

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
OF THE BEN HILL COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON JUNE 6, 2014 AT 6:30 PM IN THE
BEN HILL COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX

Those present for the meeting were as follows:

Philip C. Jay III	Chairman
OD Netter	Vice-Chairman
Scott Downing	Commissioner
Daniel Cowan	Commissioner
Bennie Calloway	Commissioner
Frank Feild	County Manager
Donna Prather	County Clerk
Toni Sawyer	County Attorney

Chairman Philip Jay III called the meeting to order.

Elder Gene Thomas gave the invocation.

Everyone gave the Pledge of Allegiance.

Amendments To The Rules Of Order

Commissioner Scott Downing made a motion to relax the rules on addressing the Chairman, Commissioners, and the public. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Scott Downing, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, and Vice-Chairman OD Netter all voting for the motion.

Approval of the Agenda/Agenda Changes

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the agenda. Vice-Chairman OD Netter seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chairman OD Netter, and Commissioner Scott Downing and all voting for the motion.

Public Comments: NONE

Acceptance of Prior Minutes

Vice-Chairman OD Netter made a motion to approve the Workshop Meeting minutes held on May 5, 2014. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, and Commissioner Bennie Calloway all voting for the motion. Commissioner Scott Downing abstained from the vote.

Commissioner Bennie Calloway made a motion to approve the Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes held on May 6, 2014. Vice-Chairman OD Netter seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Vice-Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, and Commissioner Scott Downing all voting for the motion.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the Public Hearing minutes held on May 28, 2014. Commissioner Scott Downing seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Scott Downing, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Vice-Chairman OD Netter all voting for the motion.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the Special Called Meeting Minutes held on May 28, 2014. Commissioner Scott Downing seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Scott Downing, Vice-Chairman OD Netter, and Commissioner Bennie Calloway all voting for the motion.

Constitutional Officer: NONE

Department Head Reports:

Chief Appraiser Joyce Merritt explained why her attorney fees are as high as it is. She stated she hired an attorney to assist with four appeals with a Hearing Officer and seven appeals with Superior Court.

County Board Reports: NONE

County Manager's Report:

County Manager Frank Feild reported the following:

Perry House Road

The Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank (GTIB) has advised us that our grant application for the Perry House Road Bridge will not be funded. They have money in the 2015 Budget for grants and invited us to apply again when they begin accepting new grant applications.

We asked for a critique of our application and got some very good comments back. The bottom line is that they expect us to come up with \$400,000 of the project cost from local sources in order to be competitive.

2013 Audit

The Auditors have moved quickly through the 2013 County Financial records. They will be delivering a final report by June 30th, but all indications are they are very pleased with the progress we have made.

We need to publicly commend Donna Prather for all her hard work in cleaning up our books since she took them over in late 2011. This has been an extremely difficult and thankless job; accompanied by an incredible amount of unwarranted criticism. Donna is a true professional who sets a high standard for all of us to live up to.

Development Authority of Ben Hill County

Courtney Whitman prepared and submitted a grant application to ACCG for funding an intern this fall. She has been awarded this grant; which will put a college student into her office for 200 hours to help with some of the major projects she is working on. This will be paid for by the ACCG Civic Affairs Foundation.

Courtney has also been extremely helpful in processing the paperwork for the Queensland residents seeking assistance from the Water Well Trust to drill their own wells. We currently have 4 applications approved, and several pending. Jason Miller was able to convince the Health Board to issue a variance for all of Queensland so we can drill wells there; following strict requirements which will insure there is no contamination. The well-driller says he is ready to begin.

The Revolving Loan Fund has recently made another loan for a local business expansion.

The Development Authority of Ben Hill County will sponsor a series of FREE Saturday evening concerts called "Summer Nights in the Park". They will feature local musicians, and be held in Blue & Gray Park on June 14th, July 12th, and August 18th from 6-10 p.m.; and September 6th from 4-10 p.m. The concerts will showcase our community's small business owners and entrepreneurs; and will include representatives from local, state and federal agencies to help people interested in starting-up businesses. More information is posted on the County website at www.benhillcounty.com.

I'd like to commend Courtney Whitman for the many projects she is successfully handling. At the same time, she is pursuing academic studies in the field of Economic Development at the state and national levels. She is another outstanding member of our County Team.

Departmental Review and Staffing Study

The Carl Vinson Institute of Government Team will be here tomorrow and Thursday to conduct interviews with the Departments and Constitutional Offices.

Annexation Request: NONE

Rezoning Application: NONE

Alcohol Application: NONE

Old Business:

Public Transportation

County Manager Frank Feild reported he hand-carried our application for a Rural Transportation Grant to the DOT Regional Office on May 19th. Although we were way past the deadline, they accepted and forwarded it to Atlanta; where it will be considered if there is still funding available. If it is approved, funding could begin as early as July 1st. If not, we will be considered for the program year beginning in July of 2015.

If our application is approved for July 1st of 2014, we will begin the formal process of acquiring new vans and selecting a 3rd party contractor to operate the system. Optimistically, we might be able to begin operating by mid-Fall.

If our application is not approved for this year, and the Commission wants to proceed with an Interim Public Transportation System, we are developing another option. Jason Miller identified 4 high-quality used vans; which we purchased. We are preparing a plan and proforma for operating a Public Transportation System using a 3rd party contractor. If the proforma suggests we can come close to breaking even, we could contract for a 90-day trial period. This would allow us to terminate the operation if it doesn't work out, and wait until July of 2015 to start again.

If we acquire new vans, the ones we have now can be held in reserve or used to augment our fleet. After 1-year, we can sell the used vans and expect to at least double our money. The key to any successful Public Transportation System is ridership. People have to use the system or it will lose tens of thousands of dollars a month in operations. Very few systems are truly self-sustaining; with the majority relying on government subsidies to survive. We believe a Ben Hill County Transit System will work; but it must be popular with our citizens and operated at a minimal cost to the County.

Fitzgerald Ben Hill County Land Bank/Intergovernmental Agreement

Commissioner Scott Downing made a motion to approve the intergovernmental agreement and to authorize the Chairman to sign all documents. Vice-Chairman OD Netter seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Scott Downing, Vice-Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan and all voting for the motion.

New Business:

House Number Signs/Volunteer Fire Department

Alan Conger stated they have kicked off this project and have approximately 60 signs already up. He stated they are receiving more responses from citizens and they are looking at putting up four dry hydrants to help lower citizens insurance. Mr. Conger asked if an ordinance is needed for the signs, could it be done now and includes the same language as the State code 505.1 Address Identification.

After further discussion, Commissioner Scott Downing made a motion to have an ordinance drawn up with the same language as the State. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Scott Downing, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Vice-Chairman OD Netter all voting for the motion.

House Bill 60

County Manager Frank Feild stated in the wake of the Governor signing House Bill 60, we have been approached by vendors who want us to install expensive security screening systems in all of our public buildings. Remember that a security screening system also requires a trained person to monitor it and to respond immediately with authority.

This bill makes it a misdemeanor for people to carry weapons in unauthorized locations; including government buildings and parking lots; but it does not require all government buildings to have restricted ingress or screening by security personnel. The County still decides which buildings should have increased security. The County can regulate its employees carrying weapons; while the Sheriff determines and regulates what his employees can do.

We have recently upgraded the security of our courthouse by adding a second set of doors and a teller window at the front entrance, and controlling access to the building when court is not in session. We already have controlled access to other County Offices; including County Administration, Tax Commissioner, Public Defender, Probate, Elections, Magistrate, Sheriff's Office, 911, and the Jail. We are constantly reviewing and upgrading our security measures.

Grady County in Southwest Georgia recently made the news by voting to prohibit weapons being carried in their parks and recreation facilities. However, House Bill 60 already makes this a misdemeanor.

At this time, we do not recommend contracting for additional security screening systems, or duplicating the restrictions already contained in House Bill 60.

Employee Health Insurance

County Manager Frank Feild informed the Commissioners we have been studying the ACCG employee health insurance renewal information from Blue Cross Blue Shield. We have 97 employees enrolled in the plan, and the current policy expires on June 30th. Renewal of the same policy will increase our costs 40%.

From February 1, 2013 thru January 31, 2014, Blue Cross reports we paid \$592,575 in premiums. They paid out \$1,253,229 in claims. We were fortunate to have been in the ACCG insurance pool; which reduced the negative impact of our claims. However, our loss ratio is still very high and our best course of action is to stay in the pool rather than try to bid-out our health insurance.

If we renew with the same terms we currently have, the total cost of our policy will be \$859,220. This is a \$ 245,000 increase. Our employees currently contribute 15% of the cost of health insurance; which is \$36.53 per participant each pay period. If we renew with the same terms, a 15% employee contribution will jump to \$ 51.15 per pay period.

Most counties that offer health insurance benefits require their employees to contribute 35% of the cost of their premiums. If we renew with the same terms, and require a 35% employee contribution, it would increase the employee contribution to \$119.34 per pay period. This would equate to a net cost increase to the County of \$37,082.

We could also renew our policy with different terms to reduce the impact of the cost increases. There are many options; but we focused on providing the best health insurance we can afford, containing the total cost to the County, and keeping employee contributions and out-of-pocket expenses as low as possible. He presented a strategy to the Commissioner.

2014 NACO Conference and Voting Credentials

Commissioner Scott Downing made a motion to delegate Vice-Chairman OD Netter as the voting delegate at the 2014 NACO Conference. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Scott Downing, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Vice-Chairman OD Netter all voting for the motion.

Agenda Changes and/or add ons: NONE

Legislative Report:

Commissioner Scott Downing mentioned Irwin County had State Representative Jay Roberts and State Senator Tyler Harper Day. He stated it was a great turn out.

Commissioner's Remarks:

Commissioner Bennie Calloway thanked County Clerk Donna Prather for a job well done.

Meeting adjourned

_____ Philip C. Jay III, Chairman

_____ Donna R. Prather, County Clerk