

**FRANKLIN COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
WORK SESSION  
April 28, 2015  
6:00 P.M.**

Present: Commission Chairman Thomas Bridges  
District 1 Commissioner Robert Franklin  
District 2 Commissioner David Strickland  
District 3 Commissioner Jeff Jacques  
District 4 Commissioner Eddie Wester

Media: Shane Scoggins, Franklin County Citizen  
MJ Kneiser, WLHR

Staff: County Manager, Beth Thomas  
County Clerk, Elaine Evans

**Item 1 & 2: Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance** – Chairman Bridges called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the work session. He also thanked them for their attendance and interest in the County. He then asked Commissioner Wester to lead the invocation and pledge to the American flag.

**Item 3: Items to Be Discussed:**

**A. Public Comment** – Chairman Bridges asked if anyone had anything for public comment. Lisa Brannen asked to be recognized. She said that she is upset and disappointed that it was reported that there was no opposition to the proposed chicken houses that will be located on Hwy 59 near the hospital. She said that she was not aware that there was a planning meeting and would have attended if she had known of it. Mrs. Brannen said that she wanted to make a comment about doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. She said that with the opposition from the neighbors she would like for the Brown family to do the right thing.

Chairman Bridges thanked Mrs. Brannen for her comments and told her that this issue would be addressed at Monday's May regular board meeting. Commissioner Jacques stated that there would be a public hearing prior to the regular board meeting which would give people a chance for public comment.

Joshua Brannen asked to be recognized by the Commission Board. He said that he has heard comments that the fans from the proposed chicken houses would be pointed toward the Interstate. He said that the wind will blow the smell toward the hospital. He also said that he thought that this would keep businesses from locating on the available land near the hospital. He said that he does not think businesses will want to locate near something that might smell. Mr.

Brannen referenced a government survey from several years ago that stated that Franklin County, Hart County and Stephens County are projected to grow. It also said that Elbert County would decrease in size. So far this has proved true, especially with decrease in business in Elbert County. He does not want chicken house smell to hinder businesses from locating in Franklin County close to the hospital.

Chairman Bridges thanked Mr. Brannen for his comments and said that this would be discussed at the meeting Monday night. County Manager Beth Thomas clarified that the public hearing for this issue has already been held. There is not a requirement to hold a second public hearing. This item is not on the public hearing for May. This item is on the regular board meeting agenda. Chairman Bridges said that there will be time given at the regular board meeting for additional public comment.

MJ Kneiser of *WLHR* asked was the last planning commission meeting advertised. She said that she did not receive a notice and asked if it was advertised in the paper. She asked if the planning meeting was a public meeting. Chairman Bridges confirmed that it was a public meeting. Ms. Kneiser said that she did not think that the public knew about the meeting. Chairman Bridges asked Shane Scoggins of the *Franklin County Citizen Leader* how he found out about the meeting. Mr. Scoggins said that he asked Planning Director/County Engineer John Phillips after the last meeting to confirm the date. He also said that it was a regular meeting that occurs at the same time each month. County Manager Beth Thomas confirmed that this is true. Ms. Kneiser said that she is part of the media and she was not notified. Mr. Scoggins said that he is too but he asked about the meeting time.

Commissioner Strickland said that for future reference it would be good to have meeting times listed in the paper. Ms. Kneiser agreed. She said that the planning commission meetings need to be advertised 24 hours in advance in the same way that the county commission meetings are. She also said that an agenda should be included for the planning commission meetings just like an agenda is received for the county commission meetings. Ms. Kneiser said that she has never received notification of planning meetings. Mrs. Thomas asked Ms. Kneiser if she was stating that this was normal – that she has never received planning commission meeting notices. Ms. Kneiser said that this is true. Mrs. Thomas told Ms. Kneiser that this would be looked into and corrected if needed.

Another question was asked by an audience member of where a *Franklin County Citizen Leader* can be purchased. Mrs. Thomas asked Shane Scoggins to answer the question. Mr. Scoggins said that most of the convenience stores in the County have the paper for sale. There are also paper racks located in various locations around the county.

Larry Brannen asked would the chicken house issue be discussed at tonight's meeting or would it be at a later meeting. Chairman Bridges said that the May meeting would be the next chance for public comments on any issue. Commissioner Jacques said that the public hearing will start at 5:30 p.m. on May 4<sup>th</sup> before the regular board meeting. The regular board meeting is where action will take place on the specific zoning recommendations. Public comments can also be made at the regular board meeting. Chairman Bridges asked if there was anyone else who wished to speak. There were no other public comments.

**B. Hospital Update – Asset Purchase Agreement and Release** – Chairman Bridges asked County Manager Beth Thomas to give an update on the hospital asset purchase agreement and release. Mrs. Thomas said that the hospital negotiations are moving forward with all parties involved working together for a successful outcome. The closing of the asset purchase agreement will require the release of the security deed by all parties, including Franklin County. The Commission Board will be required to take action at that time. A special meeting may be necessary to complete this requirement. If a special meeting is needed the proper meeting notices will be published. Documents for review are unavailable at this time. Even with successful negotiations, Franklin County is not relieved of the contractual obligations to repay the bonds. Commissioner Strickland clarified that Franklin County is only responsible for one bond. Mrs. Thomas said that the release would encompass all the pilot bonds. Chairman Bridges asked for additional questions or comments. There was no further discussion.

**C. Joint Comprehensive Plan** – Chairman Bridges asked County Manager Beth Thomas to explain the Joint Comprehensive Plan. Mrs. Thomas said that local governments in Georgia are required to submit comprehensive plans to the Department of Community Affairs. The plan must be reviewed by the Regional Commission and DCA. Franklin County's comprehensive plan was updated in December 2014. The review process by the Regional Commission and DCA has been successfully completed. A public meeting was hosted and held by the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, of which Franklin County is a part. No comments or concerns were received by GMRC. Franklin County is now free to move forward with the adoption of the comprehensive plan update in accordance with state standards. A draft resolution was provided by GMRC and has been provided to each commissioner for review. Mrs. Thomas asked that action be taken at the May regular board meeting.

Chairman Bridges said that it is good to have a comprehensive plan to help guide the direction of the County. Commissioner Jacques said that the adoption of a plan is the first step in being able to apply for funding for county projects. Mrs. Thomas said that this is true. She also said that when grants are applied for that the comprehensive plan will be looked at before approval. There was no further discussion. Chairman Bridges said that this would be looked at again at the May regular board meeting.

**D. Purple Heart Proclamation** – Chairman Bridges said that the Purple Heart Proclamation was looked at last year. No action was taken at that time. Chairman Bridges asked Commissioner Strickland to explain this further. Commissioner Strickland said he was asked by Farris Johnson to revisit this. He said that this proclamation would recognize veterans who live in Franklin County and have received a Purple Heart Medal. Commissioner Strickland said that Georgia is a Purple Heart state. He said that he would like for this to move forward. Chairman Bridges said that Franklin County appreciates all the veterans living in the County, including the Purple Heart recipients. Chairman Bridges said that tribute will be paid to the Purple Heart recipients on Monday by adopting the proclamation. Commissioner Strickland asked that the *Franklin County Citizen Leader* and *WHLR* advertise that this will be done Monday night and invite all Franklin County Purple Heart recipients to come. Chairman Bridges said that this would be great.

**E. Road Update – FEMA Declaration** – Chairman Bridges asked County Manager Beth Thomas to comment on the FEMA declaration. Mrs. Thomas said that a federal disaster declaration was approved on April 20, 2015 for the winter storm that occurred February 15<sup>th</sup> through February 17<sup>th</sup>. Franklin County was included in the declaration. Lyndon Burgess, EMA Director; Terry Harris, EMS Director and Mrs. Thomas attended a briefing held by FEMA where it was noted that Franklin County is eligible for up to 75% of the costs incurred. There are two projects – emergency preparedness and debris removal. Mrs. Thomas publicly thanked the road department employees; Lyndon Burgess; Terry Harris and all the volunteer firemen who helped during the winter storm. She also thanked everyone for their attention to documentation which will help greatly with the application for FEMA.

Mrs. Thomas went on to say that during the storm cleanup process the decision was made to use in house labor instead of contract labor. This was the best decision for Franklin County as 75% of the cost is eligible for reimbursement. Straight time and overtime are eligible for reimbursement for the debris removal process. FEMA will be in Franklin County on Thursday, April 30<sup>th</sup> for a kickoff meeting to give further instructions on the process for recouping eligible expenses. This is the first step in the process. FEMA money is not guaranteed at this point, this is only the starting process. Chairman Bridges thanked Mrs. Thomas and the county staff for applying for reimbursement.

**F. Road Acquisitions & Abandonment – Pittman Drive** – Chairman Bridges said that it is his understanding that Pittman Drive has been talked about previously. This is the first time for Pittman Drive to be talked about with the current Commission Board. Chairman Bridges asked Mr. and Mrs. Wade to come forward and state to the Commission Board their request for Pittman Drive. Mrs. Wade said that her request is for the County to maintain the road. She said that when it rains it is a mess, with people getting stuck on the road. There is a hill that during rainy times makes the road impassable. Chairman Bridges asked Mrs. Wade if her desire was for Pittman Drive to become a county road. Mr. Wade stated that Pittman Drive used to be a county road. Mrs. Wade said that the school bus used to come down the road and during that time period the road was maintained by the County.

Commissioner Strickland asked Mr. and Mrs. Wade what time period was the road maintained by the county. Mrs. Wade said that she has lived on Pittman Drive since 2000. She said she thought that the maintenance ended about five years ago when the school bus stopped coming down the road. Chairman Bridges told Mr. and Mrs. Wade that at one time the County had temporary easements to take care of roads. When the easements run out, the County no longer has permission to work the roads.

Mrs. Thomas referenced the Pittman Drive file that was maintained by the road department staff. She also drove down the road to see the condition. Mrs. Thomas stated that according to the road files that Pittman Drive was considered for acceptance twice before. The last attempt for acceptance to maintain Pittman Drive was in 2010. Out of the 21 property owners, only 12 signed easements were returned to the County. The County was unable to get the necessary right of way to work the entire road. The portion where the easements were returned was worked. Once the temporary easements expired the road was unable to be worked on because at time the road became private property. Mrs. Thomas stated that both times Pittman

Drive was looked at for county maintenance, only half of the property owners signed easements. The County is limited with what can be done. Mr. Wade said that they do not know who owns all of the lots on the road; some of them are empty lots with no houses.

Commissioner Franklin said that Pittman Drive was previously addressed his first term in office. The problem is that the property owners will not respond to the request for easements. Mrs. Wade confirmed that this was the problem that she has run into. Chairman Bridges stated that the County will do what they can to help. The County cannot work on private property. He asked Mrs. Wade if she is willing to try for the third time to get the easements signed. She said that she would. Mrs. Thomas said that there is a hill on Pittman Drive that seems to create some of the problem. She said that maybe after the easements are signed the County could look at taking a portion of the hill down.

Commissioner Strickland said that in the past roads have been maintained on the portions of where the easements have been signed. He said that if they could get enough signatures for the easements and the road meets the road acceptance policy then that part could be worked. Chairman Bridges asked Mrs. Wade to contact County Engineer, John Phillips to see if he can help with the easement process so that Pittman Drive can be maintained. Commissioner Strickland asked if this road showed private road on the registry. Mrs. Thomas confirmed that Pittman Drive is listed as a private drive. Commissioner Strickland said that a private road is to be maintained by the property owners on the road. Commissioner Jacques referred Mrs. Wade to the tax maps so that she can see what right of way is listed for this road. Chairman Bridges also told Mrs. Wade that the tax office should be able to help with contact information for the property owners.

**G. Operations Update – Technology Assessment** – Chairman Bridges asked County Manager Beth Thomas to give a technology update for the County office. Mrs. Thomas said that everyone is aware of the software and hardware issues experienced by the Board of Commissioners office. At the present time this office is facing a failing hard drive. The in house server has two hard drives, one of which has failed. At this point an investment is needed to get the hard drive back up and running to avoid losing critical information. In house servers need to be updated occasionally and this is not an uncommon practice. Mrs. Thomas stressed that in the future a technology update is needed. The current software in use is based out of the 1980's. It is very trustworthy software but as hardware is updated, the software has to move with it to avoid additional problems. Financing options will also be looked at for this big of an investment.

Commissioner Strickland said that the Georgia Mountains Region Commission recently had a technology update. At that time they leased the software instead of purchasing it for approximately \$12,000 per year. Mrs. Thomas said that she would look at every option and the best option will be chosen. Commissioner Jacques said that the software needs to be functional and compatible with the services offered by Franklin County. Mrs. Thomas said that all options will be looked at. Chairman Bridges thanked Mrs. Thomas for her work and wished her luck.

**H. Operations Update – SPLOST IV Projects** – Chairman Bridges asked County Manager Beth Thomas to provide an update on the SPLOST IV projects. Mrs. Thomas said that this is the current SPLOST which started in 2010 and will end in 2016. SPLOST is a one per cent

sales tax to fund capital projects or debt payoff. It is an excellent type of tax. Because of the lawsuit that was pending at the beginning of SPLOST IV, the decision was made to collect the funds on a monthly basis instead of bonds or debts. There are several projects pending waiting on funds to be collected. Mrs. Thomas said that she is looking at financing the remainder of SPLOST IV so that the capital projects can be completed instead of having to wait for 18 months for the monies to be collected and then the projects completed. The capital projects will benefit the County.

Commissioner Jacques asked Mrs. Thomas what type of financing she was looking into. Mrs. Thomas said that she is looking at bonding as well as local financing. She is currently running the numbers to get the best financing option for Franklin County. Commissioner Strickland asked what the remaining total is for SPLOST IV. Mrs. Thomas said that the remainder on SPLOST IV is approximately four to five million dollars. Commissioner Strickland then asked what project is being looked at for the recreation department. Mrs. Thomas said that what was presented in 2010 as recreation projects are playground equipment; fencing; maintenance equipment and a multipurpose building.

Commissioner Jacques asked Mrs. Thomas how she derived the approximate four to five million dollars left on this SPLOST. Mrs. Thomas said that Franklin County is waiting to collect as they spend. Some projects have been paid for in advance out of the general fund. Getting this amount upfront will allow the general fund to be repaid. Several of the volunteer fire departments have spent their amounts upfront before the money was collected by the County. Commissioner Jacques asked did the four to five million factor in the amounts due to the cities. Mrs. Thomas said that the amount for the County would be around 4.1 million dollars. She will also contact the cities and see if they want to go with the financing or continue to get their money monthly. Chairman Bridges thanked Mrs. Thomas for her approach in solving this issue.

Chairman Bridges reminded everyone of the next public hearing at 5:30 p.m. on May 4<sup>th</sup> before the regular board meeting at 6:00 p.m.

MJ Kneiser asked if there is a timeline for the budget talks and work sessions. Mrs. Thomas told Ms. Kneiser that the timelines are the same ones that were previously given out. All of the budget files are to be turned to Mrs. Thomas this week. She said that as soon as the budget files are completed that the meeting dates and times will be scheduled. The dates and times for budget meetings will be advertised.

Chairman Bridges asked if there was anything other questions or concerns. There was no further discussion. The meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Signed on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2015

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Chairman J. Thomas Bridges

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Robert L. Franklin, District 1 Commissioner

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David R. Strickland, District 2 Commissioner

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Jeff Jacques, District 3 Commissioner

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Eddie Wester, District 4 Commissioner

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Elaine H. Evans, County Clerk