

MINUTES
MERIWETHER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

October 13, 2021

This meeting was held by Zoom due to COVID-19.

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

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

II. INVOCATION – Commissioner Beth Neely-Hadley

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – All

IV. ADOPT AGENDA

Commissioner Hines asked to add under New Business 9. Discussion of mitigation regarding the Board of Commissioners and the Tax Commissioners Office. Commissioner Hines stated the information listed under Citizen Comments on the Agenda was moved from the end of the Agenda to the number 6 position and wanted to know when this move was discussed. Commissioner Hines stated it is keystone to allow the public to make comments and voice concerns and she did not see a need to have this moved. Chairman Threadgill stated other Counties have information on this and it gives specific direction. Commissioner Hines stated she had looked at the 10 County Region represented by Three Rivers and found Spalding and Troup were the only two who were different. *Commissioner* Hines stated the Troup County Manager came from Spalding County. Commissioner Hines stated citizens can sit through the meeting and then comment at the end of the meeting. County Administrator Irizarry stated it wasn't moved because of Spalding and Troup County, it was moved to allow Citizens to speak on a subject before the Board voted on an item. Vice Chairman McCoy stated he had called for this for some time. Public comments sometime break down into second guessing what has just taken place and there is nothing that can be done at that point. It doesn't mean someone can't bring their comment back at the next meeting. Vice Chairman McCoy stated he was in favor of the change. Motion was made by Shirley Hines and seconded by Beth Neely Hadley to approve the Agenda with the following addition under New Business 9. Discuss mitigation regarding the Board of Commissioners and Tax Commissioner. All werè in favor.

V. REPORT FROM FINANCE DIRECTOR

Finance Director Bill Gregory reported money had been moved from the LGIP fund to the General Fund to cover the check run. We are expecting the Insurance Commissioner's office to send money on the 15th of the month. As soon as those funds arrive money will be transferred back to the LGIP account. The 2020 SPLOST account was corrected from last month and we are approximately \$20K over the projection and the 2020 TSPLOST account is approximately \$10K over our estimate. Both accounts are trending very positive. Commissioner Hines asked where the ARP money was deposited. Finance Director Gregory stated the ARP funds were deposited into Southcrest Bank.

VI. CITIZEN COMMENT

Catherine Jenkins, Meriwether County Tax Commissioner, stated she was at the meeting to let the Board of Commissioners know she is still having issues with IT, and it was impacting her office's ability to do their jobs and make disbursements. Tax Commissioner Jenkins stated she wants the Board of Commissioners to help her come up with a solution and is dependent on the County IT personnel. The

accounts manager cannot get into the tax software and hasn't been able to for the last week. Tax Commissioner Jenkins stated she hopes to be able to speak further in the meeting about these issues and is unable to follow through with the direction given to her by the Board. Tax Commissioner Jenkins cannot get quotes on IT service when she is unable to get the information to give to private parties about what they need to know to get an accurate quote. Tax Commissioner Jenkins stated she appreciated the fact that she has been able to speak and say about 4 or 5 sentences without being interrupted and what Chairman Threadgill said about common courtesy and civility being expected at all times during the meeting. Tax Commissioner Jenkins was glad that was on the Agenda and that she was able to speak her piece. Her office is open for business and hopes to hear from the Board.

Commissioner Hines asked if there were any citizens online that wanted to speak. There were none. Chairman Threadgill stated we are going to make Citizen Comments more specific and had spoken about this prior to the meeting. Citizens wishing to speak at the daytime meeting online would need to sign up by 5:00 p.m. on the evening before the day meeting with the Clerk and by 5:00 p.m. on the day of the night meeting. Commissioner Hines asked if this was being made as a Board decision. Chairman Threadgill asked if there were anyone who wanted to speak. There were no others to speak.

VII. MINUTES

Commissioner Hines stated she had been away and read the Minutes and thanked Clerk Thomas for doing a good job in putting them together. After looking at several things in the Minutes and watching the video a change was requested in the Executive Session portion of the Minutes. Commissioner Hines stated the information was not correct. It does not show where the Board took a vote in front of the general public. Chairman Threadgill and Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated it was brought back out of Executive Session.

Motion was made by Vice Chairman Alfred McCoy and seconded by Rosla Plant to approve the Minutes from the September 28, 2021, Regular Meeting at 6:00 p.m. Voting in favor were Chairman Threadgill, Vice Chairman McCoy, Commissioner Plant and Commissioner Neely-Hadley. Commissioner Hines abstained.

VIII. PUBLIC HEARING

None

IX. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Beth Neely-Hadley to approve \$3,800 to Bandwood Solutions for internet at Lake Meriwether. The motion was amended by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Beth Neely-Hadley to approve the \$3,800 to Bandwood Solutions with the use of SPLOST funds. All were in favor.

X. APPOINTMENTS

1. No action taken since there would not be a representative attending the November meeting.
2. Motion was made by Chairman Bryan Threadgill and seconded by Vice Chairman McCoy to reappoint Paul Harmon to the Airport Authority for a 5-year term that will expire on October 31, 2026. All were in favor.

XI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Meredith Lipson, Engagement Lead Partner with Mauldin Jenkins, confirmed the Board had received the Annual Financial Report, the Report of Independent Certified Public Accountants in accordance with the Uniform Guidance and Government Auditing Standards, and the Auditor's Discussion and Analysis. Ms. Lipson then gave a brief overview of their company. An independent audit report was provided, and Mauldin Jenkins issued an unmodified opinion. Highlights of the government wide statements notes total assets of approximately \$31,142,000 offset by liabilities of

approximately \$7,015,000. This results in the County reported net position (or equity) of approximately \$24,127,000. A substantial element of the net position is composed of a net investment in capital assets in the approximate amount of \$11,211,000. Restricted net position amounts to approximately \$3,412,000 leaving unrestricted net position of approximately \$9,504,000.

Ms. Lipson reviewed the General Fund sources and stated the General Fund revenues for the year ending September 30, 2020, were approximately \$16,900,000 with the prior year at approximately \$15,900,000.

The expenditures during the year ending September 30, 2020, were \$14,613,000. The prior year was approximately \$14,900,000. The most significant variances were an increase in general government activities and a decrease in public works expenditures. The Fund Balance of the General Fund on September 30, 2020, was approximately \$2,732,000 which was an increase from the prior year of approximately \$1,652,000. The largest expenditures were Public Safety, General Government and Public Works.

The County maintains seven special revenue funds. These funds account for revenues derived from specific sources, which are legally restricted to finance particular functions or activities. Capital project funds are used to account for revenues and expenditures related to the renovations and/or construction of major capital assets. The County maintains three capital projects funds. The County maintains one blended component unit, the IDA.

The County maintains five custodial funds, the Tax Commissioner, Sheriff, Clerk of Court, Probate Court and Magistrate Court. These funds are used to account for the collection and disbursement of monies by the County on behalf of other governments and individuals, such as cash bonds, traffic fines, support payments, ad valorem, and property taxes.

Ms. Lipson reviewed the required communications including the Auditor's responsibilities under Government Auditing Standards, and Auditing Standards generally accepted in the USA. There had been no issues with management and no issues of getting information needed.

Ms. Lipson stated being new to the County's Audit they reviewed the accounting recommendations and related matters with a new set of eyes. The recommendations and findings have a lot to do with adjustments and recording of accruals. Ms. Lipson stated she was happy to answer any questions.

Government accounting standards will need to be implemented in the future years. It will require work ahead of time. A lot has happened due to COVID. Some items will not be implemented until 2022. Copies of the adjustments made as part of the Audit process was provided in the back of the document given to the Board members. Ms. Lipson stated she would be glad to address any questions following the brief summary of the Audit.

Commissioner Hines thanked Ms. Lipson for a good job and wants the Board to address some of the recommendations found on pages 13-18 and discuss how to address them. Some items have been discussed before including Cybersecurity.

Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated we have had a positive fund balance for several years. Bill Gregory stated eight years ago we had a negative fund balance of close to \$2M - \$3M. Due to the leadership of the Board and Department Heads staying within budget we now have a positive fund balance.

2. Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Rosla Plant to confirm the support letter from Meriwether County for Development Authority of Harris County to One Georgia Authority Equity Application and allow the Chairman to sign. All were in favor.

3. Chairman Threadgill read the Proclamation from the Board of Commissioners regarding Dysautonomia Awareness Month.

4. Finance Director, Bill Gregory and IT Director, Skip Richmond, addressed the County's internet service contract with Charter/Spectrum. Fiber Optic was run by Charter approximately 7-8 years ago to County Buildings. We pay \$6,500 monthly for fiber and internet coverage. We have an opportunity to take advantage of upgrading our system. The number one issue is cyber security with firewalls and updated switches. The ARP (American Rescue Plan) funds will cover the cost of the equipment charge

but will not cover the monthly fee. The new amount will be \$5,600 and the equipment charge will be \$3,355. This would be a 5-year contract. This will also include the addition of three new sites. Chairman Threadgill asked if the new system that will be used at the Airport would work since it may be less expensive and wanted to look at other options. Commissioner Hines heard this would be paid for with ARP funding and wanted more discussion on this and other items. Finance Director Gregory stated one option would be to prepay the equipment. IT Director Richmond stated the internet would be for 5 government buildings and all were connected back to E-911. We do not own the fiber optic and would not be able to use it with another carrier. It was confirmed we would be able to expand as we grow. There was additional discussion of a shorter contract, payments, and receiving 6 months for free. IT Director Richmond stated if we pay for this up-front Charter owns and takes care of any problems. We can then do a refresh in five years. Commissioner Neely-Hadley asked if IT Director, Richmond would check to see if they would be willing to do a shorter contract. Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Rosla Plant to table the contract renewal with Charter/Spectrum for Internet Services to allow further research. All were in favor.

5. Administrator Irizarry asked the Board to consider authorizing the Animal Shelter to search for a truck and confirm the funding source. Chairman Threadgill stated there may be another funding source to purchase a truck. Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Rosla Plant to allow the Animal Shelter to search for a truck and use SPLOST funding if another funding source was not available. All were in favor.

6. Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Vice Chairman McCoy to allow Public Works to search for two trucks and use SPLOST funds. All were in favor.

7. Motion was made by Vice Chairman McCoy and seconded by Rosla Plant to execute the Quit Claim Deed to Hat Creek Timber and Land Company for a section of Walnut Creek from Jones Mill Road to Imlac Road. The abandonment was approved during the August 24, 2021, Board of Commissioners Meeting. All were in favor.

8. Administrator Irizarry stated at the last Board of Commissioners Meeting it was decided to draft an Intergovernmental Agreement between Meriwether County Board of Commissioners and the City of Manchester for temporary use of a County Fire Truck, and have Legal Council review the agreement. Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Vice Chairman McCoy to move forward with the Agreement. All were in favor.

9. Commissioner Hines thanked Chairman Threadgill and the Board for adding this to the Agenda, discuss mitigation regarding the Board of Commissioners and Tax Commissioner. Commissioner Hines stated she was unable to attend the last meeting in person but did attend by Zoom and the meeting was very disheartening and difficult to watch. Commissioner Hines stated there was a court order in March to address this and wanted to discuss mitigation today. There needs to be more open discussion on how this is handled, and we are here to serve the public and make sure we do it in a respectful and open way. Commissioner Hines motioned to bring in someone from ACCG or someone to mitigate on how to move forward.

Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated the Court Order was to allow the County to access the Tax Building to run internet /fiber and needed IT service for the Tax Office as well as our offices. That occurred in March. Commissioner Neely-Hadley did not remember any other conversation of a Court Order other than that.

Commissioner Hines stated there has been ongoing discussion regarding the Board and Tax Commissioner and based on the calls that she has received, there needs to be a better way to move forward. One way to do this is to bring someone in for mitigation.

Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated it was mentioned at the last Board meeting to have our new County Administrator, who had not been here prior to all of this, move forward in working with Tax Commissioner Jenkins and she has done this because all Board members received confirmation by email where Administrator Irizarry explained how we would move forward and that Skip would be available for IT. Tax Commissioner Jenkins has stated numerous times and by telephone on January 2, 2021, which Commissioner Neely-Hadley feels is one of the biggest issues, that she did not feel like the

Commissioners supported her during her run for office, former Administrator Theron Gay, had a sign for her opponent in his yard, and some people posted online to vote for her opponent. Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated she had approached Ms. Prather about running for office before Ms. Jenkins decided to run for the office of Tax Commissioner. Administrator Irizarry did not vote here and was not part of that and Commissioner Neely-Hadley wants to allow Administrator Irizarry a chance to work with Tax Commissioner Jenkins. Commissioner Neely-Hadley also received numerous calls following the last meeting where there were many constituents present for a Public Hearing and others who had to hear all of this. We need to move forward and let Administrator Irizarry communicate with Tax Commissioner Jenkins. We do not need a three-ring circus. If she cannot work with the Board, the former Administrator, and the new Administrator then something legally may need to be done.

Chairman Threadgill clarified a statement made by Tax Commissioner Jenkins under Citizen Comments at the beginning of this meeting, where she requested information on what was provided in her office and had not received the information. Chairman Threadgill stated that was not correct because all Board members had received notification by email from the County Administrator outlining specifically what was in her office. Chairman Threadgill agreed with Commissioner Neely-Hadley. Chairman Threadgill stated this is his ninth year serving and he had never had an issue with a department or office and hoped we could move forward with allowing Administrator Irizarry to communicate with the Tax Commissioner. Administrator Irizarry has given her information of what is provided for her office. It has been stated by this Board for the Tax Commissioner to get three request for IT Services and bring them back to the Board of Commissioners. Chairman Threadgill felt this was the route to go and does not feel like litigation is there. We are put in place to do the business of the government for the citizens and not need to have a rant at each meeting. Chairman Threadgill stated the Agenda that has been provided to the public and is posted on our front door stated the meeting location is closed to the public due to COVID-19 (the meeting was held by Zoom for the Public), but Tax Commissioner Jenkins showed up to address the Board again. Chairman Threadgill did not feel mitigation is what we need at this point, and we need to allow what the Board has put in place to work out first.

Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated it was worth a try to allow Administrator Irizarry to work with Tax Commissioner Jenkins. If the Tax Commissioner is unable to work with the Board, the former Administrator, and this Administrator then we have a problem. The Board is not in the day-to-day operation of any other office, and we need to let the Administrator handle this first before we look at mitigation. Citizens have complained about the Tax Commissioners Office, and we cannot to do anything about that and it gets frustrating.

Vice Chairman McCoy stated he did support Tax Commissioner Jenkins when she ran for office and things have somewhat soured since that time. Vice Chairman McCoy feels we need to allow Administrator Irizarry to work with Tax Commissioner Jenkins and then move on to the alternative requested by Commissioner Hines.

Chairman Threadgill stated there was a motion on the floor for mitigation. There was no second and the motion failed.

Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated this can be brought up again if needed and some of the issues with IT have not only been in that department but also Countywide and personally.

Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Vice Chairman McCoy to allow Administrator Irizarry to work with Tax Commissioner Jenkins. All were in favor.

XII. REPORT FROM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Administrator Irizarry reported several staff members had been in touch with David Stewart who provided Broadband to the City of Woodbury. We are looking at several options and Mr. Stewart wants to do a simulation.

A Department Head Meeting was held on October 4, 2021, along with a few other days due to scheduling. Several Constitutional Officers were able to attend. During the meeting information was shared regarding issues they were having and items of which they were proud. An email will be sent to departments prior to Board meetings so they can let Administrator Irizarry know of any announcements that need to be

brought before the Board. There will be a meeting with Department Heads and any Constitutional Officers who wants to attend, on Wednesday morning, following the Tuesday evening meeting to provide updates and decisions made by the Board during their meeting.

We are working on the Law Enforcement Grant through the State. There was a webinar on Friday that was attended by Administrator Irizarry, HR Director Valerie Chambers, and Finance Director Bill Gregory. There will be information going out to those departments so they can supply us with information needed to get the stipend.

Meriwether County has received a \$4K Safety Grant from ACCG for the 2nd year in a row to be used to replace worn out safety items.

The County received an agreement from UHC that needs to be signed. The Agreement deals with HIPPA for us to safeguard our documents. Counsel reviewed the Agreement.

In an update on the Wellness Program, the three greatest health concerns identified from the biometric screening were: diabetes, obesity, and hypertension. HR Director Chambers will move forward with planning activities that will focus on these areas.

The Safer Grant is still in progress and will expire in February 2022.

It was determined the 2021 Holiday schedule was voted on by the Board in December 2020. HR Director Chambers will be made aware of that.

To date, United Health Care (UHC) has not renewed their contract with WellStar.

Attorney Lee stated he review the Document from UHC, and it was fine. Motion was made by Beth Neely-Hadley and seconded by Vice Chairman McCoy to allow the Administrator to sign the document regarding HIPPA and return it to UHC. All were in favor.

XIII. REPORT FROM COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Neely-Hadley: reported there was a large turnout for the Harvest Hoe Down in Warm Springs. Commissioner Neely-Hadley attended the Korean Dinner, and the food was great, and they were very friendly. This will be a great boost for the Korean Community.

There was discussion of when they will stripe Peaceful Lane since it has been paved.

Commissioner Rosla Plant: had spoken with Bill Cawthorne the day before regarding striping Mt. Pilgrim Road. Commissioner Plant stated she was honored to attend the Korean Food Group dinner. This will be a private catering company which will basically address the number of Korean's in the Industrial Park to have authentic Korean Food. The Food was very good, and the people were friendly. Commissioner Plant appreciated having them in the Industrial Park. Work is progressing with K&B. Commissioner Plant enjoyed the Women's Event hosted by Commissioner Hines.

Commissioner Shirley Hines: Thanked Meriwether County for their support and all who attended the Women's Event. It promoted Women in Business, and this is Women in Business Month.

Commissioner Hines stated she attended the last Board meeting via Zoom, and it was difficult to hear, it was very challenging and there would be times when it would freeze up. This has been discussed before and Commissioner Hines wanted to make sure everyone attending by Zoom is able to hear.

Commissioner Hines discussed the Code of Ethics and its importance and stated she ran for office to be a voice for those who felt they could not come to their elected official. Commissioner Hines pointed out the ACCG Code of Ethics that was hanging on the wall and saw that the County had not adopted anything in our Ordinance that addressed Ethics and a Code of Conduct. Chairman Threadgill stated we do take an Oath of Ethics and Conduct when we take our office. Commissioner Hines stated it is imperative that every elected official understand the role given to serve. Commissioner Hines stated she personally was not pleased and not in agreement with how we conducted ourselves and in her opinion we were not in compliance with the way we handled the issue with the Tax Commissioner. Commissioner Hines advised the Board to adopt a Code of Ethics and a Code of Conduct so any official or citizen would have a guideline to go by.

Vice Chairman McCoy: attended the Korean Dinner along with many others. Vice Chairman McCoy attended the Ribbon Cutting of "The Ice Block" taproom in Gay. They offered a beer tasting and it was a great atmosphere. Vice Chairman McCoy also attended the Airport Authority meeting and announced the Airshow at the Airport would be this Saturday, October 16, 2021. If it rains the Airshow will move to Sunday. There was discussion of Broadband and expanding the camp sites at the Lake Meriwether during the Advisory Board meeting held yesterday.

Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated there would be a ribbon cutting at Extreme Rider on October 22, 2021, at 5:30 p.m. The new Woodbury Animal Clinic will have a ribbon cutting on October 21, 2021, at 5:30 p.m.

Chairman Bryan Threadgill: read a letter from Meriwether County 4-H Agent, Ashley Harmon thanking the Board for their support. It is National 4-H week, and they will be traveling to the Georgia National Fair for 4-H Day on Friday. Ms. Harmon stated they were off to a very busy start this school year. Jellies and Jams were given to the Board members and staff.

Chairman Threadgill stated there is no Commissioner in the County that would be proud of a meeting like the last one. Sometimes it is unfortunate to have to have those interactions with other individuals. Chairman Threadgill has never been in a meeting like this in the last nine years of service. There is a level of respect on all sides, and it comes to the fact that the Board is a policy and budget Board only. The items that should be brought to the Board are amendments to a Budget and if there is a need for a change or addition to a policy. The Board of Commissioners were involved in this matter due to having a Department that could not work with our IT Service. Chairman Threadgill stated it was his personal opinion that the Board had done everything they could to work with this Department in order to move forward. Chairman Threadgill apologized for the last meeting and stated when someone is in a Board of Commissioners Meeting and they are called out of order or asked to leave the meeting and that individual tells the Board of Commissioners "No, you are out of order," it is something no one wants to experience. When you talk about respect there are two sides to that and a reason there is a decorum in place.

XIII. REPORT FROM COUNTY ATTORNEY

County Attorney Nathan Lee stated there was no need for Executive Session.

XV. EXECUTIVE SESSION

None

XVI. FUTURE MEETINGS & NOTICES

Chairman Threadgill announced future meetings and notices.

XVII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Vice Chairman Alfred McCoy and seconded by Rosla Plant to adjourn the meeting at 10:30 a.m. All were in favor.

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

Attest: *Beverly A. Thomas, County Clerk*

Date: *October 26, 2021*