



**FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION MINUTES
May 30, 2017
6:00 P.M.**

BOC: Commission Chairman Thomas Bridges
District 1 Commissioner Robert Franklin
District 2 Commissioner Dr. Jason Macomson
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: Call meeting to order – Chairman Bridges called the work session to order and thanked everyone for taking their time to attend.

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 would like to speak in public comment. There was no one who wished to speak.

B. Chestatee Chattahoochee RC&D – Chairman Bridges asked Frank Riley with the Chestatee Chattahoochee RC&D to come forward and give his presentation. Mr. Riley thanked the Commission Board for the opportunity to come and give the yearly update. He presented a brochure to the Commission Board giving information on the services available from the RC&D.

Mr. Riley also gave information on the Firewise Program that the RC&D administers for the State of Georgia and part of the Southeast. He said that this is a program that has been in place for about five years with involvement from the local governments, fire departments, EMS and the citizens of the counties. Mr. Riley said that the goal of this program is to make the citizens safer through education of fire prevention.



Mr. Riley said that it is easy to protect your home from fire. He said to do as our grandparents did, sweep around the house, keep leaves away from the house and off of the roof. Mr. Riley said that a firewise program can be done for the citizens of Franklin County at no cost to the County. He said that by educating the people that fire calls can be cut down on. The firewise program has been so successful that the RC&D was asked to take the program from Towns County to Virginia. He said that the money was given to the RC&D's in North Carolina and Virginia to implement the program. The next targeted area will be Tennessee. The fire in Gatlinburg was a classic example of embers hitting debris around homes and igniting fires.

Another service offered by the RC&D is an NRCS soil grant. Mr. Riley said that this grant is for any kind of soil related project. He said that this can be sponsored for anyone in the County. Seasonal high tunnels were also built and given to each county in the district. The one for Franklin County was built at the college. Mr. Riley said that the RC&D is to encourage conservation of resources.

C. FY18 Budget Presentations and Discussion – Chairman Bridges said that the next item for discussion is the FY18 budget. He asked Mrs. Thomas to further explain this item. Mrs. Thomas asked Dr. Pam Stone to come forward to speak about the Animal Shelter.

Dr. Stone gave the Commission Board statistics for the **Animal Shelter** for the past several years. She said that the Animal Shelter was started in 1998 with Franklin County and Hart County. The two counties were not able to maintain the Animal Shelter financially so the cities began to help. Dr. Stone said that the Animal Shelter was on the verge on closing in 2010. At that time the board members for the Animal Shelter had a meeting with the jurisdictions and came up with a funding plan. The funding plan is cost share based on usage. She said that this is then tied to \$160,000 the base line budget. Dr. Stone said that this formula has not changed in seven years although the cost for running the Animal Shelter has gone up to over \$200,000 each year. To keep from asking for increases from the jurisdictions, fund raisers and grant opportunities are explored.

Information was presented on the number of animals brought in each year from each jurisdiction. Dr. Stone said each time an animal is brought to the Animal Shelter that driver's license and actual address is checked to determine which city or county to assign the animal to.

Dr. Stone requested a contribution of \$71,520 from Franklin County to be paid in quarterly installments. She said that for the last couple of years Franklin County has paid a little below what was asked for. Dr. Stone asked that in fairness to the other jurisdictions that Franklin County pay the requested amount for FY18. She said that the Animal Shelter provides a much needed service to the citizens of the County at a much less expense than comparable shelters in the area. Chairman Bridges commended Dr. Stone on the clear information she presented.

Judge Ken Eavenson spoke next on the budget for Probate Court. He gave



the Commission Board the budget information that was submitted to Mrs. Thomas. Judge Eavenson made the Commission Board aware of some proposed changes to be made in Probate Court and Magistrate Court. He said that the issue for Probate Court is caseload. In 2013 and 2014 there were 4,000 citations. This year the citations should reach 7,000 with an expectation of 8,000 for next year.

According to Judge Eavenson the number of cases is a problem for Probate Court. In 2013 and 2014 there were 3,000 plus cases. And last year there were over 6,000 cases. He said that his office does more work than Hart County, Elbert County and Madison County combined with only three clerks. Judge Eavenson said that at this time he is not asking for additional personnel but in the future this may be something that has to be addressed.

Judge Eavenson said that he is trying everything possible to keep from adding personnel. This coming year he and the Magistrate Judge are planning to use their employees together. The Magistrate Judge has agreed for one of his clerks to help with the phones and the check in of people on court days which will allow the Probate office to stay open. Judge Eavenson said that on court days the parking lot is full from the Justice Center to the 911 Center. He said that his office and the Magistrate office are working together to keep from going to more court dates to contain costs of having to pay a prosecutor, public defender, interrupter and court reporter.

Included in the Probate Court is a small amount of overtime for the clerks because Judge Eavenson said at times overtime is unavoidable. He also included an additional \$1,584 for judicial support for the Assistant Magistrate Judge. Judge Eavenson said that for the last two years the Assistant Magistrate Judge, Freddy Pulliam has helped him on Fridays to take pleas. He said that he would not be able to handle over 120 DUI's and possession and suspended license cases without some help.

Judge Eavenson said that an additional expense is the appointment of an administrator for indigent cases. He said that in the past the Clerk of Court was appointed the administrator for these cases. Judge Eavenson said that the Clerk of Court already has enough to do without having this added. He said that Robin Cato, an attorney in the County was appointed to this position. This is done on a commission basis. Judge Eavenson said that most of the cases that Ms. Cato does is done pro bono. He said that at some point additional funds may be needed for the indigent cases.

Sheriff Steve Thomas spoke next. *He said that the price for law enforcement has gone up as the calls go up each year. Sheriff Thomas said that his office has trained at least three officers who have left for better paying jobs. He said that his office tries to stay within budget but calls, inmate housing, and transports have all increased. When officers are on transport additional officers have to be called in for the safety of the citizens of the County.*

In the past Sheriff Thomas said that his budget has been cut. He said that this year he and Chief Deputy Investigator Jimmy LeCroy met with Mrs. Thomas and asked that the amount requested for next year be approved. Sheriff Thomas said that



when his budget is cut that it puts his office deeper in the hole. He said that he appreciated everything that the Commission Board does to help.

Mrs. Thomas said that the FY18 public hearing for June 5 has been advertised in the Franklin County Citizen Leader. The budget is on file for review in the office of the County Clerk. She expressed to the Commission Board that she is open to an additional work session for the budget if there are questions or concerns about the budget requests. Mrs. Thomas said that as it stands now the budget is coming in at zero. She said that there was a \$10,000 error in the revenue calculation but this still leaves about a \$10,000 buffer. Mrs. Thomas said that the \$800,000 for the Sheriff and any requests received after the budget was advertised have not been included in the budget. She said that decisions will have to be made as to what gets approved and what does not. The vote to approve the budget for FY18 is needed at the June 27 Work Session to become effective July 1.

Commissioner Jacques addressed the request for the Sheriff's budget. He said that a lot of the proposed spending appears that it could be paid for with SPLOST and this brings the numbers down. Mrs. Thomas said that she would recommend that some of this be paid for with SPLOST V or Jail Fund money. She said that if this is taken into consideration that it reduces the \$865,000 down to approximately \$465,000 to \$500,000. Chairman Bridges said that this needs to be studied closely. An additional meeting can be scheduled if necessary.

D. FY18 Contracts – Mrs. Thomas said that the public defender contract is a contract that is approved each year by the Commission Board. She said that the county attorney works with the public defender on this contract. Mrs. Thomas said that the information that she has received is that the budget will go up \$710 from last year. The approved budget for last year was \$84,266. The final contract has not been received but will be forwarded to the Commission Board as soon as it comes in.

The second contract is for the State Probation. A room at the courthouse is used one day a week. Mrs. Thomas said that there is a contract between Franklin County and the State of Georgia and the term is up. She requested that the State take out a paragraph giving them the right to sublease. Mrs. Thomas said that this should be received by June 5. If it is not received by then it may need to be voted on at the June Work Session. Commissioner Wester questioned if this is a zero dollar contract. Mrs. Thomas said that is de Minimis. The County provides space and cleaning.

E. 2017 LMIG Resurfacing Project – Mrs. Thomas said that the 2017 LMIG project was split into two separate projects, patching and paving. The bid opening was held on May 11 with Stratton and Sons giving the lowest of the three bids at \$495,526.42. Mrs. Thomas said that the bid from Stratton and Sons was less than \$150,000 from the next bid. She asked that this be reviewed and considered for approval at the June meeting.

F. Board Positions – Mrs. Thomas said that there is one opening on the Planning Commission. The names of all the applicants for the Planning Commission



and Jail Subcommittee have been provided to the Commission Board by the Clerk. Mrs. Thomas asked that the Commission Board look over these names and be prepared to vote for appointments for the Planning Commission and Jail Subcommittee. She said that diversification is needed on both of these as well as guidelines for the Jail Subcommittee. Mrs. Thomas said that she has spoken with GMRC in regards to facilitating the Jail Subcommittee. She said that they will be available for this and they have provided the price. Mrs. Thomas said that she does recommend using a facilitator for the Jail Subcommittee; either GMRC or the County Attorney.

Mrs. Thomas said that the subcommittee of Dr. Macomson and Commissioner Wester might need to be enacted again to choose the applicants. Dr. Macomson asked how many would be needed for the Jail Subcommittee. Mrs. Thomas said that has not been determined but she would ask that it be an odd number or someone designated to break a tie.

Commissioner Franklin said that he would like for each Commissioner to pick a member so that the districts would be represented. Mrs. Thomas said that this has not been looked at to see which district the applicants come out of. Commissioner Franklin said that he is not saying that the pick of the Commissioner has to come from their district. Chairman Bridges said that the Commissioners can give their input to the subcommittee. He asked Sheriff Thomas if they would have representation on the subcommittee. Sheriff Thomas said that the Jail Administrator, Jimmy LeCroy and he would all be involved. Mrs. Thomas said that if three employees are going to be involved then the subcommittee needs to be offset by three or greater from the public.

Sheriff Thomas requested that one of the Superior Court Judges also be on the Jail Subcommittee. Chairman Bridges said that is a good thought. Mrs. Thomas said that she would contact the three judges to see if one is willing to serve. She said that she would not pressure them but it would great to have their involvement. This will help with diversification. She said that in order to reach other segments of the community, people may have to be asked to serve.

Chairman Bridges asked Commissioner Wester and Dr. Macomson if they would be willing to evaluate the three applicants for the Planning Commission and give a recommendation at the June meeting. Commissioner Wester and Dr. Macomson affirmed that they would. Chairman Bridges said that the applicants and process for the Jail Subcommittee needs to be finalized this month so that things can get started. Mrs. Thomas said that the number of people for the subcommittee and the timeline need to be determined. She said that she was hoping for appointments at the June meeting but it may not be possible. Chairman Bridges told Commissioner Franklin if he wanted to make a recommendation for the Jail Subcommittee to let it be known.

Commissioner Franklin said that the Commission Board is elected by the people and he is not excited about a subcommittee. He said that the voters of the County elected the Commission Board to do a job and they should be the subcommittee. Chairman Bridges said that it is a good thought. Commissioner Franklin said that the subcommittee is like a solo commissioner, getting the subcommittee to pull one way.



He said that there were more subcommittees now than ever in the past. Commissioner Franklin said that it is a crying shame that a board cannot get something worked out. Chairman Bridges said that this is an important issue and all the Commissioners need to give their input. He told Commissioner Franklin since he gave his input; it would be good for him to serve on the subcommittee. Commissioner Franklin said that as long as he is a Commissioner he wants to be on every subcommittee because he was elected to be on a Board.

Dr. Macomson asked the scope of the subcommittee; is it where to build a jail or if a jail is to be built. Mrs. Thomas said that the recommendation came from the Grand Jury to build a jail and not to do an expansion. She said that the thought process came from do we go to the voters and elect financing. Sheriff Thomas said that is not true, the Grand Jury recommended going with expansion. He said that Mrs. Thomas brought up building a new jail. Mrs. Thomas said that the Grand Jury reports she read said that a new jail needed to be built. She said yes, she did bring it up. Sheriff Thomas said that he has never asked anyone for a new jail. He said that he asked for an expansion to eliminate the housing out of inmates. Mrs. Thomas stated that before she became county manager and has also stated to the Grand Jury as County Manager that she does not think that an expansion will correctly utilize the staff.

Mrs. Thomas said that the funding options will have to be looked at. Do you go to the voters and ask for approval to incur debt. If an expansion is done, Mrs. Thomas said that the County does not have the funds ready for it. She said that the Commission Board is completely against raising taxes and this leaves very few options. A capital lease option is out for the jail and the SPLOST cycle has already been designated. Mrs. Thomas said that whatever the plan the Jail Subcommittee can help with PR as education is the key.

G. Health Insurance – Mrs. Thomas said that she previously presented the health insurance options for the Commission Board to review. She said that the plans are the same that she presented although she was able to get United Healthcare to take off 1%. Mrs. Thomas said that the base plan will be at no cost to the employees but will also go up on the health savings contribution from \$35 to \$60 a month. She said that the buy-up plan will also be offered. The contribution for the buy-up plan will be the cost of the base plan plus \$35 per month. Mrs. Thomas asked that the Commission Board approve this so that open enrollment can be started. Chairman Bridges asked for a motion to accept the health insurance options presented by Mrs. Thomas. Commissioner Jacques made the motion to accept the insurance plan as presented by the County Manager following review. Chairman Bridges asked for a second. Dr. Macomson seconded the motion. There was no discussion. Chairman Bridges asked for a show of hands. The motion passed by (5) five **YES** votes to (0) zero **NO** votes. The **YES** votes were Commissioner Franklin; Dr. Macomson; Chairman Bridges; Commissioner Jacques; and Commissioner Wester.

H. Capital Expenditures – Mrs. Thomas said that previously it was projected that money would be available of which she requested that this spent on capital expenditures to reduce expenses. She said around this same time that the



Elections Superintendent received information from the Elections Division Director stating that upgraded voting machines were available for purchase from San Diego, California. These machines will be sold at about a 61% savings to the County. Mrs. Thomas said that these machines will cost \$350 plus \$16.50 for shipping and any applicable sales tax to California versus \$1,400 from the vendor. The cost for 40 machines will be \$21,780 from the State of California versus \$56,000 from the vendor. Included in the \$21,780 is \$150 per machine paid to Kennesaw State University for the licensing fee. The machines currently in use by Franklin County belong to the State. There is a contract between Franklin County and the State of Georgia stating that any replacement machines have to be bought by Franklin County. At this time there are only 10 machines that are owned by the County.

Commissioner Jacques asked what the life expectancy is on the machines. Mrs. Thomas said that these machines are less than one year old. Gina Chappelle, Elections Superintendent said that the State of California only used the machines for one election. They have been warehoused and sealed. The State of California did not like the machines and offered them to the State of Georgia because they knew this was what was used. Mrs. Chappelle said that at this time no machines can be purchased from the regular vendor because there are none available. Most of the machines currently in use are from 2002 and the life cycle is almost outdated. Commissioner Jacques asked about repairs. Mrs. Chappelle said that if they broke down, the vendor will make the repairs and send them to KSU and KSU will send them back to the County. Commissioner Jacques thanked staff for taking the time for finding the deal.

Mrs. Thomas said that in the SPLOST V allocations, the upgrade for the E911 communications system was included. By the year 2020 it will be a federal requirement to be NextGen communications. Mrs. Thomas said that this upgrade will take care of the federal requirement but the County's system was also getting to the last of its life cycle. She said that the original vendor that was considered has been bought out by Motorola and this resulted in an increased price but staff was able to locate another vendor. Both vendors were asked to give pricing structure. Mrs. Thomas said that WestTel International will complete the total E911 communication project for \$217,650 with five years of maintenance included. She said that \$200,000 was included in SPLOST V for this project. The other vendor's price was \$252,000. Mrs. Thomas asked the Commission Board to review the proposal from WestTel and consider approval of spending of the SPLOST V funds. The timeline for the conversion is three months. The current support company will be used by WestTel for support once the system is in place.

I. Fy17 Budget Modifications – *Mrs. Thomas said that as part of the FY18 budget, the FY17 budget was also looked at. The budget modifications are for grant monies, work comp distribution, rental, LMIG, and elected official salaries. Mrs. Thomas said that all of her requests are budget neutral so there will be no impact to the bottom line. She said the last two budgets have included a Jail Fund transfer. The Jail Fund is money that comes from fines and fees. Mrs. Thomas said that \$200,000 has been included in the budget each year. She said that for the past two years she has not used any money from the Jail Fund but this year she will be taking \$200,000 out*



of it. Mrs. Thomas said that this will help with some of the overages. She is also asking for another \$201,457.93 to include the overruns for inmate housing, medical cost, jail vehicle, resurfacing of the jail parking lot and jail capital expenditures. Mrs. Thomas said that the review was made by her by looking at the GL and invoices. She said that there is over \$990,000 in the Jail Fund. The combined reduction will be a little over \$400,000. Mrs. Thomas said that the statute gives the authority to the governing body to use the funds for the operations of the jail.

Sheriff Thomas stated that as long as the requirements for the Jail Fund are met, he is fine. He said that if some of the money is taken from the account for something else then the County will be in trouble. Sheriff Thomas suggested that County Attorney Bubba Samuels review this before it is done. Mrs. Thomas said that she checked with other counties and a lot of them use all the jail fines to run their jails. She said that she would run this by Mr. Samuels.

J. Manager's Report – Mrs. Thomas gave updated information on the progress with the FCC. She said that on May 19 a letter of recommendation was received for strong support of the satellite modification for the counties of Franklin, Hart, Stephens and Elbert. The letter was signed by Senator Johnny Isakson, Senator David Perdue and Congressman Doug Collins. Mrs. Thomas said that some of the modification requests have been denied because of lack of support by the broadcasters. Franklin County was unsuccessful with gaining support from the Georgia Association of Broadcasters. Congressman Collins office staff has reached out to the national association for support. Mrs. Thomas said that the recommendation from the DC contact is to contact the Atlanta broadcasters and ask for support and/or for them to not contest the request for the market modification.

Mrs. Thomas said that she anticipates that the Greenville market will protest but with support from the Atlanta market it should not be an issue. Another reason for denial is that the networks have a carriage contract which has terms and limits of what they can do. At this time it is still being worked on for market modification.

Five hundred dollars in dues is paid each year to the Chestatee Chattahoochee RC&D. Mrs. Thomas said that this has not been paid for this year. She asked the Commission Board to review the information from Mr. Riley concerning the RC&D and determine if the County would like to stay a member. There are two representatives from Franklin County; Angela Whidby and Woody McFarlin. Mr. McFarlin has asked to be removed. At this time there is not a recommendation to replace Mr. McFarlin. Mrs. Thomas asked the Commission Board to please review the value of the RC&D and let her know if the County wishes to continue as a member.

K. Announcements – Commissioner Wester said that this is his third year on the Commission Board. He said that the County departments have done a great job in keeping a balanced budget as best as they could. About four years ago Commissioner Wester participated in Leadership Franklin and one thing that stuck with him from the program concerned budgets. He said that the Board is given legitimate reasons for increases by department heads and constitutional officers but the budget cannot



sustain them.

Commissioner Wester said in one of the classes that there was an outside analysis from ACCG of Franklin County. In this assessment it was stated that nothing separates Franklin County from every other county in the State of Georgia. There is nothing that makes business want to locate here, nothing that makes citizens want to live here. Commissioner Wester said that he would like the Commission Board to think of ways to make the difference and what can be done for Franklin County to make it stand out. He said that a move has to be made to make something happen.

Commissioner Jacques said that are many justifiable requests from constitutional officers and department heads. He said year after year the State puts hardship on counties by unfunded mandates. This makes for hardship in balancing budgets. As of last year excise tax is now paid on every gallon of motor fuel purchased. Legislators removed 3% energy consumption tax. Commissioner Jacques said that the County makes a tremendous effort to get industry to locate here but this was removed by legislators with no input from the County. He said that the fairest tax is a sales tax. The T-SPLOST penalty is still being paid by Franklin County at roughly \$100,000 per year. TAVT goes down each year. Commissioner Jacques said that he is in favor of helping the fire fighters but the cost of the insurance policy falls on the County with no help from the State. He said that the redirection of trucking tax to the metro Atlanta area has cost the County approximately \$150,000 each year.

Chairman Bridges said that the Commission Board is striving to increase the employees' salaries with a budgeted 3% increase. He said that this is not near enough with how important the employees are to the County. Chairman Bridges said that Senator John Wilkinson has been appointed by Governor Deal to see how the State can assist with ways to fund the Sheriff's department.

Chairman Bridges adjourned the work session at 7:30 p.m.



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