



**FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION MINUTES
August 29, 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

Staff: County Manager Beth Thomas
County Clerk Elaine Evans
County Engineer John Phillips

Item 1: Call meeting to order – Chairman Bridges called the work session to order at 6 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He expressed his appreciation for their time and attendance.

Item 2: Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance – Chairman Bridges led the invocation and pledge to the American flag.

Item 3: For discussion

A. Public Comment – Chairman Bridges asked if anyone would like to speak in public comment. There were no public comments.

B. Capital Expenditures Investment (Tag Reader) – Chairman Bridges said the tag reader item has been discussed in the past. The purchase of a tag reader would assist the State Troopers in doing their job. The job they do and their presence in Franklin County is very important. Chairman Bridges asked Commissioner Wester to go over the capital expenditures investment/tag reader item. Commissioner Wester said Judge Grizzle called him and stated that a tag reader was something that would benefit the State Patrol and would also be beneficial for the County. The financial impact to the County has to be explored before purchasing because of the tight budget faced by the County. Chairman Bridges thanked Commissioner Wester for starting the discussion and Judge Grizzle for bringing this to the attention of the Commissioners. He asked Sgt. Brian Roberts with the Georgia State Patrol post located in Lavonia to come forward and give more information on this.



Sgt. Roberts came forward for discussion with the Commissioners. Chairman Bridges said his understanding is the State does not provide all the troopers with tag readers and radars and a lot of the counties are providing assistance. Sgt. Roberts stated that a lot of the counties are providing tag readers to the GSP. He said the tag readers provide immediate information to the law enforcement officer such as if the owner of the vehicle is wanted; if the vehicle is stolen, if the tag is expired, if the registration is suspended and if the car has no insurance. Sgt. Roberts said a lot of times on a small traffic stop, law enforcement officers may make an arrest for a bigger charge. There is also discussion of putting the tag readers at the state lines. This would give law enforcement information on every car that enters into Georgia. He said if a car came into Georgia with a load of dope or some other charge it could be tracked.

The tag reader would be beneficial because of the amount of miles of I-85 in Franklin County. Sgt. Roberts said Franklin County deputies have three tag readers in use. He said the tag readers are awesome with the amount of information they can provide. The first tag reader that was put into use by Franklin County within 15 minutes a stolen vehicle was recovered. Sgt. Roberts said the Georgia State Patrol does not generate any income from writing tickets. All of the income goes to the counties. The GSP does not buy radars, lasers or anything that generates money so they rely on the counties to help with these purchases.

Information was presented to the Commissioners from Sgt. Roberts on the number of citations written starting in 2014 when the Lavonia post was opened. Sgt. Roberts said part of his job is the scheduling of the troopers. He said on most days one, two or three troopers work Franklin County. The troopers work the Interstate and they are very good at their jobs with the protection of Franklin County. Chairman Bridges said the troopers are bright stars in Franklin County.

Dr. Macomson asked Sgt. Roberts what is the cost of the tag readers. Sgt. Roberts said the cost for two tag readers is \$37,000 with the training included. There is an annual subscription fee that will be covered by the GSP. Dr. Macomson asked Sgt. Roberts if he was asking for two tag readers. Sgt. Roberts said he was asking for two and hoping for one. He said that he would like to have at least one tag reader so statistics could be given to the County next year showing what a difference the purchase made.

Mrs. Thomas said in the past 24% of all fines that came into the County came from the GSP. Within three years of the opening of the Lavonia post this amount increased by 187% to go over 50% of the fines collected in the County. Mrs. Thomas said the presence of the GSP within Franklin County is appreciated. Sgt. Roberts said the GSP is not in the County to make money; they are in the County to save lives. He said the fatality rate in Hart County has been reduced by 50% and he is sure that the rate is even better in Franklin County. The GSP is making a difference and saving lives. Sgt. Roberts said the post in Lavonia covers Franklin County, Hart County and Elbert County. He provides troopers to each of these counties to help reduce crime. Chairman Bridges asked Sgt. Roberts if there are troopers 24/7 in Franklin County.



Sgt. Roberts affirmed yes. He said when the Lavonia post was opened it helped with the concentration of troopers being located within the three counties.

Chairman Bridges said the management would have to look at this and find out if it is possible to help the troopers out. Mrs. Thomas said Franklin County got unexpected money back on a worker's comp audit this year. The past few years Franklin County has had to pay an extra \$5,000 to \$6,000. The audit was completed by Deborah Bufford and went great. Mrs. Thomas said money is tight right now but it always is in the summer months leading up to October and the billing cycle. With the extra cash from the work comp audit Mrs. Thomas said it would be a good investment to go into public safety. At this time it would be possible to purchase one. It might also be possible to purchase another one when the insurance premium is received in October. Mrs. Thomas said the insurance premium was budgeted on historical data but if there was growth in this area, public safety would be a good investment. If it is not possible to purchase in October it might be possible to purchase at the end of the fiscal year.

Commissioner Jacques said this is a tremendous utilization of new technology to be able to target criminals while they are on the road before they commit a crime in Franklin County or elsewhere. He said he spoke with Sgt. Andrews of the GSP and one of the Franklin County deputies about the usage of tag readers and both stated it has helped target criminals and has made a difference on the Interstate. Commissioner Jacques said he is supportive of purchasing at least one tag reader dependent on the finances of the County. Dr. Macomson said he is in agreement with this. He said he definitely sees the benefit of the GSP in Franklin County. Commissioner Jacques said there are still people on the Interstate who do not adhere to traffic laws but with the presence of the GSP and the Franklin County deputies there is a habit change in the way people drive when entering Franklin County.

Sgt. Roberts said the readers take a picture of the tag and the car as it passes. He said if there is an alert then the trooper is able to go down the road and match the car based on this information. Dr. Macomson asked if the information can be communicated to a car that doesn't have a tag reader. Sgt. Roberts said yes but he does not know how it works. He has only had the opportunity to sit with Franklin County Deputy Antwane McCurry on the Interstate. Commissioner Franklin asked where the training will take place. Sgt. Roberts said they would come to the post and train them there. He said it is more computer skills than anything else. Commissioner Wester said he travels a lot into South Carolina for work. He said the troopers in Franklin County and Hart County make a big difference as it is not unusual for him to travel to Greenville and never see a South Carolina trooper. Commissioner Wester said as soon as he hits the Georgia state line the presence of the GSP slows drivers down. He said the technology helps the troopers to be able to do a more efficient job. Commissioner Jacques said it helps them do their jobs safer. Sgt. Roberts again stated that this is not to make money; this is to keep the citizens of Franklin County safer.

Commissioner Franklin said it is amazing that the speed of the car does not have an effect on the picture. Sgt. Roberts said this is the same system that is used in



Atlanta for the HOV lanes. Chairman Bridges told the Commission Board that this needs to be thought about and will be looked at during the September meeting. He thanked Sgt. Roberts for coming and bringing the information. Sgt. Roberts expressed his thanks to the Commissioners for the help that has been given in the past. Commissioner Jacques thanked Sgt. Roberts for sharing this opportunity to enhance the safety of the law enforcement officers and the citizens of the County. He asked Mrs. Thomas what is the amount of the check received from the work comp audit. Mrs. Thomas stated it was \$15,000.

C. Discussion of Inspection Program – Chairman Bridges said the Planning Commission has been looking into an inspection program. He asked John Phillips to give further information on this item. Mr. Phillips said an approval was given by the Commission Board for a request for proposals from private contractors who would provide the building inspections. The Planning Commission has recommended implementing an inspection program but would like to know if the County is really ready to make the move.

Mr. Phillips stated there are people who are very much in favor of starting an inspection program and there are people who are very much opposed to the program. He said there are very few people who are neutral concerning the program. The Planning Commission would like clarification from the Commissioners before sending out a request for proposals. Chairman Bridges asked how this program will be paid for. Mr. Phillips said the Planning Commission is looking for this program to be structured in a way for the fees to cover the cost of the program. Dr. Macomson asked if the divided opinion is from the Planning Commission. Mr. Phillips said it is the citizens in the County. The Planning Commission is in agreement that this program would benefit the County and they are willing to modify the program if needed.

Chairman Bridges asked Mr. Phillips if there have been issues for the County since there is not an inspection program in place. Mr. Phillips said there is a lot of housing being done in Franklin County and someone may come in and get a permit for a storage building and then information is received that this is being lived in. Most of the storage buildings are not designed for egress for fires. It is not unusual to find these buildings are not hooked up to any type of septic system. Mr. Phillips said the Planning Commission does not want to make the regulations so costly that people cannot afford to live in Franklin County; they are trying to resolve the safety issues. A lot of the problems seen involve children and they are at risk. The Planning Commission would like to make things safer for everyone.

Mr. Phillips said another big issue is on the contractor level. There are contractors who follow the rules and regulations of the State and build and price according to the Code. There are other contractors who know that Franklin County does not have an inspection program and they undercut the job and the price. Mr. Phillips said the contractors who abide by the State law feel this is not fair to them. Chairman Bridges questioned if the counties surrounding Franklin County have an inspection program. Mr. Phillips said most of them have some type of inspection program. There are many counties that do what Franklin County is proposing, to use



contracted services for the inspection program. There are other counties and cities that have staff inspectors.

The City of Lavonia is looking at their inspection program for potential changes. Mr. Phillips said the City of Carnesville has indicated they may be interested in partnering with the County to use the same inspector for city inspections. Franklin County is in the minority of counties with not having some type of inspection program. Dr. Macomson asked what procedure is used now. Mr. Phillips said now a permit is issued with checks for the use of the property being in accordance with the zoning and the structure being built to meet the setback requirements. There is no type of inspection for the building or the plumbing of the structure.

***Mrs. Thomas** said the County has experienced issues with the setback process and if the inspections are not done the process will have to be modified. There was a situation last year where everything was done according to the County's process. After the setbacks were reviewed the house was then moved. Mrs. Thomas said this engaged the County in a lengthy litigation. Dr. Macomson said it would seem that the best way to go would be with the contracted inspector who would be trained to catch things. Mr. Phillips said one of the benefits of using a contracted inspector is they are only paid if they are needed and it is not a staff position where benefits would have to be paid. The contractor would also be responsible for their certifications and the County would not incur a cost. The companies providing these services also serve as the County's inspection department and all questions about code would be answered by them. Mr. Phillips said the fees and paperwork would be handled by someone in the County but everything else would be handled by the contracted company.*

***Commissioner Franklin** asked if the adjoining counties use outside contractors or if they have someone on staff. Mr. Phillips said it is a mixture. Jackson County and Barrow County use a contractor. Madison County and Stephens County have on staff inspectors. Commissioner Franklin asked City Manager Charles Cawthon if the City of Lavonia has a staff inspector. Mr. Cawthon said yes, Randy Dove does all the inspections; residential, commercial and industrial and also serves as the Public Works Director. He said everything is changing and some of the burden needs to be shifted to the builder. It is expensive to have a full time inspector on staff. Mr. Cawthon said as construction is picking up it is getting harder and harder to keep up. He said that the thoughts of the City of Lavonia staff are if the County changes then maybe they could piggyback off of what is decided.*

***Commissioner Wester** said there will be pros and cons to this program as there are with any program. He said he has a contractor's license through the State. One of the reasons for the State program is to help weed out the fly by night contractors. If there are not inspections it does not help eliminate the unlicensed contractors. Commissioner Wester said there are also people who want to do their own work and do not want to hire a contractor. He said he does not have a problem with a building program because there is a State policy to follow. Inspectors can cause headaches but they are there to make sure that the job is done right. Commissioner Jacques said the builders also have the option of hiring their own inspectors if they*



deem it appropriate.

Dr. Macomson asked what would be the effect to the new process if after the fact it was discovered that someone built a house without a permit. Mr. Phillips said if this process moves forward it would be from the beginning point and going forward. Dr. Macomson asked what is done now when someone has built without a permit and a complaint is received on them. Judge Grizzle said they would be cited and would come before him or the Commission Board. Mr. Phillips said this is not common but does happen from time to time and is usually for lack of a septic tank. If there is no septic system the health department becomes involved. Most of the issues get resolved because usually everything is in place, the person just didn't go through the proper paperwork. Judge Grizzle said Louie Korff with the Health Department and Chris Ayers with the County look for compliance. The problem is usually rectified by getting a permit and installing correctly with the tickets then being dismissed. Judge Grizzle said mostly this comes from people who do not know the process.

Judge Grizzle said if he decided to build a house he could get a building permit and build it any way that he wanted to and there is nothing that anybody could do to stop him. Mrs. Thomas said the State has codes but it is up to each county to enforce them. Commissioner Franklin asked if the program is implemented will it stop a homeowner from doing his or her own work. Judge Grizzle said it will not. Mr. Phillips said if it is for the homeowner's benefit they can build it. Commissioner Franklin said he is against a man or woman not being able to do what they would like in their own home. Judge Grizzle said the only time construction would be stopped by an inspector in this case would be if the house was deemed unsafe or uninhabitable. Mr. Phillips said the interpretation from the State is mandatory building codes are in effect for all construction in the State of Georgia. An individual homeowner can do the work but according to the State they are still required to meet the codes.

Mrs. Thomas said the Planning Commission has done their due diligence and looked at the various options. At this time the vote is needed to be able to put this in place. Commissioner Franklin questioned how the public would be treated after this is in place. Chairman Bridges said it is owed to the Planning Commission to let them know which direction the Commission Board would like to go in. This item will be placed on the September agenda.

D. Manager's Report – Mrs. Thomas said the Jail Subcommittee Report was received this afternoon at 4:53. This will be forwarded by County Clerk Elaine Evans to all the members for the comment period with comments to be given to GMRC. After the comment period and finalization from GMRC the presentation will be made to the Commission Board.

The meetings for the Hazard Mitigation update have been completed. Mrs. Thomas said the participation included volunteer fire departments, St. Mary's Sacred Heart Hospital, the Board of Education and each of the cities. Because of the good participation the contribution was able to be made in like kind with no cash flow. The grant for the project paid for the remaining \$18,000. A \$24,000 project was



completed with no additional cash outflow. The next step is to hold public comment periods. The dates will be advertised as soon as they are finalized. After the comment periods this will be presented to the Commission Board for a resolution, and then sent to GEMA and FEMA.

Numerous phone calls have been received on Casey Road. There are some underlying structural problems with the road and it is a bigger project than Franklin County has equipment to repair. Mrs. Thomas said County staff met with engineers from GDOT to assess the situation. The County has already contracted to have the road repaired. This is the high paving season and Franklin County has been placed on the list for the necessary repairs. Postings are on the road.

ACCG will hold their district legislative meeting in Franklin County on November 9. Emmanuel College has agreed to host this meeting. Mrs. Thomas said the expectation is for 100 to 150 people to attend with commissioners, county clerks and county managers and others. She expressed her thanks to Emmanuel College for their participation and relationship. More information will be given as it is received.

Mrs. Thomas announced that County Clerk Elaine Evans has completed her course work for county clerk certification. Commissioner Jacques said this is a huge accomplishment. Commissioner Wester expressed his congratulations on this accomplishment and many more to come. Commissioner Franklin, Dr. Macomson and Chairman Bridges extended congratulations also.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that once the basic needs are met that people move toward the psychological needs. One of the psychological needs is a feeling of accomplishment. Mrs. Thomas said based on the psychological needs people are motivated to work for different reasons; money to care for their needs, a title, or a sense of accomplishment. She said information was gathered from other counties and cities by Elaine with lots of great ideas such as certificates, resolutions, extra money and gifts. Mrs. Thomas asked the Commissioners to consider recognizing employees at the regular board meeting each year in the month of November for their years of service. It has been said that if you invest in your employees then you never have to worry about a customer because your employees will take care of your customers. Mrs. Thomas asked the Commissioners to please give suggestions about the employee recognition program.

E. Announcements – *Mrs. Thomas announced the September meeting will be held on September 11 instead of September 4 due to the Labor Day Holiday. There will be a public hearing at 5:30 p.m. and the regular board meeting to follow at 6 p.m.*

Chairman Bridges adjourned the work session at 6:58 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