

**MINUTES**  
**MERIWETHER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**January 24, 2023**  
**6:00 P.M.**

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Commissioners Present: Chairman Bryan Threadgill, Vice Chairman Gene King, Commissioner Rosla Plant, Commissioner Emmett Collins, and Adam Worsley  
Staff Present: County Administrator Michelle Irizarry, County Clerk Beverly Thomas, Finance Director Bill Gregory, and Attorney Michael Hill

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Bryan Threadgill called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**II. INVOCATION**

The Invocation was given by Deacon Jerry Wimbish of Mt. Sinai Missionary Baptist Church.

**III. PLEDGE TO THE FLAG**

All

**IV. ADOPT AGENDA**

Motion was made by Vice Chairman King and seconded by Rosla Plant to adopt the agenda. All were in favor.

**V. PRESENTATIONS**

Brin Jones, E-911 and EMA Director, updated the Board regarding the recent tornado. Mr. Jones stated that on January 12, 2023, an EF2 Tornado, that was 26 miles from one end of the County to the other, came through the County and it was the same system that hit Spalding County. Meriwether County had numerous volunteers along with the Salvation Army, Red Cross, and local Church groups that have been meeting needs. Through the Salvation Army there have been over 1,000 meals and 1,000 cases of water provided. Other items given out were toys, blankets, food boxes, shovels, rakes, and tarps for those in need along with other assistance. We are now in the recovery phase with a point of distribution set up in front of DFACS. There were approximately 280 households affected with some only having minor damage and others having total destruction. Mr. Jones met with FEMA today to start a public assistance process. Paperwork will be gathered and processed to provide to FEMA and the County should be able to get at least 85% back and can use in kind work toward the 15% from volunteers other than Firefighters. Mr. Jones stated Tim Reeve with GEMA was in the audience to answer any questions. Chairman Threadgill asked how much longer they would give out tarps. Mr. Jones stated they will move the location to the Fire Department and will continue giving out tarps as needed. There is a family who is still using the showers and a few others. The recovery process started today. The disaster relief center will arrive tomorrow to inspect the Tech Center to make sure that is what they want and if so that will start up next week. That will be for people to come in and talk to FEMA about what may be available to them, but they must rely on their insurance first. FEMA will also help with the deductibles. The SBA will be there regarding loans. We may be under a State of Emergency for another week. That is something the Board will need to discuss. Mr.

Jones stated there were some great organizations who stepped up to help. Chairman Threadgill hoped to bring those organizations in to be recognized. The Board thanked Mr. Jones.

## **VI. FINANCE REPORT**

Bill Gregory, Finance Director, stated he had provided a lot of information to the Board members to review. Mr. Gregory pointed out the 44-page summary document, that is the final report from the Treasury Department. The original document was 580 pages. The bank balance in the general fund is strong due to the tax collections. The other funds are also good. Mr. Gregory provided the usages for ARP funds and pointed out the two-page document press release from the US Department of Treasury that lists what the funds could be used for which included items such as COVID related, Vital Services in the County, premium pay for essential workers, and eligible Water and Sewerage and Broadband infrastructure. On page 4, in the blue document, it shows usage, and you can work out the formula for the replacing lost public sector revenue. The original information, put out by the Treasury, has been changed. They are offering the Cities and Counties to take up to \$10M threshold for revenue replacement without having to provide any documentation, which is what we did. Our amount is \$4.1M which allows us not to have to go through several years of reporting like the larger Counties will have to report. Our award amount was \$4.1M and we have spent around \$300K. We must commit the remaining funds by the end of 2024 and spend by the end of 2026. There was additional information shared by Mr. Gregory on the revenue. There was an emphasis on page 11 on spending on Government services. Some of the most common examples are: Construction of schools and hospitals, Road building and maintenance, and other infrastructure, Health services, General Government administration staff, and administrative facilities, Environmental remediation, Provision of police, fire, and other public safety services (including the purchase of fire trucks and police vehicles). This also gives the Board other options to fund items that were under SPLOST and TSPLOST. One of our surrounding Counties purchased a fire truck with ARP funds. Chairman Threadgill suggested the Board have a future Work Session to discuss this and he wanted the Board to hear from the public.

## **VII. CITIZEN COMMENT**

None

## **VIII. MINUTES**

Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Vice Chairman King to approve the Minutes of the January 11, 2023, meeting with the following corrections under Appointments:

5. Appointment to the IDA, District 2: the four-year term will expire on January 24, 2027, rather than on January 20, 2027. The vote needs to be changed from Emmett Clark to Emmett Collins.

11. Appointment to the Planning Commission, District 1: The spelling of the last name of the appointee should be Dell rather than Dale. The appointment was listing as expiring on January 5, 2029, and it should be January 5, 2024.

13. Appointment to the Planning Commission, District 5: the term will expire on January 5, 2028, rather than January 5, 2023. All were in favor.

## **IX. PUBLIC HEARING**

Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Adam Worsley to go into a public hearing to hear Case #2022-008 – request from Christopher T. McCullough to rezone 5.74 acres from LDR (Low Density Residential) to NHC (Neighborhood Commercial). Property is located on Tax Map #164-037-001

acres) and 165-002 (0.74 acre). The purpose of the rezone is to develop a Country Store/Market Place. All were in favor. Cassandra Sharpe, Director of Building, Zoning and Community Development, stated Mr. McCullough had filed for an application for a rezoning permit to develop a Country Store/Market Place. The current zoning is LDR, and Mr. McCullough has requested the property be rezoned NHC. Retail is not allowed in LDR zoning. The property consists of 5.74 acres. The parcels are listed as Map #164-037-001 and Map #165-002 in Meriwether County Tax records. Letters have been mailed to the adjoining owners advising them of the request with hearing dates and times. Appendix A – zoning section 7.3 permitted uses and special uses, convenience store, or market place as to be in NHC zoning. Ms. Sharpe stated in reviewing of the standards for the exercise of zoning power, in the Meriwether County Official Code, Appendix A, Zoning Section 16.8, the following was noted: A. The current zoning of the subject property does not allow for a commercial within the zoning district. Staff believes the rezoning at this location would have a positive impact on property value in the area. B. The property is well located geographically in the Northeast area of Meriwether County. C. The property is also slated in the comprehensive plan as an area for small businesses. D. Considering these facts, The Meriwether County Community Development Department recommended approval to rezone 5.74 acres from LDR to NHC with the following notations: 1. Must follow sign ordinance for signage. 2. Get approval with GDOT for ingress and egress for Hwy. 85 or Hwy. 362. 3. Must have approval from Meriwether County health Department for sewage and water.

Mr. McCullough stated he was available to answer questions. There were no other comments and no opposition.

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

Motion was made by Vice Chairman King and seconded by Emmett Collins to approve the rezone. All were in favor (see new vote to include stipulations as listed below following Unfinished Business #1). \*\*\*See vote that occurred after Unfinished Business.

## **X. APPOINTMENTS**

1. Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Adam Worsley to table the confirmation of an appointment for the City of Woodbury position on the Lake Meriwether Advisory Board, to fill a term that will expire on January 28, 2025. All were in favor.
2. Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Vice Chairman Gene King to appoint Janet Stiner to the Planning Commission, District 2. This appointment fills a vacant position and will expire on January 5, 2027. All were in favor.

## **XI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

1. Administrator Irizarry stated during the October 12, 2022, Meeting, the Board approved acceptance of the maintenance bond for the streets in the second section of Chambless Village Subdivision, contingent on staff and legal review. Since that time, staff has been working on the documents because the developers are now requesting a change in title on the deed and want to also bring deeds and bonds for the remainder of the streets within the subdivision. This request has required staff to rework the deeds for both phases. The final deeds have been sent to the owners and we are waiting for those to be signed and returned. Once the documents are in hand, staff and legal will complete the review and bring documents for both phases to be accepted by the Board.

Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Adam Worsley to table the acceptance of ROW Deed and Bond for Chambless Village Subdivision, TRGGC Chambless Investors, LLC, and Paran Homes, LLC. All were in favor.

\*\*\*Vote from Public Hearing.

Chairman Threadgill stated the Board did not include the stipulations, as described by Ms. Sharpe, in the vote for the request for rezone in the Public Hearing Case #2022-008. Motion was made by Vice Chairman Gene King and seconded by Adam Worsley to include the stipulations as presented by Cassandra Sharpe, Building, Zoning, and Community Development Director. All were in favor.

## **XII. NEW BUSINESS**

1. Bill Gregory, Finance Director, stated several months ago, Moody's contacted the County after doing their yearly review of our bond rating and we provided information to them. Based on the New York press release dated January 13, 2023, Moody's Investor Service has upgraded the rating on Meriwether County, GA's general obligation unlimited tax debt to A1 from Baa1. Concurrently, Moody's has upgraded to A1 from Baa1 the rating it maintains on county-guaranteed debt issued through the Meriwether County Water & Sewer Authority, GA. Moody's has also assigned an A1 issuer rating to the county. The issuer rating reflects the county's ability to repay debt and debt-like obligations without consideration of any pledge, security, or structural features. This action concludes a review that was initiated on November 3, 2022, in conjunction with the release of the US cities and Counties Methodology. Based on their review there has been improvements in Meriwether County over the last year. If the Board of Commissioners issue bonds down the line, it will be a cost savings. If we go out for financial needs, we can get a lower interest rate. Mr. Gregory stated he would get with Ms. Irizarry to get an article in the newspaper. Moody's is a National Bond Rating.

2. Representative Lynn Smith reached out to Chief Superior Court Judge, John Simpson who then reached out to Administrator Irizarry for a letter of support in the creation of an eighth Superior Court Judge position for the Coweta Judicial Circuit. This letter will need to be signed by all Commissioners. This Legislation would include a State paid Judge, State paid Assistant District Attorney, State paid Public Defender and a State paid Judicial Assistant as well as a State paid Law Clerk. After review of the letter, motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Vice Chairman Gene King to approve and sign the support letter. All were in favor.

3. Motion was made by Emmett Collins and seconded by Commissioner Plant to confirm the Resolution for the appointment of Robert Phillips to the Meriwether County Board of Tax Assessors. The appointment was made on January 11, 2023. All were in favor.

## **XIII. REPORT FROM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR**

Administrator Irizarry thanked Public Works and GDOT for their work in cleaning up the debris on County and State roads after the tornado occurred. There are twelve roads that need debris removed from the ROW and many of the dirt roads are in bad shape from the bad weather. The inmates have been cleaning up from the storm damage. The water leak has been repaired at the Health Department and the water is working. The LMIG was approved. Administrator Irizarry thanked everyone for their patience following the storm. Administrator Irizarry thanked all that were involved and for everyone's patience in trying to take care of the citizens. Brin Jones

recognized Administrator Irizarry and the help she provided on the night of the storm. Chairman Threadgill also thanked Administrator Irizarry.

#### **XIV. REPORT FROM COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

Commissioner Emmett Collins: commended County employees for the job they did and for the volunteers in the County who pitched in to clean up following the tornado. Commissioner Collins received several calls regarding potholes on the dirt roads. As soon as the weather permits, the County will be working on that.

Commissioner Rosla Plant: announced a kids Fishing Event at the Fish Hatchery in Warm Springs. There was not a program last year so the fish will be large. Children will be limited to three fish each. The Fish Hatchery has received funding in the amount \$5M for a new building. There are a lot of good things going on. Like everywhere else there are staffing shortages, but the workload remains.

Vice Chairman Gene King: commended everyone in the County for pulling together following the storm. Some mentioned were the Sheriff Department, EMS, EOC, Administrator Irizarry, Commissioners, volunteers, and citizens. It was good to see everyone come together, and all did a great job clearing the roads and checking on people. Vice Chairman King stated he was invited to look at the Jail regarding what needs to be addressed. Vice Chairman King asked for a future Work Session to address the issues at the Jail. Vice Chairman King asked if we could put out a bid to have someone pressure wash the Courthouse wall.

Commissioner Rosla Plant had a request to find out where we were on the Courthouse roof repair. Administrator Irizarry stated they have completed the drainage reconditioning which was working but there was a leak identified in the dome. This has been submitted to insurance. Commissioner Plant stated we will look at the cosmetics after the leak is repaired. We may need to piggyback when we do the wall to see what needs to be done cosmetically.

Commissioner Adam Worsley: echoed the sentiments of the others. It was nice to see the County team come together and get information out. Commissioner Worsley was happy to see the great leadership from Counties around us who had their own issues but came here to help us. Commissioner Worsley hopes we can reciprocate if they have a time of need. Commissioner Worsley thanked everyone in the County for helping him during his first few weeks in office and for their help and support during this recent crisis.

Chairman Bryan Threadgill: thanked those at E-911, EMS/Fire, Public Works and others who helped during the storm. Chairman Threadgill rode in a helicopter brought in by GSP to see the damage. The helicopter was piloted by Haley Lucas who was recognized by the Board of Commissioners last year as one of the only GSP female pilots in the State. She is the daughter of our Interim Public Works Director. Thanks were expressed to everyone for what they did and continue to do.

**XV. REPORT FROM COUNTY ATTORNEY**

Attorney Michael Hill welcomed new Board members and expresses that he and Nathan Lee looks forward to working with them. Attorney Hill stated an Executive Session would be needed for litigation.

**XVI. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Motion was made by Adam Worsley and seconded by Rosla Plant to go into Executive Session at 6:38 p.m. to discuss Litigation. All were in favor.

Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Adam Worsley to go out of Executive Session at 6:55 p.m. All were in favor.

Motion was made by Adam Worsley and seconded by Rosla Plant to go back into Regular Session at 6:57 p.m. All were in favor.

There was no action taken.

**XVII. FUTURE MEETINGS & NOTICES**

Chairman Threadgill made the announcement of Meetings and Notices prior to Executive Session.

**XVIII. ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business to discuss, motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Emmett Collins to adjourn at 6:57 p.m. All were in favor.

Approved by: Majority vote of the Board of Commissioners

Attest: Beverly Thomas, County Clerk

Date: February 8, 2023