

**FRANKLIN COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
WORK SESSION MINUTES  
December 22, 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 work session to order and welcomed everyone. He asked everyone to stand and led the invocation and pledge of allegiance to the American flag.

**Item 3: *Items for discussion:***

**A. Public Comment** – Chairman Bridges said the first item for discussion is public comment. There was no one who wished to make a public comment.

**B. Dixie Lane – Rance Roberts** – Chairman Bridges recognized Rance Roberts to speak about Dixie Lane. Mr. Roberts said that previously Dixie Lane was a County road. A few years back it was changed from a County road to a private road. He said that four families live on this road. It is in bad shape and needs work. Mr. Roberts said that the families who live on Dixie Lane would like for the road to be a County road again. Chairman Bridges said that the information which was provided by County Engineer John Phillips has been given to each Commissioner concerning Dixie Lane. He asked each Commissioner to study this information for action at the regular board meeting in January.

Commissioner Franklin asked if there was room at the end of the road for a motor grader to turn around. Mr. Roberts said yes, that there was room. Commissioner Strickland asked Mr. Roberts if he knew when Dixie Lane became a private road instead of a County road. Mr. Roberts said that he did not know when that the residents were not notified. Commissioner Strickland asked if Mr. Roberts could recall when work stopped on the road. Mr. Roberts said that could not recall what year but he knew that it was when Mr. Ginn was county manager. He said that the first time he realized that

Dixie Lane was not a County road was when he asked for a road sign to be placed. He said that it used to be a County road which went all the way through to Baty Road. Chairman Bridges thanked Mr. Roberts for bringing this to the attention of the Commission Board. Commissioner Strickland asked if the length of the road is less than a mile. Mr. Roberts said that he thinks it is less than a mile.

Commissioner Jacques said that he was sure this has been researched by John Phillips. He asked if the findings from Mr. Phillips are available. If this road was ever part of the County system there would have been advertisements as well as a formal recommendation and vote by the Board. County Manager Beth Thomas answered that this is correct. She said that a lot of roads that are no longer worked had temporary easements that have expired. The temporary easement allowed the road to be worked without being formally adopted. A temporary easement is also for a set period of time. Once the set period of time expires then the road is no longer worked. Mrs. Thomas said that she is not speaking for Mr. Phillips but she is fairly certain that this was a road with a temporary easement that has now expired. Once the easement expires the County no longer has a legal right to be on the property and work the road.

Mrs. Thomas said that at this time all the property owners on Dixie Lane have granted permanent easements. She said that the County is experiencing a lot of the temporary easements expiring. Commissioner Jacques said the temporary easements were initiated after the Board at that time received the proper deeds with a time frame of one year giving the property owners time to do the appropriate surveys and deed preparation and signings. Temporary easements were never meant to be long term, they were only meant to give time for the proper paperwork to be completed. Mrs. Thomas asked the Commission Board to give her their questions regarding Dixie Lane and she would provide answers before the January regular board meeting. She noted that some of the older easements had longer time frames than a one year period.

**C. Chestatee Chattahoochee RC&D – Frank Riley** – Chairman Bridges asked Frank Riley to come forward to speak about the Chestatee Chattahoochee RC&D. Mr. Riley said that thirteen counties are in the Chestatee Chattahoochee area, which includes Franklin County. Some of the current programs of ChestChatt are seasonal high tunnels; NRCS field days; Georgia Firewise Liaison; and Fire Adapted Communities. The seasonal high tunnel is a greenhouse designed for small fruit, flower and vegetable growers who want to extend the growing season. The goal of ChestChatt is to get more people growing stuff in their homes. Mr. Riley said that ChestChatt will donate one seasonal high tunnel to each of its thirteen counties. This will be funded by a grant from the State of Georgia. These seasonal high tunnels are also for sale to anyone. ChestChatt has a program where FFA; 4H; Young Farmers and other organizations can earn money for helping market and install the seasonal high tunnels.

Mr. Riley said that 12 NRCS field day events will be held over the next three years in North Georgia. The field days will include forestry; soil health; alternative/organic farming; high tunnels; row crops; pasture management; agritourism; small farm conferences; and other related topics. He said at these events the subject

will be talked about in the morning and viewed in the afternoons. Mr. Riley said that the purpose of these events is to help the citizens improve farming and gardening skills along with other natural resources practices. These events will be held across North Georgia to be in easy reach of most Georgia citizens.

Mr. Riley said that the Georgia Firewise Liaison is a national Firewise program throughout Georgia for people who live in wildfire prone areas or anyone who is concerned about risk of fire on their property. He said that the important things are to keep the leaves away from the house and off the roof of the house. He said that this is an educational program for the public. A pilot program was started in Towns County which cut the wildfire costs by 75%. In 2014 Union County had 11 fires and Towns County had one fire. This is a successful program educational program for the public. There are 83 certified firewise communities in the State of Georgia. It is a small process to become a certified community. After the certified community status, renewal has to take place each year. After becoming a firewise certified community a grant for up to \$5,000 may be applied. This grant is applied for through the Chestae Chattahoochee RC&D. Mr. Riley said that firewise education for farmers is extremely important.

Mr. Riley said that in 2013 Chest/Chatt was chosen to develop one of the eight national pilot Fire Adapted Communities and it is the only one in the East. The pilot program was started in Towns County with a purpose to build a fire education and prevention program and when developed to spread the FAC concept across the Southeast. He said that Franklin County can become a Fire Adapted Community. This would mean that training would be given to Franklin County on what to do if a fire came through. Another FAC program has been started in White County. The Fire Adapted Communities concept includes Firewise; Ready Set Go; fuels mitigation; wildfire education; forest management; evacuation; and many other things to help a community be able to survive a wildfire.

The US Forest Service Regional forester asked Chest/Chatt to spread the FAC concept up the Appalachian Mountains from Towns County to the State of Virginia to help reduce the risk of wildfires. Chest/Chatt is working together with three RC&D's in the State of North Carolina and one in the State of Virginia.

A grant is being administered by Chest/Chatt for agriculture in White County in the Town of Testnatee watershed. This will assist landowners with projects that improve water quality and stream erosion. Mr. Riley said that office space in the Chest/Chatt building in the City of Demorest has been rented to the Disability Resource Center.

Chest/Chatt is under contract with UGA for collecting field data for REAP energy audits with poultry growers. The REAP program is administered by USDA Rural Development and allows producers to receive 25% cost sharing funds to improve energy in poultry houses. An agreement with the Southwestern RC&D allows Chest/Chatt to perform REAP audits in Western North Carolina. This will allow farmers to apply for cost share assistance with USDA for energy saving projects.

Mr. Riley said that USDA Forest Service/NRCS Joint Lands Restoration Proposal is a grant project around the Chattahoochee and Sumter National forests in Northern Georgia and Northern South Carolina. The proposal is to help Forestry agencies reduce the wildfire risks in the Wildland Urban Interface and develop Fire Adapted Communities in the area. A Cooperative Agreement between GACDS and Chest/Chatt RC&D Council will share an employee. This employee will help administer programs and grants.

Woody Woodyard asked Mr. Riley if there is a program to help in providing individuals with fire extinguishers. Mr. Riley said that the communities can apply for a grant to provide them to individuals.

Commissioner Wester asked Mr. Riley if any of the local HBA's or the State Home Builders Association is involved with the Firewise program. Mr. Riley said that they need to talk to the Home Builders Association. He said that he has talked with real estate people and sometimes he gets a negative reaction because they do not want potential customers to know of fire dangers in the neighborhood. Mr. Riley said that Home Builders and Home Owners Associations are who needs to be talked to. Commissioner Wester asked Mr. Riley if this is similar to the land protection act in California that they are trying to take across the nation. Mr. Riley said that this is the same type of thing. Chairman Bridges thanked Mr. Riley for coming to present this information to the Commission Board.

#### **D. Board position update**

1. Tri County Development – Chairman Bridges asked Mrs. Thomas to give an update on the open position on the Tri County Development Board. Mrs. Thomas said that three highly qualified people have turned in the board appointment questionnaire. The three applicants are Paul Crawford, Tracy Dilworth and Brian James. She asked the Commission Board to review the applicants for possible appointment in January. The open position is due to the resignation of Cary Bennett. Commissioner Strickland asked if these people will be contacted for interviews or what the process will be. He said that each of these people is highly qualified. Mrs. Thomas said that there is not a specific procedure or policy on appointing boards. She said that this is a tri county board, not just a Franklin County board position.

Mrs. Thomas stated that she does not know of any restrictions in contacting the applicants but to make it fair and equal to everyone. Commissioner Strickland said that he was asking because of the three applicants instead of one. Commissioner Jacques said that this is a rarity and he is thankful for the applicants. Commissioner Strickland said it was nice to have people interested. Commissioner Jacques said that he agreed with Commissioner Strickland that some format needs to be in place for board appointments. Commissioner Strickland said that his concern was how to determine when there are three qualified applicants. Mrs. Thomas said that the questionnaire needs to go into a little more detail. She said that she will work on expanding the questionnaire to include if the applicant would be interested in serving on other boards as openings occur.

Mrs. Thomas said that in appointing board members she would recommend subcommittees versus a formal interview process because of meeting requirements. She said that the vote for this position does not have to occur in January. The vote can occur after the appointment procedure is clarified after everyone has a chance for input. Chairman Bridges said that is a good recommendation.

**E. SPLOST Financing – Jim Pannell** – Chairman Bridges asked Jim Pannell to come forward and make his presentation on the SPLOST Financing. Mr. Pannell said that the voters of Franklin County approved two bond questions on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. One was in regards to the general obligation bond for the hospital and the other was for the renewal of the SPLOST tax for a six year period. The intergovernmental agreements were entered into between the cities in Franklin County and Franklin County. The approval of the SPLOST authorized the issuance of 14 million dollars of sales tax bonds for approved projects.

Mr. Pannell stated that the resolution to be executed tonight is for \$3,135,000 of the 14 million in order to provide money for the County as well as to provide \$250,000 for the City of Carnesville for approved projects. The bonds were validated by an order of the Superior Court on December 15, 2015. Mr. Pannell and County Attorney Bubba Samuels drafted the validation documents to confirm the issue of the bonds. The resolution adoption is the last validation piece. Upon passage of the resolution the documents will need to be signed by the Commission Chairman, Clerk of Superior Clerk and County Clerk.

Northeast Georgia Bank has agreed to buy the bond at a rate of 1.99%. With the approval of the resolution the bond is scheduled to be issued on December 29<sup>th</sup> of this year. Commissioner Strickland asked when the first payment would be due. He asked if this money was to pay for the hospital. Mrs. Thomas stated no that the financing for the hospital will be done next calendar year. Mr. Pannell said that this money is being borrowed on the front end of the SPLOST. A debt service schedule is also included in the resolution. At closing \$63,000 will be set aside to pay interest until the cash flow starts. The first payment with out of pocket funds will be July 2017.

Mr. Pannell said that two motions will be needed to execute the resolution. Chairman Bridges asked for discussion before moving forward. Commissioner Jacques said that this was a very good presentation. He asked if Bubba Samuels had looked at this. Mrs. Thomas said that Mr. Samuels has been involved in the whole process along with Mr. Pannell and Andrew Tritt. Mr. Pannell said that this is the third draft of the bond resolution. Comments and reviews were made by Mr. Samuels and Mr. Tritt.

Chairman Bridges asked Mrs. Thomas if it was her recommendation to move forward and approve. Mrs. Thomas stated yes. Chairman Bridges said that the first motion is for the bond resolution. Commissioner Strickland made the motion to accept the bond resolution as presented. Commissioner Jacques seconded the motion. There was no discussion. Chairman Bridges asked for a show of hands. The motion passed by five (5) YES votes to zero (0) NO votes. The YES votes were Commissioner

Franklin; Commissioner Strickland; Chairman Bridges; Commissioner Jacques; and Commissioner Wester.

Chairman Bridges asked for a motion to move forward with the bond contract with the City of Carnesville. Commissioner Jacques made the motion to move forward. Commissioner Strickland seconded the motion. Chairman Bridges asked for discussion. Commissioner Strickland asked why there was money going to the City of Carnesville and nothing to the other cities. Mrs. Thomas and Commissioner Jacques stated that the City of Carnesville was the only city that wanted to participate. There was no further discussion. Chairman Bridges asked for a show of hands. The motion passed by five (5) YES votes to zero (0) NO votes. The YES votes were Commissioner Wester; Commissioner Jacques; Chairman Bridges; Commissioner Strickland; and Commissioner Franklin.

Mrs. Thomas asked that the Commission Board allow Chairman Bridges to sign the documents before going into executive session.

**F. Executive Session – Personnel** – Chairman Bridges asked for a motion to break to sign the bond documents before going into executive session. Commissioner Jacques made the motion to break and then go into executive session for the purpose of discussing personnel. Commissioner Strickland seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The YES votes were Chairman Bridges; Commissioner Franklin; Commissioner Strickland; Commissioner Jacques; and Commissioner Wester. The break to sign the documents began at 6:50 p.m. and ended at 7:05 p.m. The executive session began at 7:05 p.m.

Chairman Bridges asked for a motion to close executive session and go back into regular session. Commissioner Jacques made the motion to come out of executive session and go back into regular session and also for the Chairman to sign the closed meeting affidavit where personnel was discussed. Commissioner Strickland seconded the motion. Chairman Bridges asked for a show of hands. The motion passed by five (5) YES votes to zero (0) NO votes. The YES votes were Commissioner Franklin; Commissioner Strickland; Chairman Bridges; Commissioner Jacques; and Commissioner Wester. Regular session resumed at 8:00 p.m. There was no further discussion. The meeting adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Signed on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2016

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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