

**FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION
SEPTEMBER 30, 2014
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 Clint Harper

Media: Kandice Eberhardt, Franklin County Citizen
Denise Matthews, Franklin County Citizen
MJ Kneiser, WLHR

Staff: County Manager John Phillips
County Clerk Elaine Evans

Item 1 & 2: Chairman Bridges called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. He then asked Commissioner Strickland 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. There was no public comment.

B. Short Term Work Program – Chairman Bridges asked County Manager John Phillips to explain the short term work program. Mr. Phillips said that it is time to update the Franklin County Joint Comprehensive Plan. This update takes place every five years. The only requirement at this time for Franklin County is to update the short term work program. Items that are listed on the short term work program are eligible for both federal and state grants. Mr. Phillips presented a list of short term work program items. He then asked that this be considered for approval at the regular October board meeting.

Chairman Bridges asked Mr. Phillips to name the projects listed on the short term work program. The projects are continued expansion of the county wide water system; development of a waste water treatment plant to serve the I-85 corridor; expand planning department to include inspections and enforcement of zoning regulations; locate and purchase property for recreation centers; continuation of transportation improvement projects for roads and bridges; promote use of conservation development design in rural areas and encourage higher development in or around the cities; continue development of a fire fighter training center; construct a government office building on county property near the Justice Center; replace obsolete firefighting equipment; expand and upgrade industrial parks; jail expansion; and improvements to radio communication system. Mr. Phillips said that the approval of the short term work program by the Commission Board aids in the approval process for grant funding for County projects.

Chairman Bridges asked the Commission Board to review the plan. He said that at any time the plan can be modified. Mr. Phillips noted that the plan is not binding, that it can be changed. Commissioner Strickland said that every project on the list seems to be necessary. He also asked if the natural gas expansion could be

added to this. Chairman Bridges asked Mr. Phillips to add natural gas expansion as part of this plan. Mr. Phillips said that he would add it. There was no further discussion.

C. Employee Handbook – Chairman Bridges asked County Clerk Elaine Evans to give an update on the employee handbook. He said that the old employee handbook has been in place for some time and that an update is necessary. Mrs. Evans said that the handbook update has been ongoing since October 2013. The draft handbook has been sent out to department heads and constitutional officers. There has been some feedback. Changes and updates have been completed as recommended by department heads and constitutional officers. The handbook has been reviewed by staff members. Commissioner Strickland said the initial update was done by Georgia Mountains Regional Commission. Mrs. Evans said that this was correct. It was then sent out to department heads and constitutional officers. It was also reviewed by staff to make sure that it was specific to Franklin County policies. Chairman Bridges said that this was discussed last month but was not voted on because some of the constitutional officers said that they had not had a chance to review it. He then said to be prepared to vote on this at the regular board meeting. Commissioner Jacques asked what would actually be voted on – is it for adoption of the handbook or is it still a work in progress. Mrs. Evans stated that it is ready to be adopted. Chairman Bridges said that action needed to be taken on the handbook and for the Commission Board to be ready to vote at the October regular board meeting.

D. Commissioners Health Insurance – Chairman Bridges said that commissioners health insurance had been delayed for feedback from the public. He then asked for comments from the Commission Board. Commissioner Jacques said that the last time this was discussed that he had three people approach him and ask him to vote against the commissioners receiving health insurance. He said that since that time he has had a significant number of people contact him and ask to oppose the passage of the commissioners receiving health insurance. Commissioner Jacques stated that it is against County policy and the County Handbook for part time employees to receive this benefit. He also said that the Georgia State Legislation which created the Commission Board specifically defines the Commission Board as part time. It is a violation of the County policy to allow the health benefit to be given to the commissioners. Commissioner Harper agreed with Commissioner Jacques. He said that he has only heard opposition to giving insurance to the Commission Board. He also questioned would the only part time employees allowed on the County insurance be the Commission Board. Commissioner Harper asked why not allow the insurance to be given to the other part time employees of the County.

Commissioner Jacques said that at the last meeting it was stated that the Affordable Healthcare Act is the basis for offering part time employees insurance. He said if that is the case why not offer health insurance to all part time County employees. Commissioner Strickland said that the correct wording is part time salaried employees and that the commissioners are the only part time salaried employees of the County. He said that the salaried status is what makes the commissioners eligible for the health insurance. Commissioner Jacques said that offering health insurance to commissioners is a perk and that he stands against it. Commissioner Strickland said that one commissioner is still on the health insurance. Commissioner Harper then said that if they brought the vote up tonight that he would vote against commissioners being on the County health insurance plan. Commissioner Jacques said that previously the Commission Board voted for the commissioners to go off the County health insurance as their terms in office ended. Commissioner Franklin said that he is an elected official. He does not consider himself a County employee. The people of Franklin County put him in office. Chairman Bridges asked the Commission Board to continue taking input from the citizens and this will be voted on at the regular board meeting in October.

E. Atkinson Bridge Road – Chairman Bridges asked Commissioner Jacques to discuss the request for Atkinson Bridge Road. Commissioner Jacques said that Atkinson Bridge Road is currently a gravel road that connects Harrison Bridge Road to State Route 51/State Route 145. The bridge on Atkinson Bridge Road will only accommodate one vehicle at a time. This is high volume county road which is

used as a cut through road to a state route. Commissioner Jacques said that his proposal is that from Atkinson Bridge Road from State Route 51/State Route 145 to a point 900 to 1,000 feet back from the bridge structure that the County put an application of double surface treatment. This is less costly than asphalt and will bring the substandard dirt road up to acceptable standards. This treatment will eliminate some of the maintenance on this road as well as enhance the safety. He would also like to see a slight widening of the road. Moving forward with this project will be contingent on the easements from the residents of the road and the availability of funds.

County Manager John Phillips asked if the residents of Atkinson Bridge Road would be interested in water. Several of the residents said that they would be interested in getting County water. Commissioner Jacques said that if the residents would be interested in connecting to County water that the easiest thing would be to get the right of way from the residents at one time. Chairman Bridges asked if anyone had any more questions. One of the residents of Atkinson Bridge Road asked if natural gas could be run on their road. Chairman Bridges said that it would be possible. Commissioner Jacques said that the gas is provided by the City of Royston. There was no further discussion.

F. Benton Drive - Chairman Bridges asked Commissioner Jacques to explain the request for Benton Drive. Commissioner Jacques said that he received a call from Mr. Rodney Hill. Mr. Hill is a resident of Benton Drive which is located off of Hwy 17 near Canon. Benton Drive is approximately 800 linear feet. This road is a private road which has never been maintained by the County. The residents are requesting maintenance of Benton Drive from ditch to ditch. Commissioner Jacques said that he had explained to Mr. Hill that everyone on the road will have to sign an easement before the County can perform any work. Commissioner Strickland asked if the City of Canon could work this road. Commissioner Jacques said that Mr. Hill had already asked the City of Canon for maintenance and was advised that he lives on a county road. Chairman Bridges asked if there was further discussion about Benton Drive. There was none.

G. Proposed Purchasing Ordinance – Chairman Bridges asked County Manager John Phillips to explain the proposed purchasing ordinance. Mr. Phillips said that the draft purchasing ordinance was developed by ACCG. The changes that have been made to the ordinance reflect the relevance to Franklin County. He also said that this was recently received and it has not been reviewed by department heads or constitutional officers. Department heads and constitutional officers need to review and give their input before formal approval of the ordinance. Chairman Bridges said that this is the starting point and asked that comments and concerns be addressed with Mr. Phillips. There was no further discussion.

H. Jail Expansion – Chairman Bridges said that the jail expansion is needed for Franklin County because of the housing issue. He also said that the funding for this project needs to be explored so that the County is not placed in a financial bind. He then asked for comments from the Commission Board and public. Mr. Phillips discussed the previous ways that have been looked at for funding the jail expansion. The previous ways looked at for funding the jail expansion are placing the jail expansion on a future SPLOST; using jail fund and previous SPLOST funds; issuing bonds and borrowing from a local bank. There is approximately \$870,000 available at this time. Grant funds are not available for jail expansions. Mr. Phillips does not recommend issuing bonds because the cost for issuing the bonds is \$110,500; this is in addition to the loan payment amount. The loan period for the local banks is ten years and the interest rate is higher than the bond option.

Mr. Phillips also said that one of the options looked at for the jail expansion was to use County employees to perform part of the work. It was also looked at to build the shell of the structure but only complete part of the work at this time. The architect did not recommend building part of the structure then completing the rest later – he did not see this as cost effective. Commissioner Jacques said that one option would be for the County to self-fund and pay ourselves back for the amounts used to pay for the jail expansion. Chairman Bridges said that one option to raise funds for the jail expansion would be to up the millage rate. He is not in

favor of this. He would like for the jail expansion to be placed on the next SLOST.

Beth Thomas what the ongoing costs would be for a new jail, also if technology and security is included in that number. Commissioner Jacques said that the information provided to the Commission Board is that this jail would be constructed using the latest technology available. The features of the new jail should be that they are able to use a lower number of staff because of the advanced technology. He also said that there are construction costs and the level of staffing to be considered. The additional costs to run a new jail will be a minimum of \$200,000 per year. Ms. Thomas said that she is not opposed to a new jail but that at this time she does not know if the County is financially ready to build the new jail.

Commissioner Strickland said that he would prefer to fund the jail by SPLOST because this way all taxpayers would help with the funding and not just the property owners. Commissioner Jacques said that he does not think that the County can afford to build the jail unless SPLOST is used to finance it. He said that he does see the need for a new jail and he supports the need but that the County is not financially able at this time.

Captain Gary Smith said that the jail is open 24 hours a day; seven days a week; 365 days per year. No funding has ever been set aside to maintain the jail. The money in the jail construction has had to be used on upkeep at the current jail because nothing has ever been set aside for this. He also said that there was not a plan for upkeep at the jail and that the County is still not planning for upkeep or a new jail. Captain Smith said that the longer the jail expansion is put off the more it will cost.

Sheriff Stevie Thomas said that he understands the issue of money but they are running out of room. Inmate housing costs are going up because there is not enough room to safely house everyone. He is disappointed that the jail was not funded properly on the last SPLOST but does hope that in the 2016 SPLOST jail construction will be added and funded. Sherriff Thomas said that his priority is for the safety of the citizens of Franklin County. Chairman Bridges said that planning is the key and that he wants everyone to work together with funding ideas for the jail expansion.

Ms. Beth Thomas questioned if the available funds were used to renovate the existing jail how long would it be before a new jail would need to be built. Sheriff Thomas said that this would create a problem because there would be no place for the inmates to stay during the renovation. Commissioner Jacques said that capacity is a problem. Ms. Thomas said that the inmates could be housed in other facilities while the renovation was ongoing. She also said that this cost would need to be factored into the renovation costs.

Commissioner Harper asked would the jail expansion include a work release program. Sheriff Thomas said that several years ago he asked for a work release center. The work release center would be for inmates who were let out during the day to work a job and come back to the work release center at night. These would have been ordered by a judge and would also only be for if anyone had a job. Captain Smith said that work release has actually been done in the current jail. When it is ordered by a judge the inmate works during the day and comes back to the jail at night to sleep.

Commissioner Jacques asked how long it would take it to build two pods; not the whole structure; only the two pods. Sheriff Thomas said that he did not think there was enough room to add two pods. Commissioner Jacques said that if two pods were built now that it would cut the construction costs in half. He also said that it would take care of the housing expenses as well as the safety issue. Sheriff Thomas said that it should help for at least five years. Commissioner Strickland said that he thinks that this is a workable solution. This way the County would only need to borrow \$500,000 to build the jail. He also said that he thought that the County should go ahead with putting the jail on the next SPLOST.

Chairman Bridges said that he is in favor of using the available funds to go ahead and get the jail moving forward. Commissioner Strickland said that he is in agreement, that this is a good option. Commissioner Jacques said that some of the costs would be saved because of it being a lesser project. Costs could also be saved because some of the work could be done by County employees. Commissioner Franklin asked how long it would take to build this. Sheriff Thomas said that it would take twelve to eighteen months. Commissioner Jacques said that a design build would be the quickest solution to this problem.

Chairman Bridges asked if there were any other comments or concerns. There was no further discussion. The meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Signed on the _____ day of _____, 2014

Chairman J. Thomas Bridges

Robert L. Franklin, District 1 Commissioner

David R. Strickland, District 2 Commissioner

Jeff Jacques, District 3 Commissioner

Clint Harper, District 4 Commissioner

Elaine H. Evans, County Clerk

