

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
OF THE BEN HILL COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON JULY 8TH 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
Pamela Turner	Acting County Clerk
Toni Sawyer	County Attorney

Chairman Philip Jay III called the meeting to order.

Pastor Mark Daniels 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

Vice-Chairman OD made a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Daniel Cowan 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: Allen Conger review VFD contract- Allen Conger stated that the July 4, 2014 fireworks were a success. Allen Conger stated that planning and considering two-radios.

Acceptance of Prior Minutes

Vice-Chairman OD Netter made a motion to approve the Public Hearing Meeting minutes held on June 3, 2014. Commissioner Scott Downing seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Commissioner Scott Downing, all voting for the motion.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes held on June 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 Special Called minutes held on June 25, 2014. Vice-Chairman OD Netter 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: NONE

County Board Reports: NONE

County Manager's Report:

County Manager Frank Feild reported the following:

Perry House Road Bridge

The Toll way Authority critiqued our GTIB Grant application for the Perry House Road Bridge. They recommended we resubmit the application, but first identify about \$400,000 in additional local match funding so the application will be competitive.

The grant application went forward last October with only the County and Watkins Engineering having put anything into it. There was no cash match or letters of support from anyone else. Our state officials did not inquire about it until after the selection process was completed. This is simply an observation; not a criticism. But, if we want this project to move forward, it will require more of our money and greater involvement of our leadership. I would recommend raising \$100,000 from among our community partners that are concerned about this bridge; and then borrowing \$300,000 to make up the local match that is being recommended.

One of the options we are looking into is borrowing this money from the GTIB; hoping that this will help us leverage an affirmative outcome. The money will not be drawn if the grant is not approved. The terms of the loan, and how we would repay it are still being studied.

Queensland

The Water Well Trust has contracted with 10 homeowners in Queensland to assist them in drilling individual wells. The wells are being done as a combination grant-loan. A total of 7 wells have now been drilled; with 4 of them fully connected.

Courtney Whitman of the Ben Hill Development Authority has been coordinating between the homeowners and the Water Well Trust. Jason Miller has been coordinating with the Health Department for permitting, and with Lamb Well Drilling to do the work.

These are deep wells with heavy-duty pumps. The work includes all the wiring, plumbing and disconnecting from the old Queensland Water System. It also includes water testing and certification before hook-up.

Development Authority of Ben Hill County

The Development Authority of Ben Hill County is sponsoring a series of FREE Saturday evening concerts called "Summer Nights in the Park". They feature local musicians, and are being held in Blue & Gray Park on July 12th and August 18th from 6-10 p.m.; and August 30th from 4-10 p.m. The concerts showcase our community's small business owners and entrepreneurs; and 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.

The Development Authority of Ben Hill County is accepting applications for a paid Internship Position to be performed between August 1st and December 31st, 2014. The position is open to undergraduate students, graduate students, and recent graduates who want to accomplish projects as part of the Development Authority of Ben Hill County and learn the operations of county government. Funding is being provided by the Civic Affairs Foundation of the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG). The selected Intern will be hired as a part-time county employee and paid for up to 200 hours at \$10.00 per hour.

Written applications should be mailed to the Development Authority of Ben Hill County, 402-A East Pine Street, Fitzgerald, GA 31750; and should include a letter explaining the applicant's interest in an Internship plus a Resume/Curriculum Vita. Applications will be accepted until July 25, 2014. For Questions, contact Courtney Whitman at (229) 426-5100.

RBEG Grant

We have been notified by USDA that our application for a RBEG Grant has been approved. USDA will provide \$80,000. This is a \$ 176,500 project, which is designed to demonstrate new tools for Strike Force Counties that will help them break the cycle of perpetual poverty. It will use technology to connect GA Appleseed attorneys in Atlanta with small Farm businesses in rural Georgia; helping them convert their operations to new crops and take advantage of emerging market opportunities. The Development Authority of Ben Hill County is the facilitator for this innovative program; which has already earned the personal support of the USDA State Director and key decision-makers at the USDA Strike Force in Washington.

This program has also helped GA Appleseed in their competitive application for a \$400,000 Mary Babcock Foundation Grant; which will enable them to conduct legal clinics on heirs property. The Babcock Foundation Grant application also includes Fitzgerald and Ben Hill County as partners and beneficiaries.

County Cookout

In conjunction with the Summer Nights in the Park event on August 30th, we are planning a Cookout for County employees and their families. Our County is blessed with truly great employees who set the example for the rest of the community. We want to say thanks for all the sacrifices that they, and their families, make every day so our people can enjoy a high-quality of life.

Departmental Review & Staffing Study

The Carl Vinson Institute of Government Team has met with most of the Constitutional Offices and Departments.

First Responders

The victim who was trapped in the wrecked car on February 5th and his family visited our EMS on June 20th. They brought lunch and thanked the EMS staff for all they did to save his life.

This was a terrible accident that ended up costing the victim his leg. It also served to highlight some serious leadership and behavioral problems in the first responder community that the Commission has already addressed. Many people have reported that in every subsequent incident and exercise, all of our first responders are working together as a professional team.

EMA Director Jason Miller conducted an excellent emergency management training exercise on Bells Cabin Road on June 20th. Our first responders had the opportunity to participate and deal with real-life problems associated with a multiple vehicle accident. The exercise was planned and orchestrated by Art Hardeman; a member of our EMS staff. After watching his performance, I have appointed Art Hardeman as the Deputy EMA Director; and he will assist us in planning future exercises and preparing for contingencies. We appreciate Mr. Hardeman's skills and his dedication to protecting the lives of our citizens.

At the post-exercise debriefing, all parties represented agreed that we needed more training in on-scene command & control; and that the 4th of July festivities would be a good opportunity to apply this in a non-emergency situation. Director Miller therefore planned a command-post exercise for July 4th at Paulk Park; enabling first responders to react quickly in case they were needed. Unfortunately, the exercise had to be cancelled due to a lack of participation by the First Responders.

Annexation Request: NONE

Rezoning Application: NONE

Alcohol Application: NONE

Old Business:

Courthouse Canvas Unveiling

County Manager Frank Feild informed the Commissioners that as part of its Centennial Celebration, the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) contracted to photograph all the county courthouses in Georgia. The Counties were offered the opportunity to buy a professionally-produced canvas of their courthouse; and the Ben Hill County Commission decided to do this. The full set of Georgia courthouse canvasses was first displayed at the ACCG Convention in Savannah in April; and the photographer is now working on a coffee table book of all these pictures which will be released in August.

The Ben Hill County Commission is proud to unveil the canvas of the Ben Hill County Courthouse, and to present it as a gift to our citizens.

Public Transportation

County Manager Frank Feild informed the Commissioners 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 this month. If not, we will be considered for the program year beginning in July of 2015. We are still waiting for an answer.

If our application is approved for 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 have developed another option using a 3rd party contractor. I have negotiated a service agreement with Resource Management Systems; which runs public transportations systems in 12 other counties. This is a 90-day renewable agreement that would put 2 vans on the road; one as a public shuttle and the other as a contract service. We believe it can break even; but this will be contingent on getting contracts from Medicaid, DHS, and local businesses to transport passengers. The one-way fare for the public shuttle will be \$3, and we will operate a limited number of hours per week. The contractor has signed the agreement, and it is waiting on the Commission's approval.

Mr. Field said we still have one issue to resolve before we can begin service; and that is the insurance on the vans. We are looking at several options.

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.

Mr. Feild recommendation to the Commission is to approve the Interim Public Transportation System; contingent upon resolution of the insurance issue; and authorize the Chairman to sign the agreement.

Vice Chairman OD Netter made motion to approve the Interim Public Transportation System. Commissioner Scott Downing seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Scott Downing, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting for the motion.

Fitzgerald Ben Hill County Land Bank/Intergovernmental Agreement

County Manager Frank Feild informed the Commissioners that in order to facilitate the start-up of the Land Bank, we are recommending the appointment of Commissioner Scott Downing and me to the board; to fill the County's 2 and 3-year positions, respectively. Courtney Whitman and I will share the duties of the Executive Director with the City's staff appointees. The City will appoint Councilman Albert Webb and Cam Jordan to its 2 and 3-year positions, respectively. Cam Jordan and Whitney Justice will share the duties of

Executive Director with Courtney and me. The 5th board member will be nominated by the first 4 board members; and will be jointly appointed by the City and County to a 1-year term. The School Board will be invited to send a representative as an Ex-Officio member at all Board Meetings. Kyle Cook will be appointed as the primary legal counsel. A Joint Resolution is attached. Mr. Feild recommendation to the Commission is to adopt the attached resolution.

Vice-Chairman OD Netter made motion to adopt resolution as express with the exception if school board member comes back, change if school member wants to participate. Commissioner Scott Downing seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Scott Downing, Commissioner Bennie Calloway and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting for the motion.

Queensland and Monitor Schools

County Manager Frank Feild informed the Commissioners that Connie Graham led a discussion at the June 25th Special Called Meeting about a historical sign to commemorate the Queensland School. We have designed the sign and put it into production. It will be ready for a ceremony that is scheduled on August 5th in Queensland as part of the Grand Homecoming. A proof of the design is attached for your review. The cost will be \$ 1,772.00; which includes shipping and handling. We recommend the County pay the first \$1,000 of the cost; and Mr. Graham has agreed to lead the fundraising for the balance. The attached Joint Resolution describes the history of the Queensland School, and we recommend the Commission and the School Board jointly adopt it for presentation at the August 5th Ceremony.

Finally, although the Queensland School is no longer standing, the Monitor School building is still structurally sound and deserves to be preserved and recognized as part of this community's heritage. Commissioner Bennie Calloway has made a major investment in the Monitor Center and has developed a plan to turn the Old Monitor School into a Cultural Center. We recommend the Commission acknowledge Commissioner Calloway's efforts and endorse this project; commencing with a historical sign similar to the one for the Queensland School.

Mr. Feild recommendation to the Commission is to approve the the expenditure of \$1,000 towards the Queensland School Historical Plaque, adopt the attached Joint County-School Board Resolution, and endorse planning for the Monitor School Historical Plaque and Cultural Center projects.

Vice-Chairman OD Netter made motion to approve the expenditure of 1,000 towards Queensland School Historical Plaque, to adopt the attached Joint County-School Board Resolution, and to endorse planning for the Monitor School Historical Plaque and Cultural Center projects. Commissioner Scott Downing seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Scott Downing, Commissioner Daniel Cowan and Commissioner Bennie Calloway all voting for the motion.

New Business:

Board of Assessors Appointment

Randy Hughes term on the Board of Assessors expires on July 13th. He has been a loyal and valuable member of this board and has agreed to serve another 3-year term if reappointed.

Mr. Feild recommendation to the Commission is to reappoint Randy Hughes to another 3-year term on the Board of Assessors.

Vice-Chairman OD Netter made a motion to reappoint Randy Hughes to the Board of Assessors. Commissioner Scott Downing seconded; which passed with Vice-Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Scott Downing, Commissioner Bennie Calloway and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting for the motion.

Revolving Loan Fund

Vice-Chairman OD Netter made a motion to approve Shorty's Trucking Company RLF loan in the amount of \$30,000 and approve the Chairman and Pamela Turner to sign all documents. Commissioner Scott Downing seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Scott Downing, Commissioner Bennie Calloway and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting on motion.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the White Horse Salon loan for re-finance. 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 on motion.

Housing Preservation Grant

County Manager Frank Feild informed the Commissioners that USDA has announced the availability of a Rural Development Housing Preservation Grant to help preserve and repair housing for low and very-low income families living in rural areas. These grants must be administered through Town or County Governments, Public Agencies, Federally-Recognized Indian Tribes, and non-profit and faith-based organizations. They can be used for a variety of needs, such as repairs to resolve health or safety issues or for energy-efficiency improvements to reduce utility costs. The program also boosts economic activity for housing contractors in rural areas who are hired to make the home upgrades and repairs.

We have contacted several contractors about preparing and application and administering the grant for us. In the interim, Courtney Whitman and I are collecting information that will be required for the application; which is due by July 28th.

Commissioner Scott Downing made motion to approve the submission of the Housing Preservation Grant. Vice-Chairman OD Netter seconded motion; which passed with Commissioner Scott Downing, Vice-Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Daniel Cowan and Commissioner Bennie Calloway all voting for the motion.

Road Dedication

The City of Fitzgerald has adopted a Resolution to dedicate the road and entrance to the Paulk Park Pavilion and Campground as Dave Sims Way. The City Resolution is contingent upon the County passing a similar Resolution. It will go into effect upon its passage. A proposed County Resolution is attached.

Commissioner Scott Downing made a motion to adopt the Road Dedication Resolution. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Scott Downing, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice Chairman OD Netter, and Commissioner Bennie Calloway all voting on motion.

Purple Heart Resolution

The City of Fitzgerald, along with many other cities and counties, has adopted a resolution designating them as Purple Heart community. This honors those men and women who have been wounded or killed by enemy fire while serving in our Armed Forces.

Ben Hill County has the opportunity to join these communities by being designated a Purple Heart County.

Commissioner Scott Downing made a motion to adopt the Purple Heart Resolution. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Scott Downing, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chairman OD Netter and Commissioner Bennie Calloway all voting on motion.

Traveling Wall

The Traveling Wall will be in Ashburn September 4-7. This is a 3/5th scale model of the Vietnam Wall in Washington, D.C. It is being sponsored by the Ashburn City Council and the Turner County Board of Commissioners, and will be the only appearance of the Traveling Wall in Georgia.

The exhibit will be open 24-hours a day and will be located just off I-75, Exit 82 on the Carroll's Sausage property; next to the large American flag and adjacent to the Big Peanut Monument.

As part of the display, the N.C. Helicopter Pilots Association will be displaying four Vietnam Era helicopters. Also present will be "Through The Eyes"; one of the largest photo and Vietnam - era memorabilia displays. It has been shown in 40 states and 350 communities, to over 10 million visitors.

The opening Memorial Ceremony will be at 10:00 a.m. on Friday, September 5th. It will honor each of the 36 servicemen from the seven counties in our area that gave their lives in Vietnam. Seven circles of white crosses will represent the counties, and individual crosses will represent the 36 servicemen. The Atlanta Pipes Band will provide music for the ceremony; which will include a wreath-laying and tolling of the bell for each serviceman.

All County Commissioners, Mayors and City Council members from the seven counties are invited to attend. The City of Fitzgerald has offered to share the cost of the wreath with us. Ben Hill County has been offered the opportunity of having a display area as part of the exhibit and to participate in the salute to the Vietnam War dead from Ben Hill County.

Commissioner Scott Downing made a motion for the County to participate in the display and salute to include \$750 for the promotional brochure and half the cost of the wreath; and designate Chairman Philip C. Jay, III to represent the County in laying the wreath. Vice-Chairman OD Netter seconded motion; which passed with Commissioner Scott Downing, Vice Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Bennie Calloway and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting on the motion.

Tax Digest

We received the 2014 Tax Digest last week. There has been a \$7.6 M loss in the digest; due to a variety of reasons; primarily property devaluations and covenants.

If we take the rollback, it will be 14.881 mills. This will be a 1.22% reduction in taxes and a \$63,412 decrease in projected collections. Normally, when a county has a situation like this, the solution is to raise the millage rate to increase taxes and balance the budget. One of our neighboring counties is advertising a 23% property tax increase this year.

The School Board increasing the millage rate by 2 mills will put an increasingly heavy burden on our people; and our higher taxes will make Ben Hill County much less appealing to businesses thinking about coming here. As a taxpayer, I am very disappointed. As a Manager, I know we can do better.

I recommend the County take the rollback and tighten its belt another notch. This will require scraping some more barnacles off the ship; but it should not require penalizing our employees by doing another furlough.

We are doing a much better job of managing money than we did in 2011. We increased the fund balance by \$ 344,000 in 2013; in addition to providing our employees a long-overdue bonus check. These are not dramatic gains; but they are legitimate; and we all need to be proud of them. I believe our Constitutional Officers and Department Heads can do this again.

Vice-Chairman OD Netter made a motion to adopt the rollback of 14.881 mills for 2014. Commissioner Scott Downing seconded motion; which passed with Vice-Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Scott Downing, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting on motion.

Timber Harvesting Ordinance

Ben Hill County does not have a formal process for tracking timber cutting in the county. We have been looking into this and suspect that some of our timber harvesting is not being reported or taxed.

Berrien County has had a timber harvesting ordinance on its books since 2004. They require all timber cutters to obtain a no-cost permit and post it at the entrance to the site being harvested. Timber cutters must also provide a copy of their certificate of liability to cover the cost of repairs in case they damage the county roads. The Berrien County Public Works Director determines what routes they can use; which saves their roads and bridges. A copy of the permit is then provided the Tax Assessor, the Tax Collector, the Public Works Director, and the Code Enforcement Officer so the operation can be monitored. Their ordinance also provides for compliance and penalties. The County Administrator is responsible for enforcement; and citations may be issued by the Code Enforcement Officer,

the Public Works Director, and any certified county law enforcement officer acting under the authority of the Berrien County Sheriff. Citations for violations require appearance before the Magistrate Court of Berrien County. Lowndes County has a similar ordinance.

We would like to introduce a proposed timber harvesting ordinance for Ben Hill County; which is modeled after Berrien County. Since this would involve a number of businesses and landowners, we are only doing a first reading tonight. This gives the public and the Commission time to review it and deliberate. The proposed ordinance will be posted on the county website for public review; and will be available at the County offices for review during normal business hours.

Agenda Changes and/or add ons: NONE

Legislative Report:

Commissioner Scott Downing mentioned that there will be a Transportation study committee conducted by House (Representative Jay Roberts) and an Economic Development study committee conducted by the State (Senator Steve Gooch). The meeting will mostly likely be at the end of this month in the legislative building at the Capitol. Commissioner Downing stated he would keep everyone updated and encourage the Commissioners to sit in on the meetings.

Commissioner's Remarks: NONE

Meeting adjourned

_____ Philip C. Jay III, Chairman

_____ Pamela Turner, Acting County Clerk