



**FRANKLIN COUNTY  
JAIL SUBCOMMITTEE  
MEETING SUMMARY  
July 13, 2017  
6:00 P.M.**

*Members Present:* Wayne Ellard  
Mayor Harris Little  
Colonel Don Pinkard  
Bob Ragsdale  
Judge Thomas Hodges  
Sheriff Stevie Thomas  
Chief Deputy Jimmy LeCroy  
Captain Greg Sisk  
BOC Chairman Thomas Bridges  
Commissioner Robert Franklin

*Members Absent:* Paul Crawford  
Linda Gunter  
Jeff Sosby

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

*GMRC Facilitators:* Adam Hazell  
Daniel Martin

*Media:* Lisa Manus

*Guests:* Tom Wright  
Captain Gary Smith

Mrs. Thomas introduced **Adam Hazell** and **Daniel Martin** of GMRC. Mr. Hazell thanked everyone for taking their time for this important decision and welcomed them to the Carnesville Community Center. He said that he is the Planning Director for Georgia Mountains Regional Commission and Mr. Martin is the Economic Development Director for GMRC. Their role in this process is to be neutral, objective facilitators so that the focus can be on the issue and have the discussion for recommendations on what to do regarding the concerns, needs, and issues for the jail. Mr. Hazell said that there will be three meetings with GMRC providing guidance and suggestions to the Sheriff and the County. All options will be explored for a solution.

**Sheriff Stevie Thomas** came forward and asked that everyone introduce themselves. He introduced former jail administrator Captain Gary Smith and architect



*Tom Wright as invited guests to provide the history of the jail. Sheriff Thomas said that Mr. Wright is the architect that has previously provided drawings although the plan was shot in the foot because the money was not there. The jail was built in 1993 because of a federal lawsuit. The lawsuit came during the tenure of Sheriff Joe Foster and was filed by inmates due to a lack of space.*

*Sheriff Thomas said that there have been several escapes at the jail due to the cuts that were made during the construction. Starting in 2002 to the present the recommendation from the Grand Jury is to build. Sheriff Thomas said that when he took office his priority was to get the jail out from under the lawsuit. He said that attorneys came in every month to see what was done and nothing had been done. Sheriff Thomas said that in order to get out from under the lawsuit a nurse and two detention officers were hired.*

*The Grand Jury recommendation to add onto the jail was shot down by a previous Commission Board. Sheriff Thomas then went back to the Commissioners and asked for a work release center. He said that there are 74 beds at the jail and it was full within three years of being built. Sheriff Thomas said that he does not want to build a new jail he wants to add onto the existing one. He said that space is needed to be able to split the inmates up for the classification of the crimes that have been committed. As of today Sheriff Thomas said that there 96 people in jail with 25 of those being housed out in another county. The majority of the housed out inmates are females.*

*Sheriff Thomas said that the can has been kicked down the road long enough and something has got to be done. He does not blame any individual commissioner as he understands that things have to be followed and there are things that he has to follow also. Sheriff Thomas said that he has to make sure that there is enough properly trained staff. He is also responsible for the care of the inmates and their safety as well as the safety of the staff.*

*The construction costs will continue to rise along with the liability. Sheriff Thomas said that it is time to get off our butt and do something. He said that there is staff in the County who can do some of the work which will lessen the total project cost. He said that he has talked with Joe Roane the adjacent property owner to the jail about selling additional acreage for the addition. He will bring those costs back to the County as he is given them. Over 76,000 miles was logged last year for transports using 1,456 employee hours at a rate of over \$14 an hour.*

***Chief Deputy Jimmy LeCroy** said he works under the direction of Sheriff Thomas. He said that the Sheriff is the chief law enforcement officer in the County who has the sole responsibility to protect the citizens. Mr. LeCroy said that the responsibility of the Sheriff is huge and he asked the subcommittee members to be mindful of the duties and responsibilities of the Sheriff as they go through this process.*

*Mr. LeCroy said that as the chief deputy he is assigned to investigations and his job is to put people in jail not to know how the jail runs. He also helps with the finances for the Sheriff's office which includes the jail operations. Mr. LeCroy gave contact*



*information for Sheriff Thomas, Captain Sisk and himself. He asked the subcommittee members to please contact one of them if they need additional information or have questions about the jail. Answers to questions will be given to all subcommittee members to avoid duplication of information.*

*The budget for the jail is included in the total for the Sheriff's office, it is not broken out. Mr. LeCroy said that this has caused some concern in getting an accurate cost of running the jail but he, Sheriff Thomas, Captain Sisk and Mrs. Thomas have worked on getting accurate numbers for the jail operations. Information was presented on the costs to run the jail which total approximately 1.7 million dollars per year. A question was asked from Mr. Ragsdale concerning the over \$800,000 to add 12 additional employees. Mr. LeCroy said that this information is strictly to add the employee costs. Mayor Little asked if any reserves were included in these numbers. Mr. LeCroy said that maintenance and upkeep has not been included in the budget.*

***Captain Greg Sisk** said that he has the responsibility of keeping the inmates safe and contained and supervising the jail employees. He said that on some days he comes to work and the jail is full and overflowing and the question of the day is who we can let go so that we can lock someone up tomorrow. Captain Sisk said that he does not think that this is the way that Franklin County wants to be or the way that the community wants to be. He said that they do not want to let people go who should be doing a sentence.*

*The job of Judge Hodges is to sentence people and the job of Captain Sisk is to make sure that the sentence is carried out. Captain Sisk said that the current condition of the jail makes it harder and harder to be able to do this part of his job. He said that he has to call Jackson County or Stephens County to see how many inmates they are willing to take or Gwinnett County if they are more violent. Then it becomes a problem to transport the inmates because of taking deputies away from their jobs of protecting the County. Captain Sisk said it is becoming a problem now if Jackson County or Stephens County is able to take the overflow. Sometimes the other counties response is that they will take inmates if Franklin County takes some back. Then it becomes a problem of do we let people go early.*

*Captain Sisk said that the first thing to look at is to see how much room there is. He said if there are 76 beds and there are 96 inmates then the jail is over full. Colonel Pinkard asked how this effects the classification of separating inmates. Captain Sisk said that if the classification was done correctly he was sure that he would have to house out at least 25 inmates per day and then the housing costs would go up. The inmate population has grown steadily each year by approximately 4.6. The projection is for 153 inmates per day by the year 2027. Sheriff Thomas clarified that this is housed inmates not people getting booked and going out immediately. Colonel Pinkard said that there are a lot of other influences that effect the inmate population that the Sheriff does not have any control over. Captain Sisk said that it is a moving number, something different every day.*

*At this time there are 15 inmates who are classified as low, 41 medium low, 28*



medium high and 5 high. Captain Sisk said that the high inmates are currently housed in Gwinnett County at a more secure location. Colonel Pinkard said that this makes for a lot of trips back and forth to court. Daniel Martin asked Captain Sisk to give examples of what would go into the classification categories. Captain Sisk said that any charge of a sexual nature would be high. Misdemeanor charges such as driving on suspended license or small amounts of pot would be classified as medium. Captain Sisk said that the more charges that a person has can bump them up into another category. Judge Hodges said that the charge and the history of behavior are also looked at. Ms. Manus clarified that the different classifications mean that they should be detained in different places. Captain Sisk affirmed that this is true. Sheriff Thomas said that a federal lawsuit is possible if the classifications are not separated properly.

**Captain Gary Smith** asked Colonel Pinkard if Gwinnett County has classification officers. Colonel Pinkard stated that there are nine employees who assess the risk factor of every inmate that comes into the jail for classification and suitability of the general jail population, segregation, separation or mental health issues. Classifying inmates appropriately is an important job because the jail staff is charged with their care. Captain Smith said that the classifications can change because of the behavior of the inmate. Ms. Manus questioned that the classification is not just for the care of the inmate but also for the protection of the officers. Captain Smith, Captain Sisk, Colonel Pinkard and Sheriff Thomas all affirmed yes. Captain Sisk said that Colonel Pinkard has staff to do the classifications but he does not. Captain Smith said that he did the classification by using two employees who were jump personnel.

**Chairman Bridges** asked if a decision was made prior to sending someone for housing of how long they would be in jail before going to court. Captain Sisk said that when he sends someone to another county he checks for court dates to make sure that they are not immediately brought back to the County. He also said if they have been before the Judge and bond was denied that these are the prime people to house out. Inmates are brought back to Franklin County to see the nurse if they become sick. Captain Sisk said at this time they are transported back as all medical costs belong to Franklin County.

**Wayne Ellard** said that he toured the jail and overall the jail is in decent shape for the age it is. He said that there are privacy issues concerning the female inmates. Shower curtains are used to keep the female inmates from seeing the male inmates. Mr. Ellard said that something has got to be done. He said that if every inmate that belonged to Franklin County was brought back tomorrow the facility would be at 150%.

**Colonel Pinkard** said that the situation is a ticking bomb. The inability to classify inmates creates havoc. He said he previously worked in DeKalb County and went through several federal lawsuits. Colonel Pinkard said that the jail started out with 200 beds then added doublewide trailers and eventually ended up with 1,800 beds. Due to federal lawsuits DeKalb County was forced to build a four tower jail. Classification was not the only reason for the federal lawsuit, the lack of programs and services was also part of it. The federal government can come in and place fines of



*\$100 a day or more for every inmate in the jail.*

*No matter whether the government is large or small the same kinds of problems exist of the population that has to be managed. Colonel Pinkard said that he appreciated the opportunity to serve on the jail subcommittee. He is happy to be able to share what he has learned during his years of working in two large jails that both faced issues. Mr. Ellard said that he does not want to see Franklin County involved in a federal lawsuit because of the jail.*

**Chairman Bridges** said that a lot of weight is being placed on Captain Sisk to not pack too many in the same pod. He said that he has analyzed the cost of housing out or building and that it is cheaper to house out than to build. Chairman Bridges said that he has been following a lady since December who is housed in Stephens County. He said that she only has a \$10,000 bond but has not bonded out. There is also a hold on her for New Jersey Port Authority, US Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Nationalization and New York FBI. Chairman Bridges said that this lady is costing Franklin County and that we should tell someone else to come get her. Sheriff Thomas asked if the crime was committed against his family would he want her to go somewhere else. Chairman Bridges said actually no. He said that if she was released someone else could come get her. Sheriff Thomas said that if she was released that a deputy would have to go get her. He also said that if they stay in jail, they get to court quicker.

**Judge Hodges** stated that the jail cases get priority; they go to trial before anyone who is out on bond. Chairman Bridges said that this is a priority case. Sheriff Thomas said yes and she is in jail. Judge Hodges said that the problem that the judges have is that they cover five counties. The judges can only spend a week or two in a particular county before they are off to another county. Judge Hodges also said that there are a limited number of cases that can be done. He said that with the new DA the judges have been pushing to move the cases. At this point the judges are treading water, keeping up with what is coming in.

Sheriff Thomas gave an example of if two people came in with the exact charge and neither can afford an attorney, a public defender is appointed to them. The judge will then appoint a conflict attorney to see the other one. Although they are the same charge the cases may be tried separately because they have rights. And this process causes delays in the system.

**Mayor Little** asked if it is a law that an inmate has to physically appear in court. Judge Hodges said mostly yes. He said there is not any video conferencing in any of the counties. Video conferencing is a possibility that Judge Hodges said he would support. Colonel Pinkard said that there is video conferencing in Gwinnett County and it works out well. He said that problems can be encountered if the representing attorney chooses not to do video conferencing. Sheriff Thomas said that a lot of the problems faced by Franklin County are when the DA sends orders to go pick up inmates and there is no available space and they have to be housed out.



**Captain Sisk** said that he and his staff are good stewards of the jail. They try to keep it clean and maintain what they have. He said that Detention Equipment Sales was hired to come through the jail and go over all the locks and perform maintenance. Captain Sisk said that the shower issue is redneck but it is working. You don't want males and females to be able to see each other. Because of no cameras in the female pod a female inmate tried to hang herself by a bedsheet. Captain Sisk said that he is thankful that he, several deputies and help from inmates were able to save her.

Another problem at the jail is when it rains hard that water comes through the floor or flows through the doors. Captain Sisk said that the floor in the cooler is rusted out. He said if a jail expansion is done the kitchen will need updates with a bigger freezer/cooler. Captain Sisk said that mold is also an issue. Captain Smith said that this was part of the previous lawsuit because of mold on the wall. He said that cleaning in the jail is a constant and ongoing process. Colonel Pinkard said that it would also need to be looked at to see what would be needed to bring the current facility up to standards before an addition takes place. Mayor Little said that given the age of the jail it is serving its purpose. Captain Sisk said it is serving its purpose but as years come the County will be dumping money. Captain Smith brought up the issue of low pay for detention officers. He said that this has always made for big turnover. Captain Sisk was asked if the jail is fully staffed. His answer was no.

**Judge Hodges** said that he is in support of everything that the Sheriff and his employees have said. The number of criminals will continue to go up because of drugs and the miles on the Interstate. Judge Hodges said that Sheriff Thomas has been very proactive in his efforts on the Interstate and he commends him for that. He said that he has been practicing law since 1972 and there are a lot more people in the system now and is probably due to drugs. In the jails the males and females have to be kept separate to avoid additional problems. Judge Hodges also said that the jails have become dumping grounds for mental health and this is true all across the country.

A lot of money is being spent on transports and on housing out. Judge Hodges said that it would seem to be a wise investment to put that money back in Franklin County. He said that he is in support of the Sheriff and his request. Judge Hodges also brought to attention that transporting inmates is dangerous. A lot of the problems come when going from point A to point B. He said that he does not want a situation like what happened in Putman County to happen in Franklin County ending in the deaths of the officers. Judge Hodges said that the County does not want or need another lawsuit, it needs to stay ahead.

**Beth Thomas** said that she has learned everything that she knows about the jail from the Grand Jury reports. She said that beginning in 1999 about six years after the jail was built there was a request for more beds. Mrs. Thomas said that the question for her has always been when we do whatever we do are we going to make sure that we have the right path. She said that there is always a balance between operations and how much money is needed to make that happen.

Mrs. Thomas said that the amount of money that is spent on outsourcing would



*not cover the debt service on a 3 million dollar loan for 30 years. She said that the debt service amount per year would be \$150,000. Mrs. Thomas said that for whatever solution is decided on then the question becomes how it can be funded. She said that there are three major financing options for capital expenditures; cash on hand, reserves and SPLOST. The County does not have adequate reserves for anything as budget overruns can barely be covered. Mrs. Thomas said that the jail fund is a restricted account and can only be used on certain things. She gave the current balance as \$597,000 with reduction because money was moved to take care of the over budget expenses at the jail.*

*In the SPLOST III account there is approximately \$98,000 for the jail. Mrs. Thomas said that there are currently no remaining funds for the jail in SPLOST IV. SPLOST V began collections this year with inclusion of \$200,000 for public safety for the Sheriff which is usually used for patrol cars. Mrs. Thomas said that in the SPLOST V there is 1.4 million in public buildings which includes the jail and the courthouse. \$100,000 is allocated for technology and infrastructure and \$80,000 for purchase and renovation of a building. Mrs. Thomas said that the SPLOST V cash is not in hand. The voters approved the borrowing in advance on this but there is a process that has to be followed if this is decided on.*

*Mrs. Thomas said that she has not been able to find any grants for jails. She said that she will look into grants for alternatives to jails because of the recommendation from the Grand Jury for a work center. Mrs. Thomas said that long term debt is an option for financing the jail but this will have to go before the voters on a referendum and this can only be done at certain times. She said that a component of this to keep in mind is that it will have to be paid for.*

*Two of the problems at the jail are census and classification of inmates. Mrs. Thomas said that it would need to be determined how many beds would be needed to fix this. She said that a jail expansion, a new jail or outsourcing fixes the problems of census and classification. Mrs. Thomas said that a third problem is the condition of the jail. She said that an expansion or outsourcing does not correct the condition of the jail although a new jail would. Mrs. Thomas said that whatever solution is settled on that the condition of the jail should be top priority and that the cash on hand is probably needed to fix the condition at the jail. She said that an expansion of the kitchen would cost \$250,000 but is needed before an expansion of the jail.*

*Another thing to look at Mrs. Thomas said is the operations. Is there a bottleneck in the court system and if so, how can it be helped with the available funds. Mrs. Thomas said from a numbers perspective that the housing out costs at the jail would only be able to hire 1.63 full time employees. She said that the current millage rate is worth about \$593,000. To operate on the numbers presented by the Sheriff for the expansion Mrs. Thomas said that taxes would need to be raised by 1.6 mills plus .3 mills to pay for the debt service. She said that this may have to be done and she is an advocate for doing something. Captain Smith posed the solution of expanding and then housing women for the surrounding counties. He said that this would help pay for the expansion. Mrs. Thomas said that is a great idea. But she said that it costs the jail \$61*



per day to house people. When Franklin County outsources inmates it only costs \$35 a day although transportation and other costs are not included. Mrs. Thomas said that even if we were housing we would never recoup the total cost.

**Captain Smith** said that if you own your car that you want to be the one to drive that car. He said that when you put a person in another facility that you are putting your faith that nothing will happen to this person. If something does happen to an inmate that is housed in another facility the responsibility falls back on the Sheriff and the County. Mrs. Thomas said that there are more factors to look at.

**Colonel Pinkard** said that the elephant in the room is a potential lawsuit which would cost way more than the 3 million that has been talked about. He said that this is very possible because of the inability to classify inmates. Chairman Bridges said that whatever the solution there will have to be a lot of campaigning done by the subcommittee to get the voters to go along.

**Sheriff Thomas** said that no matter what happens criminals will find Franklin County Georgia because of 185. He said that he could take his officers off the Interstate but he is not going to do that because it is his job to protect the citizens of the County. Sheriff Thomas said that a multi-county jail will not be built because it was tried when Sheriff Hugh Roach was in office. Captain Smith said that previously it was asked that money be set aside in the SPLOST for the jail but for some reason the money went away. He said that no one knows what happened and no one is doing anything to fix it. Captain Smith told Mrs. Thomas that everything was well and good with her numbers but when a federal lawsuit comes down it doesn't matter. The County has already gone through this one time and is heading in that direction again.

**Mr. Hazell** said that he is sure that everyone in the room recognizes that the current situation is decidedly imperfect and something needs to be done. He said that his understanding is at the conclusion of the discussions there needs to be a recommendation on how to make this situation better with a long term solution. Mr. Hazell then asked that positive aspects of the jail be discussed.

**Mr. Ellard** said that he had heard that the jail was built on a wetland. He said that a lot of people think this because of the drainage issues. Mayor Little said this is not true. Mrs. Thomas asked if one wall had separated from the foundation. Captain Smith said no. Mr. Wright said that because of security the windows had to be closed in so some of the ventilation was taken away. The population of the jail is so dense that it is hard to work on the existing facility. If the expansion was added then the existing jail would be able to be maintained properly while keeping the inmates and officers safe. Captain Smith said that the jail is an old facility but it still has life in it, it just needs to be maintained. Mr. Hazell asked if an analysis had been done to upgrade the existing facility. He said that this would be something that needs to be considered. Mr. LeCroy said that some of this is added into the budget each year for maintenance and upkeep. Mr. Hazell said that there are routine maintenance items and there are some that are extraordinary that seldom if ever happen. Captain Smith said that the kitchen is big enough to handle an expansion. Mr. Wright said that the laundry room is big



*enough if the equipment is upgraded.*

*Mr. Hazell thanked everyone for coming and lending their time to this effort. He said that this is an ongoing group to come up with a solution for the jail. Mr. Hazell said that a needs assessment of the jail is needed for information.*

*The next scheduled meeting for the Jail Subcommittee is Thursday, July 20 at 6:00 p.m. at the Carnesville Community Center. The meeting adjourned at 8:03 p.m.*

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Elaine H. Evans  
County Clerk*