

**MINUTES
MERIWETHER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

February 10, 2021

This meeting was held by Zoom due to COVID-19 for the public with Board Members and County Staff attending in Person

Commissioners Present: Chairman Bryan Threadgill, Vice Chairman Alfred McCoy, Commissioner Shirley Hines, Commissioner Rosla Plant and Commissioner Beth Neely-Hadley
Staff Present: County Administrator Theron Gay, County Clerk Beverly Thomas, and County Attorney Nathan Lee
Staff Absent: Finance Director Bill Gregory

- I. CALL TO ORDER** – Chairman Threadgill called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.
INVOCATION – Vice- Chairman Alfred McCoy
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

II. ADOPT AGENDA

Commissioner Hines stated at the last Board Meeting she was appointed to serve on the CAFI Board. Commissioner Hines stated she would not be able to meet that obligation and had someone else in mind that could serve. The Board will discuss the recommendation and add it to the next Agenda. Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Rosla Plant approve the Agenda and add under New Business 13. Accept the resignation of Shirley Hines from the CAFI Board. All were in favor.

III MINUTES

Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Rosla Plant to approve the Minutes of the January 26, 2021 Regular Meeting at 6:00 p.m. All were in favor.

Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Shirley Hines to approve the Minutes of the January 27, 2021 Special Called Meeting. All were in favor.

IV. MUNICIPAL COMMENTS

None

V. CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS COMMENTS

Tax Commissioner, Cat Jenkins, stated her office would be adding an exterior drop box and would need help from Public Works for a cement pad. People will be able to drop off payments. This will be similar to Troup County. Ms. Jenkins reported they are still working on the telephone system and trying to get situated. When people call it rings to all offices and because of being short staffed they are focusing on working with the people who are in line and waiting outside. Once the phone system is up, callers can leave a message and get an e-mail address to contact the office. Commissioner Neely-Hadley asked what is different now with the phones. Ms. Jenkins stated the phone would ring and if no one picked up it kept ringing and callers did not know they were calling the Tax Office unless someone answered the phone and said this is the Tax Commissioners Office. Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated when she calls there is an option to press a number for the Tax Commissioner or a number for the Tax Assessor's office and the phones were working like this as of December 2020. Ms. Jenkins stated that was the County phone line and she did not think it goes to the Tax Commissioners Office. Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated it does go to the Tax Commissioners Office because she had called before. The number she used was listed online. There was conversation between Ms. Jenkins and IT Director Skip Richmond about the telephone system. Mayor Glover stated the City of Greenville was receiving calls from citizens who were trying to get in touch with the Tax Commissioners office and could not. Mayor Glover asked Ms. Jenkins what her solution would be to this. Ms. Jenkins stated they would get a service with a recording that rings through and answers questions such as hours of operation, website address etc. Ms. Jenkins stated the office will

not take payments over the telephone because it takes up a lot of time. The Tax Commissioners Office will first take care of the people who are there in person. Ms. Jenkins stated it takes a lot of time for the Clerks to get through the Drives System which is the State program with sensitive data. There is a 1-2-day training that is needed to know how to operate the system. There were problems setting up printers and offices and machines had been moved around. One day they were down to one Clerk due to printers not working. Ms. Jenkins stated the printers were not working due to going through the drives system and there are glitches in that system. Another reason is the mechanics of the printer and moving printers to different offices. They are getting that fixed. Mayor Glover stated it is very frustrating to her office. Ms. Jenkins stated she was two people understaffed and had hired one that would be starting soon. Commissioner Neely-Hadley suggested to hire someone just to answer the telephones until the office could get situated. Ms. Jenkins stated she has a volunteer. Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated she receives calls every day from citizens who cannot get in touch with the Tax Office. Many citizens do not understand why they are unable to talk to someone in the Tax Office. Chairman Threadgill stated many older ones do not want to stand in line and if they go online there is a fee. Ms. Jenkins stated another way to help, in which she would need Public Works, is to install walk up windows at the front portico to serve those who want to renew tags or get a handicap placard. The office cannot have more than 3 people due to the Fire Marshall. Ms. Jenkins stated she is planning to change the website. There will still be some penalties to pay online and fees according to the credit card companies. Ms. Jenkins is looking to find another website that will not charge a fee. Ms. Jenkins needs IT to do more for her office. Chairman Threadgill stated that can be coordinated through Mr. Gay. Ms. Jenkins asked what the expected timeline was to get things done and stated she could hire someone if needed. Administrator Gay stated we will work with the Tax Commissioner but could not always be there immediately due to having a small IT Department. IT cannot always drop everything unless it is an emergency. IT would need to have notice. Chairman Threadgill stated the way he understood Ms. Jenkins earlier regarding the printer issues was because of the State drive system. Ms. Jenkins stated that was one issue the other was the mechanics of the machine and moving the equipment. Ms. Jenkins stated she needs access to different areas of her office and needs the password to the camera system. Administrator Gay stated this is a building security system not just an office monitor system. Ms. Jenkins stated she would prefer to discuss this in private since there are some issues and it will be expensive to fix. Administrator Gay asked Ms. Jenkins to make a request by email. Skip Richmond stated there was a printer missing from that office that has not been seen since January 1, 2021. It was not reported to law enforcement. Administrator Gay stated they will get together and discuss this. Ms. Jenkins wants to be able to access and delete the scans on her computer. Skip said he just found this out on Friday and had not gotten to that yet.

Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated she knows Ms. Jenkins is an elected official and has the authority to hire and fire and do as she sees fit but the public does not understand why the Board of Commissioners cannot make things happen. The County is receiving a lot of complaints and it is important to answer the phones and communicate well. For many years there has been a good relationship with Constitutional Officers. The complaints we are currently receiving rate up there with road issues. Chairman Threadgill stated people are saying it was never like this before, why now. No one answers the phones or returns calls. Ms. Jenkins stated she cannot get messages on the machine. Chairman Threadgill stated he took 13 messages on the day she was out and gave them to one of the Clerks. The calls were not returned. Ms. Jenkins stated she and the bookkeeper were putting in 60 hours per week. The previous Tax Commissioner did not process mail during the last weeks in office and taxes were due on December 20, 2020. There was a lot of mail received that was not processed before Ms. Jenkins took office. Ms. Jenkins had to call companies and get the passwords because Ms. Peacock would not engage with her. This will not continue and there will be excellent service going forward. Administrator Gay stated the County had received a disbursement from the Tax Office on December 30th. Ms. Jenkins stated she had another check for the County and asked if Mr. Gregory was here. Administrator Gay stated Mr. Gregory was not present, and the check could be left with him or Beverly. The check was not left with Administrator Gay or Clerk Thomas. Administrator Gay stated information on the breakdown of funds was needed to disburse the funds into various categories once they are collected. Ms. Jenkins stated she would need to

get with the Accountant to get the reports that are needed. Ms. Jenkins stated they still have Meriwether Bank and Trust as their primary account. There is not a manual for this office and it is trial and error and just takes time.

VI. DEPARTMENT HEAD COMMENTS

None

VII. PUBLIC HEARING

Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Shirley Hines to go into a Public Hearing to discuss Timber Ordinance 2021-01 and update to comply with recent State Legislative changes. Administrator Gay reviewed the changes. County Attorney, Nathan Lee, stated the changes were made to match new Statute. Administrator Gay stated our Ordinance was one of the newest Timber Ordinances in the State. Commissioner Hines asked about HB897 and stated this was mentioned by ACCG. Administrator Gay stated the multiple points of egress was included in our Ordinance. Commissioner Hines asked about violations and Attorney Lee stated if the Code Enforcer issues a citation it would be handled by the Magistrate Court. Commissioner Hines asked about clarity of Section 11 from ACCG and fines. Attorney Lee reviewed and all is in accordance with the State.

There were no online or public comments.

Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Rosla Plant to go out of the Public Hearing. All were in favor.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Rosla Plant to appoint Bill Charron to the Planning Commission, District 3. All were in favor. This term will expire 01-05-2026.
2. Motion was made by Chairman Threadgill and seconded by Vice Chairman McCoy to table the appointment for District 4 to the Water and Sewerage Authority. All were in favor.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

1. Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Rosla Plant to Amend Chapter 9, article VII, Timber Harvest Procedure. All were in favor.
2. Ms. Elliott was unable to log into the meeting on Zoom.
3. Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Beth Neely-Hadley to accept the resignation of Bill Charron from the Recreation Advisory Board. All were in favor.
4. Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Vice Chairman McCoy to table the appointment to the Recreation Advisory Board to fill an unexpired term representing the Board of Education (term to expire December 31, 2021). All were in favor.
5. Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Rosla Plant to appoint Emmett Collins to the Board of Assessors to fill an unexpired term that will end on December 31, 2021. All were in favor.
6. Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Shirley Hines to approve FY 2021 Budget Amendment #1 – Employee Benefits, \$133,035.79. All were in favor.
7. Administrator Gay stated over a year ago the County updated the Retirement Plan. We spoke about the language multiple times and Mass Mutual failed to add special provisions for the vesting period of Commissioners, Administrator, Asst. Administrator, Clerk and Department Heads. This was not discovered until someone recently left employment. This amendment will correct the error Mass Mutual made. Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Rosla Plant to approve and sign the amendment. All were in favor.
8. Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Shirley Hines to approve the ACCG Contact Appointments. All were in favor.
9. Administrator Gay stated we were working to get the Fire Station project completed. The location on Hwy. 18 did not work and now we are looking at property on Tech Drive. This property has double

access onto County Line Road costs more due to grading. Administrator Gay met with the contractor last week. Steel has increase 30%. We faced this before. We are in the \$1M range and will try to reduce cost. There was more discussion of the footprint and being able to remove a wall and add onto the building later. We have this station, one other station, a remodel to do and others we hope to get to. The contractor bid this out as our agent. He feels steel cost will continue to increase. They recommended we lock in the steel. Chairman Threadgill suggested we send out another RFP since all building materials are increasing and thinks it could cost less. Administrator Gay asked if the Board wanted to use the current company to seek other bids or did, they want the County to develop the design and go out for a full bid. Chairman Threadgill wanted good construction at a good price. The Board thought it would be good to price the building using block, and wood to see how that would compare to metal. Alan Smith, Fire Chief, stated it is now set up for a Fire Station but not as headquarters. Commissioner Hines asked Fire Chief Smith what was most important. Chief Smith stated a good central Fire Station to hold equipment, command staff and function as a Fire Station. We want to go from an ISO rating of 6X to 5 or 4 at a later date. We need to lay this out for the future. Commissioner Hines stated it has been 5-6 years since the discussion of Primrose which is what kicked this off. There is still nothing in place for Primrose. Administrator Gay stated there is still funds there for the station and it will be like we planned. Administrator Gay has a new lead on property for the station.

10. Administrator Gay stated execution of a Quit Claim Deed conveying property along I-85 and Blue Creek to the Meriwether County Industrial Development Authority was from property that was unmarketable, and we would keep perpetual easement to the sewer plant. Administrator Gay stated this was listed as a taxable property in error and we sent a letter, and it was taken care of. The taxes were waived on the land belonging to the County. Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Beth Neely-Hadley to execute the Quit Claim Deed to convey property along I-85 and Blue Creek to the Meriwether County Industrial Development Authority. All were in favor.

11. Administrator Gay discussed the layout and submitted the grant for the Greenville Recreation Facility. Meriwether County has been selected to move to the next step. It is a \$200K grant and we have a few more items to complete. The paperwork is due to them by February 12, 2021.

12. Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Rosla Plant to set a Work Session for March 23, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. to discuss Zoning. All were in favor.

13. Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Beth Neely-Hadley to accept the resignation of Shirley Hines from the CAFI Board. All were in favor.

X. REPORT FROM FINANCE DIRECTOR

Finance Director Bill Gregory was absent. Administrator Gay provided the bank balance information to Board Members.

XI. REPORT FROM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Administrator Gay met with GDOT on the entrance of a proposed new industry and has information to give to IDA Executive Director, Jane Fryer to get her involved in the matter. We will ask GDOT for additional funding for other projects.

Information was sent out for the Hogansville Comprehensive Plan.

There has been a lot of items moved out of the old storage building at the ballpark. There is a workshop on Tuesday from 6:00 p.m.- 7:00 p.m. regarding redistricting. This could impact what each City receives, and we will need to renegotiate LOST. Commissioner Hines spoke with Representative Buckner and she may have a Work Session regarding this which may be in March or April. Commissioner Hines stated we could get with Representative Jenkins regarding transportation funding. The level of work needed for Luthersville Road will be expensive. Administrator Gay hopes we will get additional funds since Luthersville Road connects to three State Roads.

Administrator Gay stated he is working on the Service Delivery Strategy update for the Public Hearing that is set for the second meeting this month.

Administrator Gay attended the Recreation Advisory Board Meeting and the Airport Meeting.

Several areas have been looked at for Security. This includes Red Oak Bridge. GDOT is looking at Hwy. 362 at Red Oak Creek Bridge Replacement and it is a 12-month project. Feedback is needed. The Durand Landfill report for December was received and it looks good.

XII. REPORT FROM COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Shirley Hines: asked if Ms. James was on the Zoom Meeting. There had been a road issue and Commissioner Hines went to Beulah Evans Road. The road was deplorable, and a constituent stated she could not get out of her property to take care of basic needs. Public Works did come out, and Commissioner Hines stated she knows it is hard to do the work with the rain. The Citizens voted for T-SPLOST and we need to have criteria on what it takes to pave a road. When people ask this, we will have guidelines. In 2017 the County had Crawford Grading look at an area on the road where there was a high bank and a curve that had caused drainage problems. Crawford Grading provided a proposal. This needs to be done since there are 80+ people who live off this road. Commissioner Hines feels we need to come up with something better than what we are doing.

Commissioner Rosla Plant: recognized Jane Fryer. The announcement came from the Governor's office regarding KD Auto in the Industrial Park. It is a \$38M investment with 180 jobs. There are a lot of good things in the pipeline and Commissioner Plant is looking forward to more good things coming this way.

Commissioner Neely-Hadley: asked about two roads that were identified during T-SPLOST for paving. Those roads are Mt. Pilgrim and Peaceful Lane. Administrator Gay stated both roads had been shot for elevation and drainage and both roads meet the criteria. Those two roads already have the Right of Way, Beulah Evans Road does not have Right of Way. A let package will be put together in the Spring. Bill Cawthorne has done a lot of work to set up this project. Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated there had been a lot of logging and whenever Kim Stover from B& Z checks it never seems to be the logger's fault. Jesse Cole Road and Temple Dukes Road have a lot of mud. Administrator Gay will check on this. Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated Ms. Elliott sent her a message and said if she does not get the Tax Commissioner's Office problem straightened out this month, she would get back with us. Ms. Elliott had been trying since the 1st of January to get in touch with the Tax Commissioner's office. Chairman Threadgill had also taken this message when he was helping to answer phones when the Tax Commissioner was in an accident. Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated a message regarding Ms. Elliott's call had been hand delivered to the Tax Commissioner and nothing has been done. Several State Representatives were contacted, and one reached out to Ms. Jenkins about contacting Ms. Elliott. Ms. Elliott has not heard back from anyone. Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated the Board of Commissioner's hands are tied. Commissioner Neely-Hadley was not familiar with some of the citizens who have been calling her about this issue.

Warm Springs will hold their annual Spring Fling on April 10, 2021.

There will be a Candlelight tour and the Candlelight run in November. The Little White House is taking the lead on this.

Warm Springs Hospital has been doing a vaccine clinic and there have been many positive comments.

Vice Chairman McCoy: spoke with Darlene McDaniel regarding her plans for a three-phase project at the old *Riverside* Restaurant by the Flint River. There are plans for a convenient store, kayak and canoe rentals, restaurant, and cabins. A new river access point was planned for Sullivan Mill Road and this will give Meriwether County the use of the full length of the river.

The County is coming up with a security plan for the covered bridge, airport runway, Lake Meriwether, and the River.

We need to review the HOST Agreement with Gabe Gribble regarding debris from trucks along Hwy. 54. Vice Chairman McCoy spoke with Sheriff Smith about Luthersville Road and expanding it an additional 1' on each side. We need more signage and develop pull offs along the road.

The Airport Authority has assured the County will be reimbursed for money spent on the fuel farm.

Chairman Bryan Threadgill: access has been closed to the Covered Bridge due to 13 support beams being broken. Calls have been received regarding striping Cove Road. Bill Cawthorne asked them to add tape until a new topcoat can be added. After that, the center line striping will occur. Administrator Gay will ask them to add the center line tape. LMIG projects are in the works.

XIII. REPORT FROM COUNTY ATTORNEY

County Attorney Nathan Lee stated there was need for an Executive Session to include Personnel, Real Estate, and Litigation.

XIV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Damon Rosser from the Zion Hill Community on Primrose Rd. asked about the recent paving on Tenny Nelson - Charlie Fuller Road to Hwy. 54. The road is coming apart. Mr. Rosser heard someone was going to come back and complete this but has not. Administrator Gay stated the temperature must be higher to get adhesion on the asphalt. As soon as it is warmer, they can make the application.

Mr. Rosser stated that he had been here all his life and had never had a problem in the past until now regarding the Tax Commissioners Office. It is unacceptable when you have parents in their 60's, 70's and 80's that are having to go through this to get a tag. Something must be done, and we must rectify what is going on in that office. Never have we had an office who did not answer their phone.

Administrator Gay addressed the road issue. The Contractor will make the repairs to the road as needed at their cost. Mr. Rosser stated Forrest Road is a safety issue and has many potholes. One friend bent a rim from running over the potholes. Primrose Road needs to be scraped so that holding water will go into the ditch. Mr. Rosser reminded the Board not to forget about the Fire Station at Primrose.

Gail Ellis from Pheasant Hollow Drive in Greenville welcomed Commissioner Plant and looks forward to meeting with her. Ms. Ellis did not want the Board to push Mt. Pilgrim Road paving aside due to other road issues in the County. Administrator Gay stated they are putting contracts together now for Mt. Pilgrim Road.

XV. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Beth Neely-Hadley to go into Executive Session at 10:50 am to discuss Personnel, Real Estate and Litigation. All were in favor.

Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Beth Neely-Hadley to go out of Executive Session at 11:50 am. All were in favor.

Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Shirley Hines to go back into Regular Session at 11:50 am. All were in favor.

Chairman Threadgill left the meeting.

There was no action taken.

XVI. FUTURE MEETINGS & NOTICES

Chairman Threadgill announced future meetings prior to Executive Session.

XVII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Shirley Hines to adjourn the meeting at 11:51 am. All were in favor.

Approved by: *Majority vote of the Board of Commissioners*

Attest: *Bevellyd Thomas, County Clerk*

Date: *February 23, 2021*