

Administration

1769 E. Moody Blvd Bldg 2
Bunnell, FL 32110



www.flaglercounty.gov

Phone: (386)313-4001

Fax: (386)313-4101

Written by:

Julie Murphy, PIO, MPIO

Flagler County

Communications Coordinator

(386) 313-4039

Email jmurphy@flaglercounty.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Governor Ron DeSantis awards Flagler County \$4 million for ‘Nexus Center’ as part of broadband expansion

February 2, 2024 – Governor Ron DeSantis on Friday awarded \$4 million to Flagler County for its “Nexus Center” – a multi-purpose facility to house both a new library and the county’s Health and Human Services Department – as part of a total \$223 million to expand broadband internet access to all Floridians. The funding includes \$135 million in state funding through the Broadband Opportunity Program, as well as \$86 million in federal funds through the Multipurpose Community Facilities Program.

“We are thrilled by this announcement,” said County Administrator Heidi Petito. “This is huge for Flagler County. We are extremely grateful to have been awarded this money by Governor DeSantis.”

Flagler County’s award comes through the Multipurpose Facility Program that was designed to support community infrastructure projects that will provide internet access. This funding comes as the Federal Communications Commission recently enacted new rules relating to private companies’ broadband expansion efforts, aimed at preventing “digital discrimination of access to broadband services based on income level, race, ethnicity, color, religion or national origin.”

“Connecting Florida’s small and rural communities to broadband internet will help them find jobs, access education resources and expand their businesses,” DeSantis said in his announcement. “We will continue to make investments in broadband internet that support long-term growth for our communities, without federally imposed strings attached.”

Chief of Special Projects and Library Director Holly Albanese heard about the federal \$4 million grant application opportunity in June 2023 from State Librarian Amy Johnson and worked diligently to prepare the application for October.

“It was a very complex grant with lots of requirements,” Albanese said. “It is the most difficult grant application I have submitted.”

Applications were scored and ranked. Flagler County needed to rank in the top 20.

“I am so proud of Holly,” Petito said. “She worked so hard and did such a great job bringing this money into Flagler County.”

Albanese made a presentation for the Nexus Center to the Board of County Commissioners more than two years ago that will provide expanded space for the Bunnell Branch Library, the Health and Human Services Department, a congregate

Andy Dance
District 1

Greg Hansen
District 2

David Sullivan
District 3

Leann Pennington
District 4

Donald O’Brien, Jr.
District 5

meal site for seniors, and community rooms. The building will sit on county-owned property on Commerce Parkway near the Flagler County Sheriff's Office headquarters.

"It's an ingenious idea," said Flagler County Commission Chair Andy Dance at the time.

The decision to find another way to incorporate more needs for the county drove the conceptual floor plan Albanese presented.

"We revised the scope of the project from just a library to a library, a Health and Human Services Department, and a community room," she said. "It appears that was a good decision because it made us eligible for these funds. This announcement made my day. It's a big win for our community."

Flagler County has another \$9.6 million earmarked for this project, and another \$1 million in revenue from the Library's Passport Program. The county also secured a \$500,000 state grant last year.

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