



"You Are Why We Are Here"

**FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION MINUTES
October 24, 2017
6:00 P.M.**

BOC: Commission Chairman Thomas Bridges
District 1 Commissioner Robert Franklin
District 2 Commissioner Dr. Jason Macomson
District 4 Commissioner Eddie Wester

Absent: District 3 Commissioner Jeff Jacques

Media: Shane Scoggins, Franklin County Citizen

Staff: County Manager Beth Thomas
County Clerk Elaine Evans

Item 1: **Call Meeting to Order** – Chairman Bridges welcomed everyone and called the work session to order at 6:00 p.m.

Item 2: **Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance** – Commissioner Wester led the invocation and pledge of allegiance to the American flag.

Item 3: **Items for discussion:**

A. **Public Comment** – Chairman Bridges asked if anyone wished to speak in public comment. There was no one who wished to speak.

B. **Delinquent Taxes** – Chairman Bridges asked Tax Commissioner Bobby Martin to come forward and speak about the delinquent taxes. Tax Commissioner Martin came forward and introduced Mr. Gabe Martin who has been his mentor since his election to Tax Commissioner in 2001. Gabe Martin began his career at the Hall County Tax Commissioners Office and then served 26 years as an auditor for the Georgia Department of Revenue. The teaching manual for tax commissioners for proper tax collecting methods was co-authored by Mr. Gabe Martin. Mr. Gabe Martin also has experience in working in property tax collections. Tax Commissioner Martin stated that he is coming before the Commission Board at the advice of Mr. Gabe Martin to speak about delinquent tax collections.

Tax Commissioner Martin said over his years of being tax commissioner the process for collecting taxes has been almost perfected. He stated the collection rates for the last seven years as 99.99% for the years 2009-2011; 99.98% for 2012; 99.7% for 2013; 99.6% for 2014; 99.1% for 2015 and 99.79% for 2016 which is currently due.



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Most of the people in Franklin County pay their taxes on time by the due date and things work well. Unfortunately there some people who do not and FIFA's (tax liens) against the properties are filed to start the process of encouragement to pay their taxes.

When Tax Commissioner Martin started his job in 2001 it was necessary for the County to hold about three tax sales a year to keep things current. Now the tax sales are two per year. The problem that is now happening is there are properties that cannot be collected. Tax Commissioner Martin gave a handout showing properties from the tax sales that have not sold. These properties have been taken numerous times to the Courthouse House steps for sale and no one will bid on them. Most of these properties are located in Gumlog near the lake but not on the lake. A lot of the times when Tax Commissioner Martin goes out to post the properties they are inaccessible due to the roads never being developed or being overgrown. The majority of the properties were purchased in the 1960's to 1970's with the intention of building but it was never followed through on. Over the years these owners have aged out, either gone on or are in nursing homes and the family members have absolutely no interest in the properties to keep them up or to pay the taxes on them. Tax Commissioner Martin stated that he cannot collect the taxes on these properties, he has tried multiple times. He asked the Commission Board to allow him to nulla bona the properties as these properties are no longer able to satisfy the tax bill because no one will purchase them. It is a disservice to the County to continue to try to sale these properties because every time a tax sale is done there are advertising costs, certified notifications and research that is required.

Tax Commissioner Martin said the original amount of taxes owed on these properties is less than \$8,000 but because of penalties, interest and fees the amount is over \$43,000 and he cannot collect it although he has tried multiple times. If the Sheriff looks for property and is unable to locate it, it is classified as nulla bona because it is not there. With the properties referenced by Tax Commissioner Martin there is property out there but no one wants them so they have ceased to satisfy. Tax Commissioner Martin said these properties would be taken off the books if the Commissioners approve to nulla bona.

Gabe Martin came forward and explained to the Commissioners that the nulla bona would be a housekeeping measure. Under the law the Revenue Commissioner and the County Commissioners are the only ones who have the authority to remove things from the digest. He said these are small tax bills and are probably less than \$100 a bill. Mr. Gabe Martin said this would take these properties out of the current accountability and it will show a truer picture of delinquent tax for the millage rate and budget processes. After this step is taken if any of the people come in to pay the delinquent taxes these bills can be reactivated for payment. Mr. Gabe Martin stated as Tax Commissioner Martin did that everything that can be done to collect on these properties has been done. He also asked that the Commissioners declare these properties nulla bona.



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Dr. Macomson asked if declaring nulla bona would absolve the property owners of the taxes. Gabe Martin said no, these accounts cannot be written off because they are real tax bills on real property; the nulla bona would only take the properties off the current books. Chairman Bridges questioned if the amounts owed would continue to accrue each year. Gabe Martin stated yes, they would be issued every year. He said unless something changes these taxes will not be able to be collected. Chairman Bridges asked if someone came two or three years from now would they be able to pay the taxes. Gabe Martin said these accounts could be opened back up at any time and the taxes could be paid if someone desired to pay them. He also said if any of the delinquent owners are shown to own other property in the County these accounts will be opened back up and a lien placed against them for payment. Chairman Bridges asked how long this would last. Gabe Martin said the liens against these properties are for seven years.

Mrs. Thomas asked what the proper documentation is for this process, a vote or specific language for the Chairman to sign. Gabe Martin said a resolution that nulla bona was voted on with a listing of the properties attached. Then place this in the minutes and files and give a copy to Tax Commissioner Martin. Commissioner Franklin asked if the vote was needed tonight. Chairman Bridges said this was fact finding night and the vote would be later. He asked Gabe Martin what the time table is for this. Gabe Martin answered there is no time table but it would be nice to have this done before audit time.

Commissioner Wester commended Tax Commissioner Martin for the fine work he does for the County. He said he knows this is not an easy job and he appreciates all the hard work he does for Franklin County. Gabe Martin told the Commissioners they are extremely lucky to have a man like Bobby Martin as the Tax Commissioner. Chairman Bridges said he has heard positive comments about Tax Commissioner Martin at meetings from people outside of the County. Tax Commissioner Martin stated that Gabe Martin told him 17 years ago that his job is to collect taxes and make everybody pay and to treat everyone fair and equitable. He said he has followed the advice from Gabe Martin and so far it has paid off.

C. Presentation of Jail Subcommittee Summary Report – *Chairman Bridges welcomed Bob Ragsdale, Paul Crawford, Sheriff Stevie Thomas and Jeff Sosby for coming to represent the Jail Subcommittee. He asked Jeff Sosby to come forward and give the Jail Subcommittee presentation. Mr. Sosby said the County is currently exploring options to address the concerns at the current jail. The County is contracting with other counties to house inmates due to the capacity at the jail. There are current issues to be resolved due to the natural aging of the jail and use of the building and operational needs. Some of the problems at the jail come from the design not being ideal to meet the current usage.*

Mr. Sosby said the subcommittee was formed in the spring of 2017 and was tasked with exploring and making a recommendation for the best option for the County and the Sheriff and the taxpayers. The majority of the subcommittee members



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agreed that an expansion at the current site along with improvements would be the best course of action at this time. The subcommittee members also recognize the financial constraints of the County and do not seek to undermine the needs throughout the County. Mr. Sosby stated to the Commissioners that the recommendations from the subcommittee were presented as a guide to address the needs at the current facility and to take action on them.

Chairman Bridges thanked Mr. Sosby for making the presentation to the Commissioners. He also thanked the subcommittee members for taking their time and effort to review the whole picture and make a recommendation. All of the subcommittee members have had an opportunity to review the jail summary report. Chairman Bridges specifically asked the Commission Board to review page eight of the report for what is needed from the Sheriff, the County Commission and what else can be done. He said all the needs of the County have to be met including the jail, the courthouse and all the County buildings.

Mrs. Thomas said that she will begin confirming the available resources and funding options for the tasks that have been recommended. She said this information was given to the subcommittee previously. It is now important to give this information to the Commissioners along with a time table of pursuing general obligation debt which is possibly the only option for this project. Mrs. Thomas said March 1, 2018 is the deadline to get the information to KSU for the May ballot. She said she will begin the work to move forward unless the Commission Board had objections.

Dr. Macomson asked what the total projected cost is for an expansion. Chairman Bridges said the projected cost now is 3.5 million dollars. His suggestion would be to go with 4 million to take care of overruns. This is the number that should be given upfront to the citizens for the ballot. Chairman Bridges said the subcommittee discussed building a new facility at a new location. The projected cost for this would be 15 to 20 million dollars. Dr. Macomson questioned if the renovations were separate from this. Mrs. Thomas said the renovations and expansion needed to be included in the total project amount.

Chairman Bridges said it is the responsibility of the Commission Board to come up with a solution. When he became a Commissioner a little over four years ago the inmate census was around 70 per day. Now the census at the jail is consistently 120 per day. He is thankful for Jackson County and Stephens County who are willing to help with inmate housing. Chairman Bridges said whether adding on to the jail or housing out, it costs the citizens of the County.

Commissioner Wester thanked the citizens who served on the jail subcommittee. He said he appreciates the members taking their time and the initiative and for being willing to help the County. This issue has been dragging on for far too long. The Commission Board does need to get something done along with being fiscally responsible and that is a tough task for all involved. Commissioner Wester said this is a serious situation and the steps need to be taken to get something done.



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D. Sewer Project – Mrs. Thomas gave an update on the sewer project that has been worked on for many years. The sewer project is a strategic step and a key component of the County's infrastructure. Several years back Franklin County secured funding and grants through USDA and ARC and set aside funds for capital improvement in SPLOST and excess funds. Mrs. Thomas said this project consists of two contracts, the plant work and the pipe work. The bids were received in August with everyone being hopeful for this project to begin. The pricing for the pipe work came in great with bids from two local contractors. The plant work only had one bidder at 9.1 million dollars which was more than double the projections and was a major setback. Mrs. Thomas said USDA allowed the County to work with the sole bidder to get the project value engineered with plan modifications. She said there was extensive work between the County, engineers and USDA and now has reached a point where the project can move forward. The cost has come down from 9.1 million dollars to 5.6 million dollars and now is a viable project again.

Mrs. Thomas said the treatment technology will remain the same. The plant will be moved further back on the property line but is still within all EPD regulations. It will also still be within County property and will remove the water table concerns. The plant will be built to a proposed capacity of .3. The previous plans were for extra room to be built now for future development. What will be built now is only what will be needed but the sewer project design is for future improvements as they become necessary. Mrs. Thomas said one pond will remain for sludge that treated water will go into. This will be the smaller of the two ponds.

Due to the increased price additional funding will need to be contributed to the project. Mrs. Thomas said the capital infusion necessary for this is available. In the event of cost overruns the remainder will come from SPLOST V. The action needed from the Commission Board tonight is to approve the resolutions to accept the contracts as they are due by November 6. Mrs. Thomas said one resolution is for the plant work at a cost of \$5,600,000 from the Harper Corporation and the other resolution is for the pipe work at a cost of \$389,353.44 from Arrowood General Contracting. After the contract approval from the Commission Board they will then be sent to USDA for approval. The next step after all approvals will be for the Commissioners to approve the appropriate bond resolutions relating to the USDA loan and interim financing through Northeast Georgia Bank. These will be presented at a later time after all approvals and documents from counsel are received.

Chairman Bridges asked for a motion to approve the two resolutions presented by Mrs. Thomas for the plant work from Harper Corporation and the pipe work from Arrowood General Contracting. Dr. Macomson made the motion to accept both resolutions. Chairman Bridges asked for a second. Commissioner Franklin seconded the motion. Chairman Bridges said this is good news for Franklin County. He expressed appreciation to John Phillips for his engineering work and to Mrs. Thomas for her work on this project. Chairman Bridges asked for a show of hands. The motion passed by four (4) **YES** votes to zero (0) **NO** votes. The YES votes were Chairman



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Bridges, Commissioner Wester, Commissioner Franklin and Dr. Macomson. Commissioner Jacques was absent from the meeting.

*E. **Manager's Report** – Mrs. Thomas said she recently attended a FEMA class on contracting. Franklin County has had two major events within the last three years, the ice storm and Hurricane Irma. In both of these situations the County staff and the volunteers did a phenomenal job for the initial cleanup. For the aftermath cleanup the County has a Road crew of nine employees. These employees are clearing 600 square miles of the County and they do regular maintenance to the roads. Because of the routine tasks the Road crew can only designate one to two days per week for cleanup. Mrs. Thomas said if the County has a Debris Removal contract in place ahead of these events, then a phone call could be made to a company to come and perform the cleanup and the County would still be eligible for the FEMA grants. Mrs. Thomas said unless the Commission Board has objections or a reason to halt she will bid out this process for a debris removal company to be in place in case it is needed.*

The Elections Superintendent Gina Chappelle notified Mrs. Thomas of the fees for qualifying that need to be in place for the upcoming election. Mrs. Thomas said this will need to be advertised in February. She will give information to the Commissioners on qualifying fees at 3%, 4% and 5% for consideration. This can be discussed at either the November or December meeting.

Mrs. Thomas said the board and committee appointments are being advertised. She said the County Clerk has sent letters to each of the Board Chairman letting them know that the expiring positions will be advertised for appointments. Mrs. Thomas said at the November regular board meeting she will present the names for appointment to the DFACS and Library Boards. Only two applications have been received for these boards – one person for each board. The other appointments can be made either in December or January. All interested citizens are encouraged to apply for any of these board appointments.

Last month an employee recognition program was discussed. Mrs. Thomas said the County Clerk helped gather information from other counties and cities about employee recognition. A resolution was given to the Commissioners that Mrs. Thomas asked be considered to recognize employees for their years of service. She said this would recognize each full time employee with continuous service, one who doesn't leave that shows commitment to the County. The program would be broken into five year increments for recognition. Mrs. Thomas would like to give a resolution for years of service and give a monetary award to these employees. To implement the program with the monetary award would be \$11,000 to \$12,000 for the first year because of catchup with about \$2,500 per year thereafter. Mrs. Thomas said the budget should be able to handle this as the insurance premium tax money came in higher than projected.

Mrs. Thomas said there are 89 people who would be recognized if the Commission Board approves implementing this program. There are 34 employees who have been with the County over 10 years, 18 employees for more than 15, 4 employees



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for over 20 years and 3 employees for over 25 years. Mrs. Thomas said there are a lot of long tenured employees and this would be a step to acknowledge them. She said November would be a great time to do this as it is the month for giving thanks. The resolution would need approval before moving forward. This could be done at the November work session or could be done at the Christmas luncheon in December. Chairman Bridges said the Commission Board will need to decide the time table. Mrs. Thomas said if the Board approved this on November 6 it could be implemented in November. If this was done in November it would be separate from the Christmas gift in December. She said she would like for the employees to be recognized at the November work session. Chairman Bridges asked the Commission Board to look this over and see if this can be implemented. Mrs. Thomas said she has already calculated the impact to the department budgets. She said there will be two things that will need to be approved, the start of the program and a budget modification.

Last year it was decided to have the planning meeting in January instead of December. Mrs. Thomas recommended to the Commission Board that the planning session be held again in January. She said the month of December is rushed and January holds a fresh start. Mrs. Thomas asked the Commissioners to please look at their calendars for possible dates. She also asked that the topics for discussion be considered. The mission and vision for Franklin County is something that Mrs. Thomas said needs to be clear to make the decisions easier for the Commission Board. Input from the citizens for the mission and vision would be needed. Mrs. Thomas said she would like to use Survey Monkey to gather information between now and the planning session. She said if the Commissioners are interested in this to please give her what they would like included in the questions.

F. Announcements

Chairman Bridges announced the regular board meeting for November 6 and the work session for November 28. There were no other announcements. Chairman Bridges adjourned the meeting at 6:50 p.m.



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Signed on the _____ day of _____, 2017

Chairman J. Thomas Bridges

Robert L. Franklin, District 1 Commissioner

Dr. Jason Macomson, District 2 Commissioner

Jeff Jacques, District 3 Commissioner

Eddie Wester, District 4 Commissioner

Elaine H. Evans, County Clerk