

MINUTES
MERIWETHER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

April 14, 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: Vice Chairman Alfred McCoy, Commissioner Shirley Hines, Commissioner Rosla Plant, and Commissioner Beth Neely-Hadley
Commissioners Absent: Chairman Bryan Threadgill
Staff Present: County Administrator Theron Gay, County Clerk Beverly Thomas, Finance Director Bill Gregory, and County Attorney Nathan Lee

I. CALL TO ORDER – Vice Chairman McCoy called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

INVOCATION – Commissioner Neely-Hadley

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

II. ADOPT AGENDA

Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Shirley Hines to adopt the Agenda and to move #1 and #2 from New Business to under Public Hearing, then add #9. Letter of Support for a Community Development Block Grant for Water System Improvements in Warm Springs and add #10. Comments regarding the Tax Commissioner. All were in favor.

III MINUTES

Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Shirley Hines to approve the Minutes from the March 23, 2021 Work Session at 4:00 pm., March 23, 2021 Regular Meeting at 6:00 p.m., and the March 29, 2021 Special Called Meeting at 4:00 p.m. All were in favor.

IV. MUNICIPAL COMMENTS

Mayor Glover from the City of Greenville said hello and was looking for volunteers for her team for Saturday's Clean up Meriwether.

V. CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS COMMENTS

Cat Jenkins, Meriwether County Tax Commissioner, asked what the addition of #10 was regarding her office since it was added and not on the original Agenda. Commissioner Hines stated she requested this be added and had something personal that she wanted to bring to the attention of the Board.

Tax Commissioner Jenkins reported the new drop box had been installed outside her office and then thanked Building Maintenance. Tax Commissioner wants to get moving on adding the help window outside the front of her office since they are limited to the amount of people who can come in the office due to COVID. Administrator Gay stated we have looked at the area where Tax Commissioner Jenkins wants the help window installed. It is grassy area and there is a drop off on the left side that drops off onto the City's property. We had a Contractor look at the entire building and he wanted to meet with Tax Commissioner. We are waiting to hear back from the Contractor. Administrator Gay stated we are going to be discussing COVID restrictions since the Governor has relaxed some of the restrictions. The window is close to the front door and it may not be as needed since the area will become more accessible. Tax Commissioner Jenkins asked if she and her staff would be reimbursed for the time, they were out due to COVID since some staff members were also absent in February when the office closed due to COVID.

Tax Commissioner Jenkins asked if there was a policy or procedure for reimbursement through the Care Act Money. Administrator Gay will discussed this with Finance and Human Resources to find out how we handled the absentees last year and we will be fair with everyone. Administrator Gay stated Tax Commissioner Jenkins was a Constitutional Officer, and her time would be covered. Commissioner Neely-Hadley thought the County paid for two weeks due to COVID and anything after that the employee

used their sick time. Tax Commissioner Jenkins stated her question was about the budget and would we be reimbursed under the Cares Act. Finance Director Gregory stated we had already received all the Cares Act funding. Tax Commissioner Jenkins asked if Meriwether County had received \$4.7M of Cares Act. Finance Director Bill Gregory stated that was for the American Recovery Act. Administrator Gay stated we are still looking at where those dollars can be spent and getting some guidelines. No decisions have been made at this point. Tax Commissioner Jenkins wanted to clarify if she could not use the County IT since it sounds like the upgrade would not be within the scope of what the County can provide, would she receive more funds to cover the cost. Administrator Gay stated she would need to ask for additional funds through a Budget Amendment. The County would need to know the amount and then it could be added to the Agenda for Board consideration.

VI. DEPARTMENT HEAD COMMENTS

None

VII. PUBLIC HEARING

None

New Business section 1 and 2 were moved during the adoption of the Agenda.

1. Administrator Gay stated Allyson Stephens had worked hard and was an important part of the Commissioner's Office. Allyson has a busy life in addition to work, having two daughters and taking college classes to get her Associate of Arts Degree. Administrator Gay stated we were proud of her personal growth and development and she had learned a lot. Allyson thanked the Board of Commissioners along with Administrator Gay and Clerk Beverly Thomas for teaching her so much.

Ms. Stephens was presented with a Certified County Clerk Certificate from UGA, Carl Institute of Government for her accomplishment.

2. Tammy Starkey and James Clark from NFP provided a presentation for the 2021-2022 Insurance Marketing Analysis. Ms. Starkey reviewed the total number of claims which contributed to the increase in cost and showed a model of the claims from 2015-2020. The loss ratio for the last year was 138%. This is due to 15 high-cost claims that were each over \$25K. Those claims contributed to 90% of the cost. We have been impacted by higher claims for two years. Some of the claims may be COVID related. Only one of the top three claims continues on the plan. Ms. Starkey reviewed who had responded to the market request and who had declined to quote. The top two companies to quote were CIGNA and United Health Care. Ms. Starkey stated NFP had negotiated with CIGNA and they had decreased the original quote by 24% with the premium increase going from \$355,447 down to \$300,259. United Healthcare premium had two options with one having an increase in price from the current premiums of \$251,487 and the UHC Fusion Option with quotes coming in at \$114,293 higher than the county is currently paying. Ms. Starkey explained the Fusion Option and provided areas where the plan cost less and where it cost more. UHC excludes CVS but did offer some savings and has a prescription drug deductible. Ms. Starkey reviewed the cost associated with each Tier and the program incentives. The overview of where we are today was an increase of 9.3% or 12.3% depending on the benefits selected. Ms. Starkey and NFP are looking at the Physicians who are being utilized now and will get the County a Medical Provider Disruption Detail. Ms. Starkey provided information on the UHC Motion Program and ways employees can earn money toward their HRA deductible.

Ms. Starkey reviewed the Dental Plan. The Dental Plan would be packaged with United Healthcare and would provide additional savings toward the Medical Insurance. There would be no change with the Vision, Life, Short Term Disability and Long-Term Disability. NFP pays for the HRA plan and they are looking at moving to Medcom due to changes and issues employees had with TASC.

Administrator Gay stated this is information for the Board to review and no action will need to be taken today. The Board will need to vote on this during the April 27, 2021 Board of Commissioners Meeting.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Administrator Gay stated the County was to receive a loan and grant for a bridge paving project on County Line Road. Projected project cost will be \$750K to \$800K over the grant and loan amount. will be an additional cost of \$750K - \$800K over that cost. We will need to spend more money on engineering which will be approximately \$75K. Administrator Gay needs confirmation if the Board wanted to move forward with this project. It did not make sense to spend that much money on engineering if the Board did not want to move forward with the project considering the additional cost. It is a huge project that includes a bridge replacement, grading, clearing, and paving the roadway. We have discussed this for a long time, and it is not as simple as replacing the bridge. There was discussion of using TSPLOST funds and we may be able to use funds from the American Recovery Program. Commissioner Hines stated this needs to happen at some time and the road is only getting worse. Commissioner Hines had attended a Zoom meeting on funding and wants the County to look at options of Federal Funding for infrastructure through the American Rescue Plan. There were concerns of traffic being detoured off I-85 to County Line Road. Administrator Gay will continue to report information to the Board and will speak with GDOT. Commissioner Hines spoke about funds the County can receive and how to handle and report the funding. There was no action, and the Board will discuss this later. Motion was made by Shirley Hines and seconded by Beth Neely-Hadley to table the discussion of paving County Line Road until additional information is received. All were in favor.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

1. This was moved to the Agenda Section after Public Hearing.

2. This was moved to the Agenda Section after Public Hearing.

3. Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Shirley Hines to approve the Memorandum of Understanding between Evidence Based Associates, LLC in partnership with Coweta County and Meriwether County. All were in favor.

4. Administrator Gay explained some guidelines we have followed that were set by the State to address COVID 19. On April 8, 2021 Governor Kemp removed some of the guidelines and changes were made such as social distance moving from 6' to 3' apart. Administrator Gay recommended we look at relaxing guidelines based on the new State guidelines. There was additional discussion. Attorney Lee stated all orders set by the State cannot be more or less restrictive and he will look at the most recent Executive Order. Administrator Gay stated he felt we needed to bring this up in light of the State changes. Administrator Gay will provide the Executive Order with highlights of changes. There was no action at this time.

5. Administrator Gay reviewed the Paving Criteria for Dirt Roads that he had written. Beulah Evans Road was taken into consideration when the first roads were considered. There were a few items on the list that needed to be changed. The Right of Way must be donated. Administrator Gay stated Mt. Pilgrim Road had existing right of way. Commissioner Hines asked about the guidelines for paving a road where they do not own property but use it for travel. Commissioner Hines used Mt. Pilgrim Road as an example and stated most of the people who wanted Mt. Pilgrim Road paved do not live on that road. Since this will be a guideline moving forward, Commissioner Hines confirmed that the landowner would need to sign off on having their road paved or oppose the paving regardless of the other people who use the road and do not own the land. Commissioner Hines stated other roads feed off a road such as Beulah Evans Road and asked what happens if you have the landowners opposed but have others using the road. Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated you cannot make someone give up their property for your benefit. Commissioner Hines stated unless the demand is so great the County could use eminent domain. An example was given of Beulah Evans Road where there may be only ten houses, but you may have many more roads that feed into that road with approximately 80 other homes. Administrator Gay hoped that the citizens and maybe the Commissioners would be able to communicate with other citizens in the area about the need to have the road paved.

6. Administrator Gay reviewed Ordinance #2021-02 and explained the problems we have with litter blowing off the back of trucks that are hauling trash. The Law requires the trucks to tarp the back when they transport trash but does not require them to cover the area after the trash is dumped. Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Beth Neely-Hadley to accept Ordinance #2021-02, an Ordinance to amend Litter Control. All were in favor.

7. The Probate Judge requested a budget amendment to hire a 24 hour per week part time person to help the office get caught up due to a large request for carry permits. The budget amendment is for \$8,600. We will look at this again during the new Budget Sessions. Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Shirley Hines to approve the Budget Amendment for the Probate Office in the amount of \$8,600. All were in favor.

8. Administrator Gay stated the Fire Department Automatic Aid Agreements are to allow access and assist other Cities and allow them to assist us when help is needed. We would be responsible for our employees and equipment and so would they. Adam Smith, Fire Chief, stated working under a Mutual Aid Agreement is common practice. When we arrive at the scene it takes longer when you must call for Mutual Aid. This way we can call on the way to the scene and cancel if needed once we arrive. Automatic Aid also counts toward the ISO rating. Chief Smith explained several benefits of having this agreement. There are three agreements for the Board to review this evening. The Agreements are with the City of Manchester, City of Pine Mountain and Talbot County. Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Beth Neely-Hadley to approve the Automatic Aid Agreements and allow the Chairman to sign following legal review.

All were in favor.

9. Motion was made by Beth Neely Hadley and seconded by Rosla Plant to allow the Chairman to sign a Letter of Support for a Community Development Block Grant for Water System Improvements for the City of Warm Springs. All were in favor.

10. Commissioner Hines received calls from citizens about the position the Board took with the Tax Commissioner and wants the Board to consider having mediation through a 3rd party or coming up with another option. Some citizens want us to look at this rather than what the Board has already voted on to move forward. Administrator Gay stated there has been a lot said of the County refusing to meet with people and not allowing ACCG to help mitigate the issues, and that is simply not true. There was no formal request for mediation with ACCG. We have heard of threats from a third party if ACCG or other organizations don't do this or that. Commissioner Hines stated she wanted this put on the floor. Vice Chairman McCoy asked Attorney Lee if this route was open to us. Attorney Lee stated the Board can always have further discussion and there are no legal requirements.

Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated the action was for the County to be allowed to get into the building to do work. We also want to be sure money is collected and disbursed to us in a timely manner. We do not want to have to go any further and want to resolve this, but we must be able to get into the building. Administrator Gay stated the success of that office is the success for all offices. Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated there is no problem talking but we have not received tax money in our office as required by law. We are in month number four. Commissioner Neely-Hadley was not opposed to sitting down to get things done and stated we just need to be able to get into the building to do work. Commissioner Hines wanted to make sure everyone is talking more since the citizens have asked her to bring attention to this.

X. REPORT FROM FINANCE DIRECTOR

Finance Director Bill Gregory reported the bank balances from several accounts, and we will have to pay \$700K by the end of the month for two roads we agreed to pave. Commissioner Hines asked if the County was restricted on how the money received at E-911 could be spent. Reports were reviewed from SPLOST and T-SPLOST. We are running above average with those accounts.

XI. REPORT FROM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Administrator Gay has been working on the Dirt Road Policy, Ordinance for the Landfill tarping, and has attended the IDA and Airport Authority Meetings. Administrator Gay received a request from Mary Bray

after the Agenda had gone out. The Recreation Advisory Board has recommended having fundraisers. They want to schedule a walk-a-thon on June 26, 2021 on County Line Road. We do not know the time and locations and will ask them for a plan that will be brought back before the Board at the next meeting. This is strictly for County Farm Road.

Administrator Gay has been working on the Park Grant and the Service Delivery Strategy updates. The Service Delivery Strategy was sent to us and minor changes are needed. Administrator Gay discussed the requested changes.

Administrator Gay told Commissioner Hines he needed to get with her regarding the signage on State Route 54 in order to tell GDOT exactly where the signs need to be. Commissioner Hines asked that the County reach out to Mayor Cuttie since it will also impact Luthersville.

Bids will be opened next Friday for a resurfacing project on the first dirt roads and LMIG.

Administrator Gay met with Georgia Trust at the Covered Bridge. They are trying to seek funds to assist us with that. We received documents from the Board of Education certifying the E-SPLOST Election. Calls have been received about the railroad underpass in Warm Springs which has been closed for 3-years this August. It will be another 15-24 months to completion. We will bring back the Airport Funding with AWAS later. A meeting was held with a citizen on the east side of the County who is interested in installing a helicopter pad which could be used if needed for EVAC. He will provide us with a set of plans to approve. Administrator Gay appreciates citizens who try to help. Commissioner Hines wanted to get more information to citizens on the Coleman Bridge Project and was concerned with the GDOT timeline. Administrator Gay stated he would check on this and get a time frame. This is a major project that would take a long time to complete.

XII. REPORT FROM COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Shirley Hines: reported many great things had happened this past week. Commissioner Hines went to the Little White House on Monday to premiere "President in our Mist" which will air on television in October or November on Georgia Public Television. *Debron* Walker purchased the Rosenthal School in Warm Springs. The film captured a lot of the school.

There was a good turnout for the Ag Innovative Center in Woodbury. The Mayor of Woodbury plans to take the old school and turn it into an Ag Center. There were several Representatives present and this would have a big impact to the County and Region.

Ms. Josie Walls passed away last week. She was a strong pillar in the County. In 1990 Ms. Walls ran for Commissioner and was the first African American Woman to hold that office in Meriwether County. Commissioner Hines had a constituent bring to her a picture that was taken of an individual who sat in her seat with her name plate in front of them. This picture was posted on Facebook. Commissioner Hines was not sure why someone sat there and was disturbed that it happened. Commissioner Hines knows there is a lot of turmoil and racial issues and does not know the intent of this. This was posted on Facebook on March 26th.

Commissioner Rosla Plant: reminded everyone of Keep Meriwether Beautiful Clean-Up day this Saturday and asked citizens to volunteer. Commissioner Plant met with the Fish Hatchery and they have scheduled a fishing class for children 12 years of age and under. There are two ponds where children can fish while social distancing due to COVID. More information will be shared as it becomes available.

Commissioner Neely-Hadley: reported the dumpster for Cleanup Meriwether in the Manchester district had been moved from the Mill to Magnolia Lane where the old Animal Shelter was in Chalybeate Springs. The area will be locked prior to and after the time allocated for cleanup.

Vice Chairman McCoy: met with a recycling group. We are trying to get DCA to work with Georgia Trust on the Covered Bridge. There will be a bike-a-thon the first of May. They will use the Covered Bridge for bicycle riding. Peaches in the Pines is set for the 2nd Saturday in June. The Republican Party will meet in Gay this Saturday to elect officers.

Chairman Bryan Threadgill: Absent

XIII. REPORT FROM COUNTY ATTORNEY

Reported Executive Session was needed for Personnel and Real Estate.

XIV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Charlene Glover stated February 28th would have been the 92nd Birthday for Ms. Josie Walls. The Cotton Pickin Fair is scheduled for the 1st weekend in May.

Ashley Harmon with Meriwether County 4-H reported they are selling Vidalia Onions for \$10 per bag. They will arrive the 2nd week of May. Please see Beverly Thomas to place your order. There are plans to have day camps at the 4-H office this summer.

Damon Rosser asked Administrator Gay if he had a chance to speak with the Contractor regarding finishing a section of road on Primrose Road. Beth Neely-Hadley left the meeting. Administrator Gay stated yes, they plan to come back and are currently working in the County. Prior to this the road surface was too cold for the material to adhere. Administrator Gay will try to get a date for Mr. Rosser.

XV. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Shirley Hines to go into Executive Session at 11:28 a.m. to discuss Personnel and Real Estate. All were in favor. Beth Neely-Hadley returned to the meeting. Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Shirley Hines to go out of Executive Session at 12:00 p.m. All were in favor. Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Shirley Hines to go back into Regular session at 12:12 p.m. All were in favor. There was no action taken.

XVI. FUTURE MEETINGS & NOTICES

Vice Chairman McCoy 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 12:12 pm. All were in favor.

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

Attest: *Beverly Thomas*

Date: *4-27-2021*