Milton FL 32570
AGENDA for January 17, 2025**

Please contact the Military and Defense Team for MS Teams webinar information.

KEY:
*(I) = Information
(D) = Discussion
(A) = Action*

All Times are listed in Central Standard Time (CST)

- 9 a.m. – 9:05 a.m. Welcome, Roll Call, Introductions..... Chairman **(I)**
 - Local Defense Community Welcome Commissioner Colten Wright **(I)**
- 9:05 a.m. – 9:15 a.m. Old Business..... Chairman **(A) / (I)**
 - Approval of Minutes Chairman **(A)**
 - FDSC Grants and Contracts Status Steve Wood **(I)**
 - FDSC Budget Report Ray Collins **(I)**
- 9:15 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. New Business..... Chairman **(I)**
 - Commission Member Reports Kellie Jo Kilberg **(I)**
 - Florida Defense Alliance Update CAPT Chandra Newman **(I)**
 - NAS Pensacola CAPT Ted Elkins **(I)**
 - NAS Whiting Field S. Nodjomian/C. Perham **(I) / (D)**
 - 2024 Florida Defense Industry Economic Impact Analysis Results Dale Marks **(I) / (D)**
 - Maritime Security Related to Military Installations Tim MacGregor **(I) / (D) / (A)**
 - Association of Defense Communities National Summit Tim MacGregor **(I)**
 - Military and Defense Update
- 11:45 a.m. – 12 p.m. Public Comment..... Chairman **(I)**

Reminder – Upcoming Meeting Dates:

- Feb 20, 2025 MS Teams
- Mar 20, 2025 Tallahassee | Session
- Apr 17, 2025 MS Teams
- May 15, 2025 Tallahassee | Grants | FDA May 14, 2025
- Jun 2025 **NO MEETING**
- Jul 17, 2025 Orange Park Camp Blanding JTC
- Aug 2025 **NO MEETING**
- Sep 18, 2025 Navarre Hurlburt Field (*USAF birthday!*)
- Oct 2025 **NO MEETING**
- Nov 20, 2025 Space Coast (City TBD) | FDA Nov 19, 2025 Installation site visit TBD

Chairman, Senator Tom Wright began the meeting at 9 a.m. EST.

He welcomed everyone in person, participating via Microsoft Teams and watching on the Florida Channel to the Florida Defense Support Commission (FDSC or Commission) meeting and asked everyone join the Pledge of Allegiance. Following that, Tim MacGregor called the roll of Commission members confirming there was a quorum.

Chairman Senator Tom Wright welcomed representatives of Santa Rosa County, the City of Milton and local Military installations and introduced Santa Rosa County Commissioner Colten Wright.

Commissioner Colten Wright: Welcomed everyone to his community and provided a short briefing on how the Santa Rosa County community works with NAS Whiting Field to support the mission of the base.

Secretary Kelly recognized the work being done on economic development in Santa Rosa County and that 23% of the economy in the county is based on the military and defense sector. He added that about half of both the Defense Infrastructure Grants and Defense Reinvestment Grants for this year went to this region of the state. He continued that FloridaCommerce recently announced \$3.1M is available for veterans reentering the workforce. He finished by thanking the commission and staff for their work on the just published 2024 Florida Defense Economic Impact Study.

Chairman, Senator Tom Wright asked all public comments to be E-mailed to Ray Collins to be read into the record at the conclusion of the meeting. He reminded Commission members that the meeting is governed by Florida's Sunshine Law.

II. Agenda Item II: Old Business

Approval of Minutes: A quorum being present, **Chairman, Senator Wright** asked for corrections to the November 21st, 2024, meeting minutes. Noting no changes, he asked for motion for approval of the minutes. Monroe County Mayor Jim Scholl made a motion to approve the minutes, Mr. Tom Neubauer seconded the motion, and the Commission members unanimously approved the minutes.

Commission Grants and Contracts Status **Steven Wood:** briefed on current status of executing FDSC contracts and grants plus provided an overview of the Defense Infrastructure Grants currently under consideration by FloridaCommerce for situational awareness of the Commission members.

Commission Budget **Ray Collins:** briefed on changes to the FDSC budget since the November 2024 meeting. Of note, the interest accrued in the Commission's escrow account is currently 35 times greater than the cost of the account management fees.

Commission Member's Updates:

Mr. Bowman had no updates.

General Diehl thanked the NAS Whiting Field staff and the local defense community for the previous day's installation site visit and hospitality for the meeting events. MacDill AFB has two notable upcoming events. January 28 is the Groundbreaking Ceremony for KC-46 beddown with construction scheduled to get underway mid-March and later there will be a Groundbreaking Ceremony for Tinker K-8 School on MacDill to construct a new Middle School and renovate the existing Elementary School. That school project is part of the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation's Public Schools on Military Installations program.

General Haas briefed that the Florida National Guard (FLNG) had at that time 452 Soldiers and Airmen on federal deployments in the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM), and United States Indo-Pacific Command (PACOM) Areas of Responsibility and projected 1,171 more to deploy during next 12 months. There were 298 troops supporting the Florida Department of Corrections. In December, the National Guard began a phased drawdown of that mission, and was supporting 12 of the 13 original facilities, expecting that drawdown to be complete with all servicemembers off mission in June 2025. There was no change to the Florida Keys Migration support consisting of 4 aircraft and 33 personnel mobilized in Marathon.

The Florida Army National Guard also was supporting the Presidential Inauguration with 500 personnel in Washington, D.C.

He also reported on multiple National Guard facility upgrades across the state.

- Two groundbreaking ceremonies at Camp Blanding: a new Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and high-yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package (CERFP) headquarters and additional barracks.
- At the end of January there was a scheduled ribbon cutting ceremony for a new Counter Drug building.
- In early February, there will be groundbreaking ceremonies for new armories at Zephyrhills and Immokalee.

The Guard has multiple events planned for the upcoming State Legislative session:

- On February 28th, they will host Freshman Legislative Day at Camp Blanding to provide newly elected officials a firsthand look at the Guard's state-of-the-art training facility.
- They will also celebrate National Guard Appreciation Day at the Capitol on March 11th, which will consist of static displays and demonstration of gratitude for the support of our state leaders.

Finally, next week he was scheduled to provide a briefing on the Florida National Guard to Senator Wright and the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space and Domestic Security.

Dr. Gonzalez had no updates.

General Haddad briefed that on December 13, 2024, in Marietta, Georgia, Maj Gen Justin Hoffman, Deputy Commander of Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), accepted the final MC-130J Commando II marking the completion of Lockheed Martin's production run for this aircraft.

AFSOC also recently commemorated two historic events. On December 19, 2024, a small group of retired AC-130H crews returned to Hurlburt Field, Florida, ahead of the anniversary of Operation Just Cause to remember that operation from 35 years ago to depose dictator Manuel Noriega, in an effort to restore democracy and protect U.S. personnel working in Panama. On Nov 29, 2024, Air Commandos, family members, friends, and community members gathered at the Yakushima Townhall dedicate a cenotaph monument of empty tomb that honors people or groups whose remains are elsewhere and mark the one year anniversary of the loss of the crew of GUNDAM-22, a CV-22 Osprey that crashed near Yakushima, Japan.

Mr. Tom Neubauer updated the Commission on an upcoming Change of Command at Naval Surface Warfare Center Panama City. Captain David N. Back was to be relieved by Captain Paul L. Stence Jr. (from NAVSEA Washington Navy Yard) on January 31.

He continued that the previous week he had visited Creech AFB and Nellis AFB with the commander of Air Combat Command and used the trip to learn more about the Air Force focus on new 6th generation Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA) Platforms. Last April General Atomics and Anduril were selected to design build and test the next phase of CCAs. The Air & Space Force Association reports the Air Force anticipates having about 1,000 CCAs by the end of this decade at a cost of about \$10M each and there is

much interest in seeing these platforms in major exercises in Florida ranges as development and testing by the 53rd wing operational test program progresses.

The Air Force is reorganizing major units under the Agile Combat Employment (ACE) wing construct which was first implemented at Mountain Home AFB in Idaho. Tyndall has hosted several ACE exercises and next year is scheduled to be the next AF base to modify the fighter wing construct into the ACE model. The construct increases personnel requirements, and some reports suggest ACE could potentially require up to 12,000 additional billets to implement, so we don't know yet if the new Secretary of the Air Force will embrace the change.

Admiral Don Quinn deferred his remarks to the commanders of NAS Whiting Field and NAS Pensacola, the two large installations in his community, since both those commanders were present and on the agenda to speak later.

Kay Rasmussen reported on Exercise Reaper Castillo, a November to December, 2024 major exercise by the 65th Special Operations Squadron at Hurlburt Field in which they successfully tested the MQ-9 Reaper's ability to operate from unpaved airfields. The control team remotely flew the aircraft from Hurlburt Field, while the aircraft physically operated from Melrose Air Force Range in New Mexico — more than 1,100 miles apart.

The Air Force has instituted a 5-mile 'no drone zone' ban on Unmanned Aerial Systems, or drones, in response to the emerging threat of encroachment due to the rising popularity of private UAS and the security risk they pose as well as the potential safety threat of aircraft-drone collisions.

- The Commission needs to monitor this issue and provide possible assistance as needed.

Okaloosa commissioners, working with Eglin leadership, have released a conceptual plan for "Eglin Orphan Land" development. This applies to eight parcels surrounding the Eglin installation identified as underutilized property and the conceptual plan would provide opportunity for potential housing and commercial development needs.

The Defense Support Initiatives (DSI) Committee will travel to Washington D.C. the first week of April to meet with Congressional members and discuss priority issues from their 2025 military priorities point paper.

She concluded by celebrating the recent major victory when President Biden utilized the authority under Section 12(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to permanently protect the eastern Gulf of Mexico, and other coastlines, from offshore oil and gas drilling. This issue has long been the top priority for encroachment protection by the DSI, Florida Defense Alliance, and the Florida Defense Support Task Force/Commission. Every earlier effort resulted in temporary protection and while this protection is not an act of Congress, Section 12(a) OCSLA has holding power stronger than an Executive Order. In 2019, Federal Circuit Court ruled that this authority could not be revoked by a Presidential Executive Order or by a reversal of the Section 12(a) authority. Congratulations to all the military advocacy entities that have fought for this protection.

General Hartsell briefed that the federal government is spending \$28B on Florida veterans. Florida is outperforming the country in reducing veteran suicide rates and leading the country in reducing the rate of veteran homelessness and in the number of veterans moving to the state. In 2024, FDVA State Veterans' Service Officers assisted more than 245,000 Veterans in providing information and counsel on earned services, benefits and support. In addition, State Veterans' Service Officers have processed nearly 44,000 new claims on behalf of Florida Veterans and helped recover more than \$259 million in retroactive benefits for Florida Veterans and their families. In part, this was made possible by an increase in the number of State Veterans' Service Officers included in the state's 2024 budget, reflecting the state's large Veteran population and the addition and statewide expansion of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

health care facilities. He also provided updates on the usage rate of FDVA nursing homes and construction progress on a new home in Collier County.

Mayor Jim Scholl reported that housing continues to be a major focus and a Housing Town Hall is scheduled for February 4. Vice Admiral Christopher “Scotty” Gray, Commander of Navy Installation Command, visited NAS Key West on December 16, 2024, to also address this issue. NAS Key West is partnering with the highly esteemed Counselors of Real Estate (CRE) and their team conducted an on-site visit from December 9-13, 2024. Virtual meetings are continuing through February 2025 and the continued support and assistance with this unique opportunity is greatly appreciated.

Other recent and upcoming events in Monroe County include a Wounded Warrior Soldier Ride which occurred January 10-12, interagency training at Saddlebunch Key from January 5-17, and on January 30 and 31, NAS Key West is to host the Leadership Monroe County Class 32, the “Frozen Phoenixes.”

Secretary Jamel Sowell sent his regrets that he was unable to be at the meeting in person, but requested the following update on the NE Florida Navy installations be included in the record:

US Navy Region Southeast: From February 3-14, the Navy will once again execute the annual Solid Curtain/Citadel Shield security exercise. Every Navy base in the US will be participating in this exercise. During this exercise there will be random gate closures, active shooter drills and other scenario-driven incidents that will require the bases to elevate threat levels and respond to exercise events.

NS Mayport: The 3rd annual Duval County Public Schools Young Women's Leadership Summit will be hosted by Naval Station Mayport on March 13, 2025. This event is part of Women's History Month and 80 Freshmen and Sophomore students from local schools will learn more about STEM programs and allow the students to interact with women who serve in technical fields in the U.S. Navy. The students will attend a luncheon and conduct visits to a Navy warship and helicopter squadron.

From February 10-14, NS Mayport will be supporting US Naval Forces Southern Command during the Intermediate Planning Conference for the 2025 UNITAS exercise. UNITAS is a longstanding, multinational maritime exercise conducted to enhance security cooperation and improve coalition operations in the SOUTHCOM AOR. In 2024, the exercise featured 17 vessels, 2 submarines, 20 aircraft and more than 4,300 personnel from 24 partner nations. The exercise itself will open at NS Mayport 15- September 19 and there will be numerous receptions and events during this visit. The USS KEARSARGE will be the US Flag Ship for the Mayport visit. After departing Mayport, UNITAS will proceed to Norfolk for a port visit there.

NAS Jacksonville: NAS Jacksonville provided air operations support the funeral for former President Jimmy Carter on January 9. The Navy conducted a 21-plane aerial review over the burial ceremony in Plains, Georgia.

NAS Jacksonville is working closely with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection on the potential for conserving Hog Island on Lake George. This lake is one of the three ranges that are part of the Pinecastle Range Complex, where a developer is planning on building 21 homes. The Navy hopes that including Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) funds will help conserve this island so no homes will be built on an island that is under the flight path of aircraft preparing to drop ordnance onto the Lake George Range.

City of Jacksonville: The City of Jacksonville will be hosting a Veterans Standdown on January 24-25. This event will combine a Job Fair with Veterans Support Services. Homeless, transitioning, at-risk and newly retired veterans will have access to employment services, medical services and assistance with shelter and housing. Veterans who need access to VA services, food, clothing and hygiene kits will be provided assistance in these areas. For more information, you may contact the City of Jacksonville Military Affairs and Veterans Services Department at (904) 255-5550 or <http://www.jacksonville.gov/mavd>.

Mr. Reeves Valentine briefed that following the US Space Command conference at the Orange County Convention Center there will be the formal launch of the National Spaceport Simulation Center, to be celebrated with an Open House Breakfast and tour on Friday, January 31. The National Center for Simulation and World Innovation Network on the Space Coast are sponsoring this event.

He also provided an update on multiple, defense-related projects underway at the University of Central Florida (UCF)

- UCF recently expanded its research capabilities by joining the prestigious Systems Engineering Research Center consortium, a University Affiliated Research Center (UARC) opening new opportunities for UCF researchers to collaborate closely with United States Department of Defense project sponsors on impactful research.
- On December 3, 2024, UCF had the honor of hosting Admiral Christopher Grady, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during which they highlighted UCF's cutting-edge advancements in hypersonics, aerospace engineering, modeling and simulation, and directed energy.
- On December 10, 2024, UCF hosted General Stephen Whiting, Commander of U.S. Space Command and showcased UCF's ongoing commitment to its deep-rooted legacy in space technology and innovation.
- On January 8, Governor DeSantis and Kennedy Space Center Director, Janet Petro, announced the NASA Space University Consortium with UCF, the University of Florida and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. This consortium will act as Florida's official space research entity, facilitating the awarding of NASA research grants in partnership with Kennedy Space Center.

Chairman Senator Tom Wright: echoed Mr. Valentine's remarks on the new Space University Consortium expressed his commitment in the state legislature to continue working to protect Florida's space assets.

Florida Defense Alliance (FDA) Update

Chair Kellie Jo Kilberg discussed collaborative research efforts being done in Florida on drone use being done with the USMC Reserve, various Florida universities, private corporations, and some Florida military installations. She continued with a developing encroachment to Homestead ARB from a proposed soccer stadium in Homestead, an update on progress on the Florida Advanced Training Range project.

She then described the FDA's military legislative priorities for the upcoming regular legislative session:

- Proposed amendments to the Live Local Act to better buffer military installations against incompatible development
- Joining more interstate licensing compacts
- Expanding childcare licensing for caregivers licensed by the Department of Defense
- Concurrent juvenile jurisdiction
- Making transfers of Individual Education Plans for military school students moving between schools quicker

Responding to the final topic, Chairman Senator Wright, Ms. Kilberg, and Secretary Kelly then discussed which elements of the state government and volunteer support structure could best take action to exert influence to make these transitions smooth for military children.

Briefings:

CAPT Chandra Newman, Commander of NAS Pensacola, briefed on the mission of NAS Pensacola, cooperation between the local community and the installation, and the needs of the base and its population focusing on storm recovery, upgrading or replacing aging infrastructure, and public access to certain base areas such as the museum, cemetery, Blue Angels practice viewing area, and the lighthouse.

CAPT Ted Elkins, Commander of NAS Whiting Field, briefed on the mission of NAS Whiting Field, progress by the local community and the state to buffer the installation from encroachment, construction of the Whiting Aviation Park, how grants from the State of Florida are being used to protect and improve the installation, and the new TH-73 helicopters currently replacing the aging TH-57s.

Sal Nodjomian and Charlie Perham of the Matrix Design Group briefed the results of the 2024 Florida Defense Industry Economic Impact Analysis. This was followed by considerable discussion as to why many local community results in this study didn't align with community expectations and perceived performance from the people who live in those communities.

Mr. Nodjomian and Mr. Perham spent some time explaining that the models used in this study (a combination of both REMI and IMPLAN) were different from the preceding studies (which only used REMI) and this time they used REMI for the state-level analysis and IMPLAN for the regional and county level analysis. This concluded with a discussion of how to properly interpret these results since the models used this time were not exactly the same as in earlier studies.

Dale Marks, Executive Director of the 96th Test Wing at Eglin AFB, followed with a briefing on Maritime Security Related to Military Installation shorelines emphasizing the scale of the problem and the need to publish more Notices to Mariners about these zones and better mark the restricted areas with more buoys.

Tim MacGregor briefed on the Association of Defense Communities (ADC) National Summit and the Commission members approved using FDSC funds to send some Commission members to Washington, D.C. to meet with senior Department of Defense and congressional leaders.

Military and Defense Updates

Tim MacGregor discussed utilizing Commission funds for the ADC conference attendance noted above, as well as purchasing new audio-visual equipment to support Commission meetings. He noted the Office of Military and Defense is assessing possible software solutions for intaking and processing grant requests; and that the defense industry economic analysis was available both on line and in printed versions the office has available. He concluded by thanking Santa Rosa County for providing the space and services to run the meeting, and thanking Military and Defense staff member Steve Wood for his outstanding service overseeing grants and contracts as he prepares to move to another office at FloridaCommerce.

Public Comment:

There were no public comments.

Senator Wright: Finished with a reminder that next meeting was scheduled for February 20 via MS Teams. He then called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m. EDT.