

MINUTES
MERIWETHER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

September 27, 2022

6:00 P.M.

This meeting was held in person and also by Zoom due to COVID

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

Commissioners absent: Commissioner Alfred "Buster" McCoy

Staff Present: County Administrator Michelle Irizarry, County Clerk Beverly Thomas, Finance Director Bill Gregory, and Attorney Michael Hill

Staff Absent: Director of Special Projects Theron Gay

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Beth-Neely Hadley

II. INVOCATION

Chairman Beth-Neely Hadley

III. PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

All

IV. ADOPT AGENDA

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

V. FINANCE REPORT

Finance Director, Bill Gregory, reported funds from E-911 had been transferred to the General Fund account. During the beginning of the year, due to computer and internet issues, payments from the Tax Office were paid using an estimated amount. They have now posted the receipts and have provided a true-up. The County received \$300K for the General Fund, and \$30K and \$40K on the Fire Districts. There are not many changes in the remaining portion of the report.

VI. CITIZEN COMMENT

None

VII. MINUTES

Motion was made by Vice Chairman Threadgill and seconded by Rosla Plant to approve the Minutes from the September 14, 2022, 9:00 a.m. Regular Meeting. All were in favor.

VIII. PUBLIC HEARING

None

IX. APPOINTMENTS

None

X. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

XI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Proclamation in Remembrance of Vernon and Norma Phillips

Chairman Beth Neely-Hadley read the Proclamation in Remembrance of Mr. Vernon Phillips, Sr., and Mrs. Norma Phillips. Many family members were in attendance along with Ms. Hannah Flynn Chair from the Department of Public Health, Laurie Roberts County Nurse Manager, and Connie Walton who is employed with the Department of Public Health. Ms. Norman Phillips served on the Board of Health. Following the reading of the Proclamation, photographs were taken, and the family was given the Proclamation.

2. 2022-2023 FY Budget

Commissioner Hines stated in reference to the Fire District, she was not in attendance at the meeting when the Board discussed taking money and putting it into the General Fund. Commissioner Hines wants the Board and the incoming Board to look at many options for funding including additional State ARP funds. In knowing the deficient that department has, there needs to be more creativity regarding bringing in funds. Most Counties get a lot of their funds from Commercial Businesses. The County also needs to apply for funding with DCA. This is a service that is required, and it is not cheap.

Commissioner Hines sent several upcoming grants to County Administrator Irizarry to review. Commissioner Hines proposed the County obtain a grant writer since grant packages are usually due in a short period of time and a grant writer would be on top of this. The largest increase was for equipment and vehicles. Commissioner Hines noticed the Coroner's budget had decreased and asked Finance Director, Bill Gregory, to elaborate. Mr. Gregory stated there were 3-4-line items that the Coroner decreased. Commissioner Hines asked if the Coroner had spoken about a morgue. Mr. Gregory stated no. Administrator Irizarry stated the Coroner did ask for a larger stretcher. Vice Chairman Threadgill mentioned the need for a morgue, which is very costly, and stated we need to check with Fire/EMS to see if they had a stretcher that would work and be available for the Coroner to use.

Vice Chairman Threadgill stated we need to make sure that funding through grants are sustainable. Vice Chairman Threadgill stated he wanted to postpone approval of the Budget due to having more questions. Motion was made by Vice Chairman Threadgill and seconded by Shirley Hines to table the 2022-2023 FY Budget. All were in favor. Administrator Irizarry told Board members to get any questions or concerns they may have in regard to the Budget, and we will coordinate this.

3. Discuss Countywide trash collection

Vice Chairman Threadgill stated this was his tenth year with Meriwether County and nothing has been done regarding countywide trash collection. There have been complaints by citizens that the cost of their trash pickup service has doubled. There is an aging population that are on fixed incomes, and we need to find the most reasonable method with two sites that are centralized with three containers at each fenced in site, a small building with heating and air conditioning, and a circle drive with gravel. Chairman Neely-Hadley stated we still have people who cannot get to the trash collection location. A conversation was held with Harris County, and they offer this service and use State Inmates to help, and they pay for this with taxes. There was discussion of Legislation

may not allow "an add on" to the tax bills. Vice Chairman Threadgill stated he wanted the service to be free and not on the tax bill. Commissioner Hines stated this is a problem everywhere and we don't have any control over what private companies do regarding their pricing. Having a Work Session and finding out what surrounding Counties are doing would be good. With the size of this County, having central locations would be crucial. Most importantly will be having manpower at each station. Vice Chairman Threadgill stated most of the places he visited had part time people who manned the stations. Chairman Neely-Hadley stated for the most part we had one trash hauler in the County that had contracts for all of the Cities and for some reason they never increased their prices over many years. When they sold the business, and the new owner increased the prices. Vice Chairman Threadgill stated he feels we could find 1-2 acres in the County to be able to have the convenience centers. Chairman Neely-Hadley stated we have a location in Durand. Vice Chairman Threadgill did not want to add this to the taxes and wanted it to be a free service.

4. PoC Radio System Proposal

Brin Jones, E-911 Director, stated he had previously come before the Board to discuss issues with communication and Public Safety. Public Safety has had issues with their communication since his employment with the County. The County has added to the this, but it is not enough. The current radios do not have penetration in the buildings and other areas. Mr. Jones came before the Board recently and discussed adding to the tower and that is still in the works. Mr. Jones explained more about PoC Radio System which is a push to talk over cellular system. It uses cell towers rather than radio towers. The County would pay a subscription fee and we don't have to worry about a primary tower, towers getting tipped over, or having to relocate to another tower that would cost thousands of dollars. Mr. Jones has used demo radios over the last 2.5 months, and there have been positive results. They have been able to talk in places where they could not talk before. They utilize the AT&T system first and then they go to T-Mobile. A few dead spots have been identified but nothing like the current system. This would give us two systems and the redundancy required for Public Safety. We would keep the old system and tower as a back-up. There was additional information provided on the priority service in case a tower goes down.

Deputy Chief, Byron Hadley, from the Meriwether County Sheriff's Office, addressed the Board. Chief Hadley stated the previous radio system had bad service and bad coverage. The Sheriff's Department is able to communicate better with this new system. Chief Hadley recommended the County keep the old system to utilize in case a system goes down. The new system on a scale of 1-10 is a 10 and is definitely an improvement. It is most important to be able to communicate if an officer needs assistance. There is a distress signal that can be used if needed. Commissioner Hines asked how long they had been testing these radios and Mr. Jones said about 90-days. Commissioner Hines asked what type of enhancement they offer with growth and when the service changes. Mr. Jones explained how that worked and stated they have agreed to service any new radios that come out in the next three years and will replace front line career personnel with a new radio. The cost is approximately \$254K (amount was later corrected to be \$210K) and that would put a portable radio in every Public Safety persons hands and one in every volunteer's hands. We have that now at about \$200,010. Mr. Jones stated that he watered down the tower project and saved an additional \$30K because there are some things we

don't have to have right now if we have this radio system. The cost for the tower and a building that was discussed and approved at a prior meeting was \$110K. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked what was the tower that was brought before the Board that would take care of all of this and we would be able to communicate. Mr. Jones stated that was moving from the Sheriff's Office Tower to the tower here on the hill. That would allow us to spread everything out and get them higher up and purchase new equipment for it. Vice Chairman Threadgill stated we were going to do that and then asked what had changed. Mr. Jones stated he just got the agreement back from the Lawyers office about three weeks ago, and he was waiting to bring this to the Board. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked if this is cut by \$30K, and the total is now \$80K, what additional equipment would be needed to utilize the system off that tower. Mr. Jones stated the biggest cost is a combiner. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked what additional cost, above the \$80K for the Tower would be needed. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked if the equipment we have now would work off that tower. Mr. Jones stated yes, it is utilizing the AT&T service on that tower. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked if we needed updates on the equipment we currently have and if it would operate off this tower. Mr. Jones stated no. Mr. Jones stated if Vice Chairman Threadgill was referring to what we currently have it would work but the equipment is antiquated. It allows us to go back to our VHF system where we were before the tower was torn down. It basically puts us back where we were. Vice Chairman Threadgill stated he was trying to figure out if we really needed the tower and what was in front of us if we do that. Mr. Jones stated that is why he held up on speaking before the Board. There was talk about scratching that project and Mr. Jones looked at what could be watered down. We still want to maintain at least enough to function if something happens to the radios. Mr. Jones wants to purchase the new system and fix the old, so we have a good redundant system. We can marry the new radios into the old system, but it would not be encrypted. Chairman Neely-Hadley stated the radios would cover everything and the concern was if the towers go down what would be the backup. It was confirmed the radios run off cell towers. We currently have 7-8 AT&T towers in the County, and we are First Net customers. Mr. Jones stated we have been able to talk in places that we never able to talk before. Some features include tracking and finding the radio and killing the radio if it is lost. There is so much more we can do with this system. Vice Chairman Threadgill stated he would like for Mr. Jones to provide to the Board a proposal that includes everything that is needed and to give it to Administrator Irizarry. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked for a separate proposal that deals with the tower that was already approved to move forward. Mr. Jones explained the quote that had been received and had included the Board of Education as well. The City of Woodbury wants this too. We did not have enough radios to give to Manchester to demo but they are interested as well. Commissioner Hines asked, with the other municipalities interested in that quote, would that help reduce the cost. Mr. Jones stated he had already negotiated the price down. The business with the radios has told us that he would never go above \$75K for the subscription fees per year. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked Mr. Jones for a complete breakdown in the proposal and include the responsibility of each City. Chairman Neely-Hadley confirmed we are using the cell towers with the radios that we are using now and asked what we were using in the old system. Mr. Jones stated it is VHF, some is digital mobile radio, and it is called DMR, and some is just analog. Chairman Neely Hadley stated if the cell towers go down it has no effect on those. Mr. Jones stated no, they are

two separate systems. Commissioner Hines asked if we had done the work on the tower that we had been talking about. Mr. Jones stated no, we put it on hold when the radios came up and wanted to see what the Board wants to do. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked Mr. Jones to bring that entire amount back with the cost to each City and the annual amount with a breakdown on what it would cost the County. Most of the Cove area is still dead even with the new radios. Station 9 to Pebble Brook Road is still in and out. This includes radios for the vehicles with a rooftop antenna to give them better reception. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked if we could install some type of ping system that is elevated that may catch the two towers for the dead area. Mr. Jones stated he did not know in regard to the new system. With the old system we would need another tower installed. Deputy Chief Hadley stated there will always be dead spots. The Sheriffs Office does not care what system the County goes with they just need something that works. Radios have been the number one issue with the staff as far as their concern for safety. If we go with this we still have to be able to use the VHF. There was additional conversation of where we currently have towers, and the area that it could reach. Chairman Neely Hadley stated they have the radios at her home, and it was hard to understand with the old radios. The new radios are much better. Vice Chairman Threadgill stated safety is a priority and the Board needs the proposal to review. Mr. Jones stated they have worked to fix what they could and add towers where they could. Mr. Jones stated the company wants Meriwether County to make a decision and Mr. Jones asked if we could put the tower on hold and let the Board think about this. Commissioner Hines thanked Mr. Jones and the Sheriffs Department. It is about the safety and the need is there. The main concern is the back up system and she wanted clarity on why we needed to do that with the discussion that has been heard today. Mr. Jones stated the old system is functional, but we have piled everything on the tower at the Sheriffs office and it has hurt the coverage in Greenville terribly. By moving to the other tower, it spreads everything out. Commissioner Hines stated she did not have knowledge regarding this and asked when you go to the new system, why is there a need. Mr. Jones stated they work off cell towers which can go down. Mr. Jones stated they also work off of Wi-Fi. Having Wi-Fi in a building will allow you radio coverage. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked if any of our vehicles had Wi-Fi. Some of the Ambulances have Wi-Fi. Chairman Neely-Hadley asked if we went with the Radios would we still have some service off our towers. Mr. Jones stated yes. Chairman Neely-Hadley confirmed if we went with this we could decide if we wanted to do upgrades on the tower. Vice Chairman Threadgill suggested contacting the individual who owns the radios and ask for a week and a half extension on the new system to allow Mr. Jones to provide Administrator Irizarry with a proposal for the Board to review and make a decision. Commissioner Rosla Plant asked about the projects as listed in the handout. Mr. Jones stated there are two projects, but we are looking at the project for Meriwether County that includes a radio for every volunteer, two radios for each ambulance for each person in there along with a mobile radio with an outside antenna, and that is for every firetruck, every ambulance, every deputies vehicle, animal shelter, public works, administration, and the Code Enforcement, allowing everyone to be on the same system. The cost would come from the Budget in Communications. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked Mr. Jones to provide how many radios go to each area in his proposal. Mr. Jones stated this also covers apps for the telephones for those wanting to use them. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked if they really needed the radio if they had the

app on their cell phones. Mr. Jones stated yes, the radios use a different band and has an external antenna. There was additional discussion of coverage with the phones and radios. Chairman Neely-Hadley asked Mr. Jones to get the information to Administrator Irizarry who will forward it to them to review in order to make a decision at the next meeting that will be held on October 12, 2022. Vice Chairman Threadgill asked about the quantity of the radios at the Sheriff's Office. The radio has as many channels as we want. An addendum agreement will be provided regarding the warranty and replacement of radios that will not exceed \$75K for 5-years. Motion was made by Vice Chairman Threadgill and seconded by Rosla Plant to table PoC Radio System Proposal until the October 12, 2022 meeting. All were in favor.

5. Recommended changes to Personnel Policy

Administrator Irizarry stated there were three sections of the Policy & Procedure Manual that needed to be updated. The sections were 79, 91 and 92. Copies of the recommended updates were included in the Commissioners Package. Commissioner Plant confirmed that a new hires annual and sick leave were started at 4 hours for each per month. Motion was made by Vice Chairman Threadgill and seconded by Shirley Hines to approve the recommended changes. All were in favor.

XII. REPORT FROM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Administrator Irizarry reported the Cotton Fair will be held October 1-2 and it is the 95th year. There will be a Haunted House Trick or Trunk through the Manchester-Meriwether County Recreation Department. Paul Jarrell, Three Rivers RDC Representative, and others will be working with the County on the Short-Term Work Program and the Comprehensive Plan update. There will be a Ribbon Cutting in early October for the new Boat Ramp. The Governors Office issued an Executive Order regarding Hurricane Ian.

XIII. REPORT FROM COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Hines – will host a Town Hall Meeting on October 13, 2022 with Mayor Cuttie. There will be different resources available such as assistance for heating. Commissioner Hines wants Administrator Irizarry to look into DCA funds and ARP funds through the State for the Fire Department and Equipment.

Commissioner Plant – gave the floor to Jane Fryer, Keep Meriwether Beautiful Director. Ms. Fryer reported she coordinates a liter tour every two years. Following the tour they look at the prior years to see if a difference has been made. The group looked at 25 Roads. There were some roads that were extremely littered with the worst being Primrose Rd., Hill Haven Rd., Harry Hardy Rd., Dallas Mill Road, and Wrightsville Road. Overall, the consensus was the cleanup made a difference. Ms. Fryer loved the idea of having convenience centers. Ms. Fryer stated the County is currently spending money on having Public Works work weekends to pack the containers down and move them out. Ms. Fryer thanked Public Works for all they do for Keep Meriwether Beautiful. Ms. Fryer asked the Board to have a Work Session to figure out how to do this. Commissioner Plant thanked Ms. Fryer for all that she and the volunteers did for Keep Meriwether Beautiful and all they continue to do.

Chairman Neely-Hadley – reported the Warm Springs Harvest Hoe Down will be held

on October 8th-9th. Everyone was invited to come out and enjoy. The Venue at Warm Springs will hold a grand opening and ribbon cutting on Saturday, October 8, 2022 at 10:00 a.m. Tours of the facility will be held on October 8th-9th. Roosevelt Warm Springs is very important to the County and is the second largest employer in the County. There will be some changes to the facility and Chris Wells, State Director of Vocational Rehab and his assistant Bethany Wetzel have stated there are no plans to close the facility or change the name. They will be updating the signage. Faye Perdue and Representative Debbie Buckner have been working on this for some time and feel it will move forward in a positive way.

Vice Chairman Threadgill – reported a major election is coming up and asked people to look for early voting. Commissioner McCoy asked Vice Chairman Threadgill to mention that he wanted the State to support naming for the new dock “River Cove Landing.”

Commissioner McCoy – absent

XIV. REPORT FROM COUNTY ATTORNEY

Stated there was no need for an Executive Session.

XV. EXECUTIVE SESSION

None

XVI. FUTURE MEETINGS & NOTICES

Future Meetings and Notices were announced.

Commissioner Hines stated it had been reported that people were stealing street signs. Signs on Jackson Street and Alvaton Road. This needs to be addressed and brought to the attention of Public Works. Theft of the signs cost taxpayers money.

XVII. ADJOURNMENT

With no other business to discuss, motion was made by Vice Chairman Threadgill and seconded by Rosla Plant to adjourn at 7:07 p.m. All were in favor.

Approved by: Majority vote of the Board of Commissioners

Attest: Beverly Thomas, County Clerk

Date: October 12, 2022