

MINUTES
MERIWETHER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION

July 21, 2021 - 4:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Chairman Bryan Threadgill, Vice Chairman Alfred McCoy, Shirley Hines, Rosla Plant, and Beth Neely-Hadley

Staff Present: Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects Theron Gay, County Clerk Beverly Thomas, and Finance Director Bill Gregory

Staff Absent: Attorney Nathan Lee

I. WELCOME – Chairman Threadgill, 4:00 p.m.

Chairman Threadgill stated the Board will hear Agenda item #2 before hearing item #1.

II. NEW BUSINESS

Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, stated in the Work Session today, a brief overview will be provided on the ARPA funding, and the Board will have an opportunity to ask questions regarding the topics discussed.

The County will receive \$4.1M under ARPA and there are specific guidelines on how the funds can be used. If guidelines are not followed, we could have to refund the money back to the Federal Government. There was a recent comment on Face Book from our State Representative where he stated “The County wants to spend the stimulus money for water and sewer, I have water and sewer and I need a road. At the rate houses are being built it will only get worse.” Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, stated Mr. Jenkins moved to a dirt road and the funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) cannot be used for roads. Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, hopes Representative Jenkins will work at the State level to get Meriwether County additional funding for roads and meet with the Commissioners and other Elected Officials to find out our needs.

2. The Board was provided with several publications relating to the topic being discussed. Today’s review was focused on the material from the May 24, 2021, ACCG webinar. Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, highlighted many points from that webinar.

County funding comes directly from the U.S. Treasury, and we must make a request to receive funds through the U.S. Treasury portal. The first half of the funding would arrive 4-6 days after completing the Treasury documentation and the remainder will follow one year later. Key dates to remember were: January 27, 2020 Federal Declaration of the public health crisis, March 3, 2021 Beginning of the ARP fund “covered period”, July 9, 2021 Deadline to comment on U.S. Treasury’s ARP Interim Final Rule, August 31, 2021 First Interim Report due to the U.S. Treasury, August 31, 2021 First Recovery Plan Performance report due to the U.S. Treasury (for Counties above 250K in population), October 31, 2021 First Quarterly Project and Expenditure Report due to the U.S. Treasury (all counties), December 31, 2024 ARPA funds must be obligated, December 31, 2026 ARP funds must be spent, and all work/performance must be completed.

Primary Objectives for Spending ARPA Funds: Make counties whole for COVID-related expenses incurred after March 3, 2021. Provide support to the community in areas impacted by COVID-19.

There are 4 Major “Buckets”: 1. Mitigate the ongoing public health emergency and its negative economic impacts (including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits; or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality). 2. Replace local government lost revenue. Fortunately, Meriwether County did not experience a loss of revenue. 3. Make capital investments in Water, Sewer and Broadband infrastructure (does not have to be COVID-related). Water & Sewer is important for Public Health and Broadband allows us to communicate in times of emergencies. 4. Provide premium pay for eligible workers providing essential work (No Meriwether County employee was laid off or lost

wages except for part-time hourly). Plus, provide for reasonable administrative costs to track spending (audit, grant management, etc.)

Prohibited Uses: Rainy day funds/financial reserves, short or long-term debt, extraordinary payments to pension funds. States are not allowed to use funds to offset a reduction directly or indirectly in the net tax revenue. Local governments are not subject to this rule, but ACCG provided caution to this.

ACCG encouraged Counties to maximize the County's use of the funds before releasing money to external organizations or individuals.

The next section discussed was Mitigating the Public Health Emergency County Programs & Services. Public Safety/Public Health Payroll: March 3, 2021 – until the national emergency declaration ends (federal), potentially through December 31, 2024, Front-line positions clearly eligible (deputies, jailers, EMS); Administrative positions may be more scrutinized than with CARES funding. Includes salary & benefits.

ACCG advised to proceed with Caution if the local government was planning to return these reimbursements into the general fund and then reallocate the funds for capital projects. You are not able to claim that reimbursement when the national emergency declaration ends, which could be prior to December 31, 2024.

Other County Investments: County facilities, HVAC to provide better circulation or air purification systems, Plexiglass shields to provide barriers, Video-conferencing technology, cybersecurity protection for servers, especially for remote workers, retrofitting facilities to create more space between employee workstations, and sanitation supplies.

Public Safety/Public Health: PPE, Ambulance sanitation systems, Jail Improvements (COVID related), Mobile medical units, vaccination clinics.

Courts: Resumption of jury trials with Courtroom modifications, if necessary, videoconferencing, and technology.

There was a section for Mental Health, but Meriwether County does not have a mental health court here. ACCG advised to proceed with caution if County investments will require ongoing operational costs. A funding strategy is needed for beyond 2024.

Replace Lost Revenue: Fortunately, Meriwether County did not experience a loss in revenue. Any reduction of actual revenues relative to pre-pandemic trends can be assumed to be due to COVID-19. A growth adjustment of 4.1 percent per year may be used or the County's average annual revenue growth over the three full fiscal years prior to the public health emergency-whichever is higher.

Capital Investments in Water/Sewer/Broadband: Projects do not have to be related to COVID-19, Get shovel-ready projects moving, expect huge demand for engineers, environmental assessments, project managers and construction, Look at long-range planning documents to identify projects that can be fast-tracked, Consider multi-jurisdictional projects for cost-sharing. From a water standpoint, Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, recommended talking to our Municipalities and possibly our neighboring Counties about a water system expansion.

Broadband: Huge investments coming for Broadband – look for ways to leverage dollars, Use ARP funds as a match – Grants (check this since some federal programs will not allow it), State Funding, Public-Private Partnerships, talk to EMC's about infrastructure/partnerships (we are doing that now.)

Premium Pay for Eligible Workers: As previously stated, Meriwether County had no loss of pay for County employees. Janitors and sanitation workers, transit staff, public health and safety staff, social service and human services staff, Regular in-person interactions or physical handling of items that were also handled by others, the Chief Executive of each recipient (County) can add additional sectors as long as they are deemed critical to protect the health and well-being of residents, For eligible workers of the County performing essential work or grants to eligible employers that have eligible workers performing essential work, Up to an additional \$13 per hour (cap of \$25K per eligible worker), Pay can be retroactive to January 27, 2020, Can be paid through the date the National Emergency Declaration ends (Federal). ACCG advised to proceed with caution because these essential workers may look to the County to fill the gap when the premium pay ends. Premium pay may create issues with other County workers who are not

eligible to receive it. ACCG advise Counties who wanted to implement a premium pay to consider a one-time payment rather than an extended increase (only for employees who were here during COVID.)

Other Considerations – Reduction in Taxes: ACCG advised to proceed with caution. Local Governments are not prohibited from using the funds for a reduction in taxes; however, this could cause future problems. Rolling back taxes and then later having to raise them to replace lost revenue would trigger the computation of the rollback rate and notice of property tax increase under O.C.G.A. 48-5-32.1. A better approach would be to recover funds from other COVID-related expenditures to free up general funds for other uses rather than supplanting the millage rate.

Mitigating the Public Health Emergency -Funds to Outside Organizations and Individuals:

Assistance to Households could include – Food Assistance, Rent, mortgage or utility assistance, Counseling, or legal aid to avoid eviction or homelessness, Emergency assistance for burials, home repairs or weatherization, Internet access or digital literacy assistance, Job training.

Potential collaboration: Non-profits, utilities, Technical Colleges, etc.

Assistance to Small Businesses – Adopt safe operating procedures, Weather periods of closure, Mitigate financial hardship resulting from COVID-19, including loans and grants to mitigate declines in revenues, Potential collaboration: Development Authorities, Convention and Visitors Bureaus, etc.

Assistance to Impacted Industries – Tourism, Travel, Hospitality, Grants/loans for safe reopening, planned expansions or upgrades of facilities delayed by the pandemic, Potential collaboration: Convention and Visitors Bureaus.

Grants and Other Organizations – ACCG advised to proceed with caution when granting ARPA funds to individuals and/or organizations outside of County operations, Reminder – the County will be responsible for the audit of the use of these funds. Agreements should be in writing and documentation systems are in place to protect the County Officials making decisions as well as those who serve in the years to come.

Reporting Requirements: Interim rule established regular reporting requirements, Includes the publishing of information regarding uses of these funds in the local jurisdiction, The first report is due August 31, 2021, for the period ending July 31, 2021.

Auditing Requirements: Counties will be responsible for the auditing of these funds, Documentation is critical to the process, ACCG is working with CVIOG to set up another webinar to auditing.

Planning is Critical to Success – while only jurisdictions of over 250K are required to submit a plan for the use of ARP funds, all Counties should develop a plan.

Planning: Provides a roadmap for addressing priorities, allows for input from Elected Officials, staff, and the community, Reduces potential for diverting funds, Gives time to ensure projects are eligible and funds are spent and tracked properly.

Planning is Critical to Success: Take time to plan in order to assess options and develop a long-term strategy, Funds must be committed by December 31, 2024, and spent by December 31, 2026.

Communications: Share the plan with the Community through public meetings, media outreach, etc. Be clear on how we spend the funds: Direct spending from Federal allocations (subject to Federal regulations/guidelines/laws), spending from eligible reimbursements recovered and added to the County's general fund (subject to State regulations/guidelines/laws) Caution: Retroactive pay and grants to outside organizations.

Commissioner Hines wanted clarification. After sitting in on a lot of webinars, there had been no mention of not using the funds for roads Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, explained you had to have loss of revenue before roads could be considered. Commissioner Hines wanted to comment about Community input for the handout that reads "Funding the Future" which talks about civic engagement and getting input from the citizens to hear what path we will go. Commissioner Hines stated she had previously brought before the Board Executive Order 13985 which addressed underserved communities and to look at what areas in our community that were hit the most by COVID. We should work with Faith based and non-profits to see what the community needs. There was a lot of food distributed during COVID because of the need in our community. Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, stated a Public Hearing will be held after the Board provides their topics of interest. Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated a lot of distributions were made by USDA in areas

where many were affected. We will need to find out where they are going from here with the distributions. Also, many that were affected received additional food stamps. We will have to take into consideration if that will continue. Many have or will continue to receive stimulus checks for families with school age children. Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, stated we will need to know this information since most are Federal Programs. Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated the School System had provided additional assistance. Chairman Threadgill stated he was not saying for citizens not to speak but wanted to stay within the parameters of what the law allows regarding the County's use of the funds.

1. Finance Director, Bill Gregory, reviewed an excel spreadsheet for the 2020 SPLOST and the preliminary projects. The list was taken from 3-4 years of meetings with Department Heads in which a broad list of categories was developed. Items discussed were:

Courthouse Roofing – has been leaking for several years and will cost \$100K to repair. Part of the roof is copper. We will have a contractor look at this to determine if we can repair or if it needs to be replaced.

Courthouse Renovation – Ventilation, cyber security, social distancing

Election Office - Renovation

Purchase of 3 Firetrucks, Ambulances. We may be able to fund the ambulances through ARPA funds.

Jail Renovation – there are issues that need to be addressed.

Animal Shelter - HVAC and pick-up trucks

Tax Assessor - Mobile Assessor, Network Improvements

Public Works - equipment and vehicles – we have two motor graders leased now and can purchase them for \$140k each after the lease. Other needed equipment was mentioned.

Government Annex Building Renovations – there is no central waiting room in the Tax Building.

Public Defender's Office

Radio System – 911, Radio Tower to replace Station 1 and 911 tower, 911 Truck, Generators for 4 ambulance stations

Recreation-Greenville Playground. Funds can be used as a match. Renovation of the gym in Greenville.

Transportation

Airport - a matching grant

LMIG Match \$2.4M. Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, explained the LMIG match

Public Service Vehicles and Equipment and various pieces of equipment funds have been committed to this.

Lake Meriwether upgrades - \$75K is estimated and ARPA funds may be used.

The estimated total cost was \$7,853,861.

Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, stated we have utilized T-SPLOST to pave dirt roads and had sufficient funds to move forward with the ones we have discussed.

We need to look at other dirt roads that we will not be able to pave. We need to do more work with roads and funding from T-SPLOST for equipment is very important. A water truck is needed to use on dry clay roads as needed. We need a packer and a vibrators pad foot roller when we replace pipes. We have a lot of millings and need an asphalt recycle hot box which will melt the millings and create asphalt. This can be used for patching. We can improve the condition of the roads with extra crews.

Commissioner Hines asked if we have an outline of what we have bought in the last 5-6 years.

Commissioner Hines thought we had already purchased a tandem dump truck. Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, stated we use a single and double axel tandem to pull our equipment and they need to be replaced periodically. We currently contract with someone to move some of our larger pieces of equipment.

Commissioner Hines was concerned that the Morgue was taken off the list. This will be needed with growth in the County.

Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, stated he had preliminary numbers for water expansion and equipment cost.

Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated this is our SPLOST list now and what we expect through ARPA.

This is a list of what was asked for through SPLOST and what was discussed were options. Commissioner Hines wants the County to look at other grants and there was mention of the ROUNTS program and Federal money that was given to USDA. There are areas in rural Counties where people do not have a grocery store and Transportation is a big issue.

Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, stated we will plan to discuss T-SPLOST in another Work Session. Feed back is needed from the Board and Public to move forward. We need a plan, and we want something positive.

There was additional discussion of the Courthouse roof and Courthouse heating and air system. Commissioner Neely-Hadley was glad parks, and the gym could fall under this. Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, felt good about the Park Grant. We had money allocated for this that now may be able to be used for the gym renovation. Commissioner Hines stated the School System received more money than the County and any projects should be looked at as a partnership. It is important to renovate and update buildings. We need to look at the Jail and the Administration Building down the road. We have land and a lot of Counties smaller than us built new buildings. Executive Director of Administration and Special Projects, Theron Gay, stated this could be included in our long-term master plan.

There were no other comments.

III. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Rosla Plant to go into Executive Session at 5:18 pm to discuss personnel. All were in favor.

Motion was made by Rosla Plant and seconded by Vice Chairman McCoy to go out of Executive Session at 5:44 p.m. All were in favor.

There was no action taken.

IV. CONCLUSION OF MEETING

The Work Session concluded at 5:46 p.m.

V. FUTURE MEETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Future Meetings were listed on the Agenda.

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

Attest: *Beverly A. Thomas, County Clerk*

Date: *July 27, 2021*