



You Are Why We Are Here

**FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
April 30, 2018
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
Mark Berryman, WLHR

Staff: County Manager Beth Thomas
County Clerk Elaine Evans

Item 1: Call Meeting to Order – Chairman Bridges welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Mark Berryman and Shane Scoggins of the media for covering the meeting. He said this meeting is to provide information to the citizens so they can make a good choice. The meeting was then called to order.

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

Item 3: Items for discussion:

A. Informational Presentations

Chairman Bridges said this is his sixth year on the Commission Board and jail discussions were started in 2013 although at that time the funds were not available. This issue was looked at again in 2017 and a subcommittee was formed to be able to solve the problem. Chairman Bridges said the members of the subcommittee gave the recommendation to place this before the voters of the County and allow them to make the decision.

The monthly charges for inmate housing to other counties was gone over by Chairman Bridges. Chairman Bridges said the housing out fluctuates with the highest month being November of 2016 at a cost of \$36,808 and February of 2018 was the lowest at \$4,340. The inmate housing costs average approximately \$16,000 per month. Chairman Bridges said the amount paid to Jackson County and Elbert County to house is \$35 per day with \$37.50 per day being paid to Stephens County. These amounts do not take into consideration the transportation costs



You Are Why We Are Here

Mrs. Thomas said the Board of Commissioners put this process in place in the most diplomatic way by asking for citizen input through a subcommittee. The recommendation from the subcommittee was to bring this before the voters for a general obligation debt of four million dollars for the purposes of expansion and renovating the existing jail. Mrs. Thomas said governments can only enter into debt in certain ways and there are no grants for jails. Jails don't generate revenue therefore potential revenues cannot be borrowed against. General obligation debt or SPLOST are the options for jails. Mrs. Thomas said the subcommittee decided four million dollars would be sufficient for the expansion and the renovations with a ten-year life span because the expansion has an estimated life of ten years. Before the end of the ten years other long-term solutions need to be explored and found.

The annual debt service for the ten-year loan is estimated at \$467,000 per year. Mrs. Thomas said this is only for the construction and the operational and maintenance costs are not included in this amount. Based on Mrs. Thomas' estimation the operational costs without any capital expenditures will be about \$883,000 per year. She said the targeted housing out costs for this year are \$200,000. Mrs. Thomas said after the reduction of the \$200,000 there is an estimated net annual cost of 1.149 million dollars. Based on the current tax digest this comes to about a 1.937 mill increase or about 18% for the unincorporated areas of the County. Mrs. Thomas said the operational costs have to be considered as well as the debt and there are needs that will have to be taken care of regardless of the outcome of the vote.

Chairman Bridges said the main question he is being asked is what the increase in taxes will be. He asked Mrs. Thomas to explain what the increase would be on a \$100,000 house. Mrs. Thomas said based on the numbers presented tonight with the assumption of a 10-year debt service and maintenance and operations the increase in the millage rate is 1.9377. An average tax bill will increase by \$77.50 for every \$100,000. Mrs. Thomas explained that this only relates to the jail and none of the other services in the County.

Sheriff Stevie Thomas said each year he and his staff have come before the Commission Board to address the overcrowding at the detention center. This situation did not happen overnight, it has been ongoing. Sheriff Thomas said 22 grand juries have recommended for more beds at the jail. He said this started before he took office when Hugh Roach was Sheriff. The jail has 74 beds and today's census was 99 inmates and the overage have to be housed out. Sheriff Thomas said over \$500,000 was paid for housing out inmates. He said anytime the officers have to be out of county for transports it impacts the safety of the citizens of the County.

Addressing the budget overruns Sheriff Thomas said they are directly tied to the overcrowding of the jail with the transports. Sheriff Thomas said he began his career under Sheriff Joe Foster in 1985 and at that time Sheriff Foster saw a need for more bed spaces which was brought to the Commissioners. A federal lawsuit was filed before anything could be done and that is the reason for the current jail. When the current jail was built the cost was seven million dollars and it was completed in 1994.



You Are Why We Are Here

Sheriff Thomas said the expansion being asked for will cost four million dollars.

Sheriff Thomas said the Jail Subcommittee looked at options of expansion, a new facility and to do nothing. The new facility option would cost in the range of 15 to 20 million dollars. The option of do nothing would ensure that a lawsuit would come because the County has been in this situation before. Sheriff Thomas said he is trying to stop the County from being in a lawsuit. He also said a regional jail was looked at but this will not work because the commissioners and sheriffs of each county would have to agree. Sheriff Thomas said he will keep the citizens, officers and inmates safe regardless of the outcome of the vote. He thanked the Commissioners for their time and attention to this issue.

***Captain Greg Sisk** said he was hired in December 2016 as the jail administrator. He said in 2016 there was a total of 154 inmate housing trips. This is in addition to the 107 trips for mental health, 126 trips for prison and department of corrections, 48 trips for hospital, 95 trips to other counties for holds and 24 trips for juveniles. Out of 554 trips, 154 were related to inmate housing. The miles for inmate housing trips was 8,900 out of a total of 76,000 miles. Captain Sisk said 402 trips were made in 2017 transporting inmates for various reasons.*

The cost to house inmates in other counties for fiscal year 2016 was \$72,765. Captain Sisk said for fiscal year 2017 the cost increased to \$265,860. The amount for 2018 so far is \$157,871. Captain Sisk said currently there are 20 inmates housed out. Two weeks ago, there were 37 inmates housed out.

Captain Sisk said inmates are housed in Elbert County, Stephens County, Oglethorpe County and Jackson County. He said if he contacted any of these counties right now most of them would tell him they did not have beds to house inmates from other counties. Gwinnett County does take some of the overflow inmates from Franklin County. Captain Sisk said the cost per trip to Elbert County is \$54.29, Stephens County is \$37.89, Oglethorpe County is \$69.69, Jackson County is \$52.70 and Gwinnett County is \$92.13. The cost for the officer or officers is not included in this amount. Captain Sisk said the most important factor to remember is the officer or officers who should be and need to be protecting the citizens is out of the county on a road trip.

A growth chart for inmate population was presented by Captain Sisk from 2010 through 2018. The inmate population steadily grew from 2010 through 2018 with the exception of 2012 which dropped by two. Captain Sisk said the past tells the future, the inmate population will continue to grow. The projected grow from 2018 through 2027 is estimated to grow by 3.75 per year. Using this projection Captain Sisk said the estimation is for 144.5 by the year 2027. He said this is probably a low number because of all the drug trafficking up and down I-85.

Captain Sisk said at this time there are problems with inmate classifications and the jail expansion will allow for the different classifications to not be mixed together as they are now. He said currently the inmates are mixed together in the



You Are Why We Are Here

Alpha Pod; 2 minimum, 3 medium, 3 maximum and 1 super maximum. He said a super max person does not need to be mixed in with the others as a lawsuit could happen. Captain Sisk said every 30 days the classification of the inmates is looked at. He said in all the pods the classifications are mixed because of lack of space. The new addition will eliminate the classification problem and will also minimize lawsuits. He said the County will also be safer with the officers not being out of the county on transportations.

Sheriff Thomas stated he has letters from all the surrounding sheriffs who want the bed space at the jail. Chairman Bridges questioned if all the other counties are having the same problem with overcrowding like Franklin County. Sheriff Thomas said yes, they are.

Tom Wright gave information on the proposed structure and secure space. He said due to increased costs the amount to build this structure increased from 2.5 million dollars to 3.25 million dollars in a two-year span. Today's costs are running around \$300 per feet. Mr. Wright said the concept for the jail expansion is right at 15,000 square feet. Based on today's costs the new construction will be about \$217 per square foot. There are four pods in this proposal with two cells for isolation. There will also be dorm space as well as secure space. Mr. Wright said this will leave the existing jail to handle the higher classifications.

Included in the expansion is an upgrade for the security systems for the existing jail and the expansion along with the locks. Mr. Wright said the kitchen will be upgraded along with the laundry room for the additional inmates. He said the addition will add 98 beds. The building is a simple structure which will cost 1.25 to 1.50 million dollars. The rest of the four million will be used for security equipment, cells and everything else that goes with a jail. Mr. Wright said steel cells that are made in Habersham County will be used. The security doors and windows that will be used are made in Stephens County.

Mr. Wright stated once the security equipment is ordered the construction is one year out for new jails. Because of the way this is being done and the size of the expansion, Franklin County will be able to slide into a slot for the security equipment so the time element is down. Mr. Wright said if this is approved and done on a fast pace and bidding was done in August or September then it would be May or June of the next year before it would be online.

Mrs. Thomas questioned the 15,000 square feet at \$217 if it was just for the new construction. Mr. Wright affirmed yes. Mrs. Thomas asked Mr. Wright how much would be left of the four million dollars for the existing jail after closing costs, fees, and other costs. Mr. Wright said the 3.25 million dollars picks up site work and some modifications in the kitchen and laundry of the existing facility. Mrs. Thomas then asked if the County would be responsible for the plumbing and associated work. Mr. Wright said a study has not completed on the existing jail and this cannot be done until the people are moved.



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Chairman Bridges asked Sheriff Thomas what the additional cost would be for staffing. Sheriff Thomas said this information was already sent to Mrs. Thomas. Mrs. Thomas said she has the information from the Jail Subcommittee.

Chief Deputy Jimmy LeCroy came forward and presented the information for staffing. He said a budget of a little over \$800,000 was presented to the Jail Subcommittee for the proposed addition. He said with updated information the proposed budget is \$1,202,923 for the jail expansion. Chairman Bridges asked Mr. LeCroy if he had information for the present Sheriff's budget. Mr. LeCroy told Chairman Bridges he broke the budget down by Sheriff's budget, current jail budget, proposed jail expansion budget and total combined budget of \$5,029,284. For the sake of transparency Mr. LeCroy requested the media to make sure this information is given to the public. Mrs. Thomas stated with the updated information from Mr. LeCroy the estimated increase to \$100,000 would be around \$98.87, based on the 1.2 operations number. Mr. LeCroy said he and Sheriff Thomas want to get this information to the voters as they do not want the citizens to go to the polls and vote without all the information being given to them.

Dr. Macomson requested the millage rate to be discussed with the information from Mr. LeCroy. Mrs. Thomas said the debt service would be equal to .7868. The 1.2 million dollars operational budget is 2.022. The reduction in inmate housing of \$200,000 would be -.3370. Mrs. Thomas said the total net number is 2.4718 and equates to about \$98.87 per \$100,000 fair market value.

Mayor David Jordan of the City of Royston questioned if additional revenue contributed from the cities has been looked at. He said they usually send their inmates to Madison County but would send them to Franklin County when this is available. Sheriff Thomas said he does not have a problem housing for the cities when he has room. Mrs. Thomas stated the cost per day for an inmate is \$65 and the County only charges the cities \$35 per day, therefore the County is not making money; only helping to cover some of the fixed costs.

Another concern expressed by Mayor Jordan is this increase will be a double taxation on the citizens in the incorporated areas because city taxes are already paid. The cities also pay the Sheriff to house their inmates. Mayor Jordan said he is very concerned about this especially when going into LOST negotiations. He said he understands people need to be locked up but he wants the citizens to be treated fairly.

Sheriff Thomas stated each sheriff has the authorization to take percentages off the police departments to house inmates. He said he chose not to as Sheriff Roach before him chose not to. Most of the sheriffs choose not to do this reduction for the police departments because the percentages off the tickets are a one-time deal. If the person has other charges the police departments would not pay anything to the County. It is better for the County to accept the \$35 a day for inmate housing than to take the percentage of the ticket.



You Are Why We Are Here

Wayne Ellard said transparency was discussed and he asked for the citizens to be told that legally there was not another option other than going to the voters. He said he does not like his taxes going up but there was not another way other than going up on taxes for this. Chairman Bridges said the objective of the Commissioners is to educate the public to be able to make the decision that is best for them. He said the County will put this information on the website. Mrs. Thomas said the Jail Subcommittee information is also on the County's website.

Colonel Donald Pinkard said he has been in law enforcement for 39 years. He said if there is not adequate classification for inmates then a situation of failure to protect is created because of the more dangerous inmates being mixed in with the lesser dangerous ones. It is possible for the County to be sued on failure to protect if a more dangerous inmate harms a lesser classified inmate if they are mixed together in the cell. Colonel Pinkard said when the officers are taken out of the county on transports another failure to protect situation is created through lack of protection for the citizens. As a citizen and property owner of Franklin County Colonel Pinkard stated that he is supportive of Sheriff Thomas because his desire is for the safety and protection of the citizens.

B. Public Comment

Bob Ragsdale stated very definite numbers were put out tonight although the bond has not passed or failed. He asked how these numbers were determined without knowing the terms of the bond. Mrs. Thomas said there is a little caveat that was presented at the Jail Subcommittee, there is no way to accurately predict debt service because of the fluctuating interest rates. She said this gives enough of a buffer to not impact debt service. Mr. Ragsdale said information is being presented on bond indebtedness and telling how much to pay in taxes before any negotiations. Mrs. Thomas said this is an estimation but the bonds have a little bit of a prediction factor for the interest rates.

John Hylton asked how much longer the County has to pay on the hospital. He said he is aware this is being paid for through SPLOST and he asked the term left on the payments. Mrs. Thomas said it will take three SPLOST cycles to pay off the hospital debt. Dr. Macomson asked how long the SPLOST cycle is. Mrs. Thomas said if the agreement is entered into with cities the SPLOST can go for six years. Counties and cities can forgo negotiations and go into a level system for five years. Mrs. Thomas said she does not recommend the level system for projects because the cities will not get money for the level one projects. Sheriff Thomas stated this was why he wanted the citizens to have the right numbers because he does not want the citizens to get hoodwinked like they did with the hospital.

Walter Brown asked Sheriff Thomas if monitoring devices for inmates who have not done any bodily harm has been looked at. Sheriff Thomas said a lot of things have been looked at. He said if the County started doing this it will put them in a corner as there are people who need to be locked up.



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Mrs. Thomas clarified that the statement of the surrounding jails being full is because of staffing issues and not capacity. Sheriff Thomas said Jackson County is the only one that this is true of. Hart County is full and Stephens County only has a little room. Mrs. Thomas said this addition will be a challenge to staff. Commissioner Jacques clarified this is based on the wage paid. Captain Sisk stated for the amount paid it will be a challenge to staff.

Aline Taylor said she lives in the western part of Franklin County where there is no EMS station or Sheriff's department. She asked what percentage of Franklin County citizens is put in the Franklin County Jail each year. Sheriff Thomas said he did not have the information with him tonight. He asked Mrs. Taylor for her contact information and said he would call her with the exact number.

Mayor Harris Little of the City of Carnesville asked for the amount per day for inmates of \$65 a day to be confirmed. Mrs. Thomas said this was the number she calculated in 2015. Mr. LeCroy said it would be close to that. Mayor Little asked how much for housing out. Sheriff Thomas said \$35 a night which does not include the pay for the officers transporting calculated at time and a half.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 by Chairman Bridges.



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Signed on the _____ day of _____, 2018

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