

FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION – PLANNING SESSION
January 26, 2016
5:00 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

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

Item 1 & 2: Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance – Chairman Bridges called the joint work session/planning session to order at 5:00 p.m. He welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance. Chairman Bridges asked Commissioner Jacques to lead the invocation and pledge to the American flag.

Item 3: *Items for discussion:*

A. Public Comment – Chairman Bridges recognized Judy Dove Belk. Ms. Belk said that she lives on Dovetown Road. She stated that she has a poultry farm that she has lived on for 52 years. Ms. Belk said that she needs extra water to keep the poultry farm going. She said that she is approximately 1,000 feet from Dove Hill Road which has County water. Ms. Belk said that the City of Franklin Springs as well as the City of Royston has also run water close to where she lives. She said that she and her neighbors on Wolf Den Road want County water. Ms. Belk said that she has never asked the County for anything but she is asking that water come down her road for her chicken houses. Commissioner Strickland asked Ms. Belk if the distance is around a half of a mile. Ms. Belk said probably.

Ms. Belk said that her desire is for Franklin County to help her get water. She has a drilled well and a spring on her property. Because of the biosecurity changes for chicken houses it is harder to use wells and springs. Ms. Belk said that she is unable to use the spring on her property because of possible yeast contamination. She said that she has one well and no backup other than a spring that is useable at this time. The well is hard to regulate for PH and chlorine for baby chickens. Ms. Belk said that it would be easier to grow the chickens with County water and she is asking for water for her chicken houses as well as her family.

Chairman Bridges told Ms. Belk that the cities and County have territories for water lines. He asked County Manager Beth Thomas to get with the County Engineer John Phillips to see if a solution can be worked out for Ms. Belk and her neighbors. Commissioner Jacques asked Ms. Belk how many poultry houses could be potentially served if water was run. Ms. Belk stated that she has six poultry houses. Commissioner Strickland said that are also potential residential houses. Ms. Belk said that she would connect her six poultry houses; her son and daughter would also connect to the water. She said that were also people on Wolf Den Road who would like to be able to connect to County water. She said that it is extremely important for her to have good water because her living depends on it.

Commissioner Jacques asked Ms. Belk if from a cost aspect if she is looking at the County as being the major water provider for the chicken houses or if this would be her secondary source for backup. Ms. Belk said that she would use the water full time. Chairman Bridges thanked Ms. Belk for coming before the Commission Board. He said that Mrs. Thomas and Mr. Phillips will look into this further for a solution. Ms. Belk thanked the Commission Board for hearing her request.

Chairman Bridges asked if anyone else would like to make a public comment. There were no further comments or concerns from the public at this time.

B. Probation Lease – Chairman Bridges asked Mrs. Thomas to explain the probation lease item. Mrs. Thomas said that the Northern Judicial Probation is run through Franklin County. The Northern Judicial Probation has an office in Hartwell that is rented from the United States Postal Service. The Probation Office is in need of more space and the USPS is willing to rent them an additional 200 square feet for an additional \$28 per month. The budget for the Probation Office is set by the Chief Judge. There is enough in the Probation budget to cover the increase. The USPS is requiring a resolution from the Commission Board authorizing either the County Manager or the Commission Chairman as an agent to execute the lease. Mrs. Thomas asked that the Commission Board look over the agreement and approve at the next regular board meeting. Chairman Bridges asked if any of the Commissioners had any comments. Commissioner Strickland asked if this was located at the courthouse. Mrs. Thomas said that this is located at the Post Office in Hartwell. The Judicial Circuit is based out of Franklin County but they have to have office space in each of the five counties. Chairman Bridges said that this would be voted on at the February regular board meeting. There was no further discussion.

C. Board appointments, Questionnaire and Open positions – Chairman Bridges asked Mrs. Thomas to give an update on this agenda item. Mrs. Thomas said that there is one position which has been open since December 1st when the current member resigned. Three highly qualified applications were received. During the application process it was identified that the questionnaire needed an update. Mrs. Thomas said that the questionnaire was updated but she did not receive feedback. She said that she talked with the Industrial Building Authority who made the recommendation of Brian James to the Joint Development Board. The IBA and the Joint

Development Board work closely together. Mrs. Thomas asked the Commission Board to review the three applications and be aware that the IBA is recommending Brian James to be appointed to the position. The appointment needs to be done at the next regular board meeting. She also asked for feedback on the questionnaire so that the updated format can be used for future applicants.

Chairman Bridges stated to the Commission Board to review the questionnaire for feedback and the applications for appointment at the regular board meeting. Commissioner Strickland asked if the other Commissioners have spoken with any of the applicants. Commissioner Jacques and Commissioner Franklin said that they have reviewed the resumes but they have not called them. There was no further discussion.

D. Planning Session

1. Financial Report – Chairman Bridges said that the first item on the planning session is the financial report. Mrs. Thomas thanked the Commissioners and the public for coming an hour early so that the planning session could take place. The planning session was delayed due to the inclement weather. The second part of the planning session will take place on Monday night which will also begin an hour earlier. The part of the planning session that will be covered tonight is the financial report.

Mrs. Thomas gave each of the Commissioners a folder with the financial information. She then went over the information for the media and the public. The financial statements are through the end of December, this will show where the County stands financially after six months. Mrs. Thomas said that as of December, 65% of the revenue budget has been received. She said that she annualized the revenue and the projection is to hit 97% of the budget. The shortfall is due to the LOST and SPLOST collections not coming in as plentiful. Mrs. Thomas said that her thought is that the LOST and SPLOST are down due to gasoline prices being down.

Next, Mrs. Thomas talked about the expenses. She said that when revenues are down the hope is that the expenses stay down also. At this time the expenses are at 47% of the budget. The annualized projection for expenses is 96% of the budget. This is wonderful news but it is also contingent on the departments continuing to spend at the current spending levels. With the revenues and expenses being this tight, the departments do not need to come in either April or May and decide to spend because it is still left in the budget. Spending has to be maintained. Mrs. Thomas said that the departments have been doing a very good job in maintaining spending.

After going over the expenses, Mrs. Thomas then went over the funding sources for the County. She also said that 50% of the County budget is taken up by public safety which is in line. Mrs. Thomas said that the majority of the funding for the County is from taxes. She said that the health insurance is showing a good trend for this year. Salaries and wages are running over budget. The gasoline prices being down are good for the expense side of the County although the revenue side is being dinged. Mrs. Thomas went over the financial graphs. She told the Commission Board that she would go over

the information further individually if needed. Commissioner Jacques asked Mrs. Thomas how was HB 170 which is the motor fuel tax, accounted for in this budget year. He said that at budget time the Governor had not signed off on the bill relating to diesel and gas tax with regard to cities and counties. He asked was the potential decrease in excise tax adjusted in this budget. Mrs. Thomas said that it was not accounted for in this budget. She said that the run rate was used for the budget with the hope that the reduced gas prices would absorb any increase in the taxes and that is happening. Commissioner Jacques said that a point of note even with the decreased motor fuel costs it does not decrease the tax that was established by the State making counties tax exempt. Mrs. Thomas said that at this time the data is still being looked at by the State.

The County is in compliance as a SPLOST IV report was prepared and published in the *Franklin County Citizen Leader* last week. The collections for SPLOST IV will run through March 31, 2017. Mrs. Thomas said 13.8 million dollars has been spent of the SPLOST IV. The estimated collections were based on a zero percent growth factor. Due to the downward trend of the SPLOST collections the overage at the end of the SPLOST will be minimal of maybe a maximum of \$400,000 instead of in the millions. Some of the listed categories for this SPLOST have already spent the maximum amount. Mrs. Thomas said that under SPLOST IV the road budget has already been spent. The water funds will be absorbed into the sewer project. This cannot be used until the estimated costs are available. Because so much of the SPLOST has already been spent, the County is now in a holding pattern until funds are collected.

Mrs. Thomas then spoke about budget modifications. This is a new process which is for cleanup. There is a budget modification for EMS due to a gift that was willed to be used strictly on EMS. This will not impact the EMS budget as it will be recorded as revenue with a wash of an expense. There is also a budget modification for the fire departments due to FEMA money being received by the County for last year's winter storm. There are also cleanup items for probation revenue that was received into the general fund. Mrs. Thomas said that additional budget modifications will be given. She said that she would like each Commissioner to look them over for possible action at the February regular board meeting.

2. Department Head Discussion – Mrs. Thomas said that there are three department heads who will present tonight they are Gina Chappelle with Elections; Rick Cothran with the Tax Assessors and Terry Harris with EMS. Each of these departments will have an impact on next year's budget. Mrs. Thomas then asked Mrs. Chappelle to come forward and speak.

Mrs. Chappelle presented a handout to each Commissioner showing the details of the 2016 elections. There are four scheduled elections which does not include runoffs which would take place in December or January. The first election to take place is on March 1st which is the presidential preference primary. Early voting will start February 8th with one Saturday voting day. There will be three Saturday voting days and early voting for every election. Mrs. Chappelle also included information on the qualifying dates for the May general primary. The dates to qualify are March 7th through

March 11th from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; ending at noon on March 11th. Qualifying will take place at the Elections Office with the Republican and Democratic parties being there. She also provided information on how to qualify as an Independent candidate. Mrs. Chappellear said that her office will be very busy in 2016 with 212 voting days. Easy campaign finance for qualifying was also discussed by Mrs. Chappellear. She said that she will have a computer available during qualifying so that the forms do not have to be handwritten. The forms are available at the Elections Office and packets will be sent to the different political parties next week.

The steps involved in preparing for an election were also gone over by Mrs. Chappellear with a handout provided to the Commission Board. She said that there are a lot of steps that have to be taken before an election can take place. The preparations for the March 2016 election started on December 4, 2015. She said that there are a lot of deadlines and trainings that have to be done by the Elections Department.

2015 highlights were provided by Mrs. Chappellear. She said that odd years are usually slow times but that was not the case for Franklin County. A special election was held for the City of Lavonia due to the passing of one of the council members. There was also a special election for the continuation of the SPLOST along with the municipal elections in November. The voting precincts were also consolidated from 13 to seven. Mrs. Chappellear said that the consolidated process was a smooth process with very little objection from the public. She said that the biggest and costliest task was the mailing out of the over 12,000 precinct cards. Everyone was thanked who helped with this placing of stamps on the post cards. Mrs. Chappellear said that she hoped for reduction in the elections costs is around \$22,000 per year. The poll workers were reduced from 65 to 35. Mrs. Thomas said that the savings will not be seen in 2016 but there will not be a major spike. This is a large election year and the reduction will help with this.

The last topic that Mrs. Chappellear spoke about is that the Elections and Registration Office is the local flier for Ethics in Franklin County. Mrs. Chappellear said that it is the responsibility of the candidates to file the forms. She said that the easiest way to file the forms is to do this online. She also said that she is willing to help with the Ethics forms if needed. Commissioner Strickland thanked Mrs. Chappellear for the good job she does. Chairman Bridges; Commissioner Jacques; Commissioner Franklin; and Commissioner Wester echoed their thanks. Mrs. Thomas next introduced Rick Cothran the Chief Appraiser for the Tax Assessors.

Mr. Cothran presented a summary of what the Tax Assessors office does and how it is done. He said that there should be some kind of increase in the tax digest for this year. It is still too early to call as sales are still coming in. The Tax Assessors monitor sales through the end of the year and all sales have not recorded yet. Commissioner Jacques asked Mr. Cothran to clarify the increase. Mr. Cothran said that this is a value increase. Commissioner Strickland asked would this be possible that a piece of property valued at \$100,000 could possibly go up to \$110,000 or \$115,000. Mr. Cothran said that this might go up some. He said that there would probably be some

increase in commercial property and possibly in residential. The buildings are the main thing that will be looked at in the coming year. If it is an improvement it will be looked at and will have to increase. This process should be done in small increments so that it will not cause problems for anyone.

Every three years a review of all the properties in the County is required. Mr. Cothran said that this review was finished this year. The last part of the review will also go on the digest so a small increase is expected. He said that it will be around March before hard numbers will be available. The good news is that the tax digest is not going to go down. There have been slight increases in the digest for 2013; 2014 and 2015. The digest should follow this pattern with a slight increase. Mr. Cothran said that aerial photos are also available on the tax website. He said that when property is split this is updated weekly but the aerial photos only get done every three to four years.

Commissioner Strickland asked Mr. Cothran to explain SB 346. Mr. Cothran said that SB 346 was passed several years ago. It is a tax reform bill. Part of this bill is that the purchase price of a piece of property is the taxable value for the next year. If the purchase price was lower than what was valued by the Tax Assessors then that was the taxable value for the next year. Commissioner Strickland asked if the following year the value would increase. Mr. Cothran said that it would increase to the Tax Assessors value. Chairman Bridges and the Commission Board thanked Mr. Cothran for his presentation. Mr. Cothran thanked Shane Scoggins of the *Franklin County Citizen Leader* for publishing an article at no charge to the County about exemptions and other information for the public. Mrs. Thomas then asked Terry Harris of the EMS to speak.

Mr. Harris thanked the Commission Board for allowing him the opportunity to come speak. He said that before he gets to the EMS information he is presenting information on the E911 operations. Mr. Harris said that in 2012 there were 28,307 calls where some service was dispatched. By 2014 the dispatched calls increased to 32,814. In 2015 the dispatched calls increased further to 33,733. All of the dispatchers at E911 are certified with the exception of one part time employee who just finished training. This employee is signed up and accepted for certification classes.

An upgrade of the GCIC and CAD servers were done at E911. Mr. Harris said that if one server goes out another one takes over. This allows the ability of E911 services to not go down. He said that the phone system at E911 is being looked at to be replaced in the next SPLOST. Commissioner Strickland asked if this was the TruVista system. Mr. Harris said that this is the system that brings in the information for the E911 system from the trunk lines that run from Miami to Charlotte.

Mr. Harris then transitioned into the information for EMS. He said that in 2008 when Station 4 was added in Carnesville the call volume was 3,485. In 2015 the call volume was 4,553. With the trend of the calls, Franklin County EMS is on pace to run almost 5,000 calls for 2016. The revenue for 2010 was \$971,000. The revenue for 2015 was \$1,263,000. Mr. Harris said that around 50% of the calls are being transported to the local hospital. He said that the other 50% is being transported out of the County to

Athens; Anderson; Gainesville and other places.

The recommendation from the State EMS is for an ambulance service to have one ambulance per 1,000 calls. Mr. Harris said that there are four med units in the County and the call volume is at 4,553. He said that from the recommendation from the State it is halfway past the point of adding another med unit. He said that he is aware of the finances in the County but that it is getting to the place that sometimes there is not an available ambulance to run calls. He said that the out of County transports are what is causing problems. Mr. Harris said that his suggestion is to add another med unit. He said that it would add about \$325,000 to personnel costs. Commissioner Strickland asked for clarification of how many employees for this amount. Mr. Harris said that this would be six employees. Commissioner Jacques asked if the med unit is still around \$165,000. Mr. Harris said to buy the ambulance is about \$145,000. Commissioner Jacques if that included being fully equipped. Mr. Harris said no, that is just the med unit. He said that fully equipped would be about \$180,000. There are spare units and spare equipment in the County at this time which could be used. The biggest challenge would be the salaries.

Mr. Harris told the Commission Board if the County was unable at this time to add another med unit, he would suggest taking the three shift supervisors off of the ambulances and hire three additional full time people. The hiring of three people would be about \$175,000 per year. He said that the shift supervisor on duty could act as a fifth unit to go on calls. An off duty person or first responder would have to meet them at the scene to continue the transport. Mr. Harris said that this is not an ideal solution but it would work for now. Commissioner Strickland asked if Franklin County could work with other transport agencies to help. Mr. Harris said under the State license for EMS, the E911 calls have to run by Franklin County EMS. He said that if EMS called another transportation service it is not a certainty that the transport would take place. If the patient did not have insurance then the transportation service would turn them down.

This problem has been looked for a while by Mr. Harris. He said that the most time consuming aspect is the transports from the hospital to other facilities. Mr. Harris said that he called other transportation services about helping with the transports from the hospital. The other transportation services only have BLS (Basic Life Support) certification instead of ALS (Advanced Life Support) certification. Commissioner Jacques asked Mr. Harris if the companies knew there would be additional business could they buy the necessary equipment. Mr. Harris said that he was sure they could. The revenue that would be lost if another provider took over would be in the neighborhood of \$200,000 per year.

Mutual aid contracts are in place with other counties in the event that an ambulance is not available in the County. Mr. Harris said that the other counties will send help but it does take time to get from their county into our county. Commissioner Franklin asked if the new ambulance is in to replace the one that was burned. Mr. Harris said that it has not come yet. Commissioner Franklin then asked how collections were coming. Mr. Harris said that the County uses a collection agency and also a billing

agency. He said that the billing agency works very hard to collect on behalf of Franklin County. There is some delinquent debt but there is also a great amount that has to be written off of billing because of contracts with insurance providers.

Commissioner Wester referred back to Mr. Harris' suggestion of taking the shift supervisors off the trucks. He asked Mr. Harris if he thought there would be any problems using first responders as they are strictly volunteers. Mr. Harris said that Franklin County has a good group of first responders. He said that it is very rare to page and a first responder not show up at a call. Mr. Harris said that on the other side of this is that a paramedic will be on the scene that can perform advanced life support until another county shows up to help. He said that all the ambulances come to Carnesville to bring paperwork and replenish supplies. Mr. Harris said that by having a supervisor off the truck will cut out a lot of the traffic back to Carnesville. The supervisor will take the supplies instead of the truck coming into Carnesville. He also said that the first responders are a great group who are very dedicated. Commissioner Franklin said that the first responders were trained also. Mr. Harris said that the EMS staff train the first responders. Commissioner Jacques asked Mr. Harris could part time personnel be brought in when there are heavy call volumes. Mr. Harris said that he does not have enough part time paramedics to be able to call in. He said that the majority of the EMS around the district is not fully staffed. Commissioner Strickland asked if Franklin County lost staff to other counties. Mr. Harris said that in the past he has.

Commissioner Jacques asked Mr. Harris if there were paramedics who live in the County who work full time in other counties who would be willing to come in for part time work here. He said that he is looking for a solution because of the financial situation in the County he does not foresee that the finances will be there to add a med unit in either this year or the next. Mrs. Thomas said that the County is in crisis financial mode. A med unit cannot be bought at this time. But a short term solution could be to take the supervisors off the trucks until the additional staff could be added. Commissioner Jacques asked if one person could be used to take supplies back and forth to the EMS stations. Commissioner Strickland said that this person would have to be qualified to be able to sign off on the supplies. Mrs. Thomas said that one person every day is what they are asking. Mr. Harris said that he did not want to get into the situation where there is not personnel to send on E911 calls. Chairman Bridges thanked Mr. Harris for his presentation. He said that he is sure that with working with the Commission Board and with Mrs. Thomas a solution can be found.

Chairman Bridges asked if anyone else had any comments or concerns. Martha Coker asked to speak. Ms. Coker said that she knew that Ms. Belk had already spoken about the water situation. She stated that she has been contacting the County for over three years requesting help with water. Ms. Coker said that she spoke with Mrs. Thomas and she asked her if she had contacted the City of Franklin Springs. Chairman Bridges told Ms. Coker that Mrs. Thomas and Mr. Phillips will be looking into this issue and working on a solution. Commissioner Strickland asked for clarification on whose service area Ms. Coker lived in. Chairman Bridges stated again that Mrs. Thomas and Mr. Phillips will look into this and will keep in touch with these residents. Mrs. Thomas

said that this will be looked into and they are on the list for those requesting water. Commissioner Strickland said that if these residents are willing to purchase the pipe for installation. Mrs. Thomas said yes, the aid and construction. Commissioner Strickland said that in the past this has been done. Mrs. Thomas said that is correct, that if they are willing to purchase the inventory, we provide the labor. She also said that the City of Franklin Springs will have to be willing to give up this area. The reason for wanting the residents to contact the City of Franklin Springs in addition to contacting the County is they may get water faster according to the work load of the agency. Commissioner Jacques agreed with this and to do what is the best for the citizens of the County. He said that right of way issues need to be taken care of before anyone can run water lines. This will be done through the agency that provides the service.

There were no further comments or concerns from the public. The meeting adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

Signed on the _____ day of _____, 2016

Chairman J. Thomas Bridges

Robert L. Franklin, District 1 Commissioner

David R. Strickland, District 2 Commissioner

Jeff Jacques, District 3 Commissioner

Eddie Wester, District 4 Commissioner

Elaine H. Evans, County Clerk