

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
OF THE BEN HILL COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON JUNE 2, 2015 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
Bennie Calloway	Commissioner
Daniel Cowan	Commissioner
Frank Feild	County Manager
Donna Prather	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 Bennie Calloway 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 Bennie Calloway, 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 Bennie Calloway 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 04, 2015. Commissioner Bennie Calloway seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chairman OD Netter, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting for the motion.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes held on May 05, 2015. Vice-Chairman OD Netter seconded the motion; which passed with, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chairman OD Netter and Commissioner Bennie Calloway all voting for the motion.

Commissioner Bennie Calloway made a motion to approve the Special Called Meeting held on May 12, 2015. Vice-Chairman OD Netter seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Vice-Chairman OD Netter, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting for the motion.

Constitutional Officer: NONE

Department Head Reports:

County Extension 4H Agent Jeri Gelliland gave an update of some changes being made. They have a new District Director and Makayla Rinear, her secretary, has resigned to take another job.

Vice-Chairman OD Netter made a motion to approve hiring for the secretary position and the chairman to sign all documents. 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.

Executive Director of Economic Development Courtney Whitman gave an update of all activity concerning the Development Authority of Ben Hill County, Revolving Loan Fund.

She reported the Summer Food Program has begun and she named all sites that will have food available.

She reminded everyone that Summer Nights in the Park will began June 6th at 6pm until 10pm. She is still looking for vendors for these events.

Ms. Whitman also reported she, Cam Jordan, and Frank Feild did a presentation for USDA Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Administration, Dr. Parham, State Director of Georgia Quinton Robinson and other USDA colleagues regarding the Ben Hill County Strike-force Initiative Demonstration Project.

Road Superintendent Tim Kegebein gave an update on the roads condition on Bethlehem Church Road is in poor and dangerous condition. He reported 40 trees were down; but thanks to volunteers and two deputy sheriffs they were able to clean up the roads.

County Board Reports:

Community Service Board Member, Mr. Connie Graham, thanked the Commissioners for the opportunity to serve and he gave a brief report from the Georgia Association of Community Service Boards Annual Board Retreat May 14th & 15th. Their discussions included being the lead in advocacy, development and implementation of services for those within the communities we serve.

County Manager's Report:

County Manager Frank Feild reported the following:

Budget Review

Mr. Feild gave a brief review of the revenues and expenditures as of April 30, 2015.

CSX Crossing on Lilac Road

DOT approved the engineering cost estimate for the Lilac Road railroad crossing on May 6th and sent CSX a contract. The construction will include two quadrant mast mounted flashing lights, bells, and gates. This project will cost \$ 335,779. DOT will pay for everything. Once the agreement is signed, DOT will issue CSX a notice to proceed with construction.

Perry House Road Bridge

We understand that state funds for rebuilding the Perry House Road Bridge will be put in the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). We are deeply appreciative to Jay Roberts, the new DOT Director of Planning, and to former Commissioner Scott Downing who lobbied for this project on behalf of Ben Hill and Irwin Counties.

Bi-pass Sidewalks

We met with DOT this morning to develop options for a safe pedestrian walkway between the Ocilla Highway and the Wal-Mart complex. This area has a high traffic density, and we are very concerned about wheelchair “scooters” traveling on the bypass road surface and along its narrow shoulders. We are also researching the possibility of building a pedestrian bridge on the north side of the box culvert.

EMS Calls

EMS Director Mark Shealy has calculated the number of calls the EMS responded to in 2014; breaking it down by City and the unincorporated areas of the County. There were a total of 4,816 calls; 804 were in the unincorporated areas of the County; while 4,012 were inside the City of Fitzgerald. Although the population is split about 50/50; as is the LOST distribution; over 83% of the calls our EMS responds to are in the City.

Federal Building Update

This is a 2011 SPLOST project; and is being done in phases. The County is the General Contractor and is supplementing it with County labor and equipment.

The County staff removed the tree stumps and excavated the foundation on May 19th and 20th.

On May 26th, Low Country Basements of Savannah arrived to begin sealing the basement walls on the inside and outside. The County staff smoothed-out the foundation walls to insure they could be successfully sealed, and the contractor has completed sealing the outside. Rock is currently being installed to reinforce the original French drain; then the excavation will be filled with sand and dirt. This should be completed before the end of the week. The contractor will then install a special French drain system, sump pumps, and industrial dehumidifiers inside the basement. This phase of the work should be completed by the end of the month.

The County staff has begun replacing the suspended ceiling tile; removing non-load-bearing interior walls; cleaning the ductwork; rewiring and re-plumbing; and will replace the HVAC system. We have a number of other things to do in the next phase, but may have to wait until the SPLOST funds are replenished before proceeding.

This is still a very complex operation, but we are on schedule, operating within the budget, and in compliance with GA Law.

Courthouse Windows

New windows have been custom-built for the courthouse. They resemble the original windows and will increase the building’s energy efficiency. They will be installed in phases to accommodate the court schedule. The County is the General Contractor and is using a combination of contract labor, county labor, and county equipment. This project is on schedule, within budget, and in full compliance with Georgia Law.

New Phone System

The City, County, School District and Hospital all have communications systems that need to be upgraded. Many of our phones can no longer be serviced. We are collaborating to develop a new communications system that will serve all four organizations, and offer redundancy. We believe it will save the taxpayers a significant amount of money. A contractor is putting together an Executive Summary, a network map, and a cost-benefit-analysis for decision makers in each organization to review, and will be making formal presentations by mid-June.

We have also asked this contractor to prepare a proposal to install a closed-circuit, video teleconferencing system between the courthouse and the jail that would allow video arraignments. This is being done in other counties, and if our Superior Court Judges and the Sheriff accept the concept, we believe it could save the County considerable costs and risks of shuttling and guarding prisoners.

Housing Development Grant

The two parcels associated with the proposed tax-credit housing development between North Merrimac and Dewey McGlamry Road has been recommended for rezoning by the Planning & Zoning Commission. They are both in the City Limits and will be included in the City's Urban Redevelopment Plan. Affordable Equity Partners will submit the Application to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs before the June 11th deadline. We anticipate a 50/50 chance of it being approved, and expect to have a decision by November. If it is approved, the development must be completed by the end of 2017. If it is not approved, the project will be resubmitted for consideration in 2016. There is enough foot print to apply for a 2nd housing development in the future.

Many people do not understand this project, and we have faced considerable opposition in putting the application together. I would like to set the record straight in a couple of areas:

- This is not government-owned or subsidized housing. The developer will be the property owner and will pay all taxes, permits and fees; just like everyone else.
- This will be quality housing; and local contractors will have the opportunity to bid on the work. This construction will involve about 48 housing units.
- The construction cost will be approximately \$9M. It will create a \$1.3M annual impact on local businesses and \$225,000 annual impact for Government Services. When it is completed, it will create 4 fulltime jobs to manage it. This is real money going into the pockets of our citizens and offsetting their taxes.
- All potential residents will be required to complete an application and pass strict selection requirements, such as:
 - ❖ Criminal Background Check
 - ❖ Positive financial credit of 50% and above
 - ❖ Meet minimum credit score stipulations
 - ❖ Show proof of employment
 - ❖ Have a monthly income that is 3 times the amount of their monthly rent.

Annexation Request: NONE

Rezoning Application: NONE

Alcohol Application: NONE

Old Business:

Public Protection Classification/Skip Starling

The Insurance Services Office (commonly known as ISO) recently inspected the Ben Hill Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. and assigned a new Public Protection Classification for the unincorporated areas of Ben Hill County. This rating goes into effect on July 1st of this year, and is used by insurance underwriters to determine the premiums each property owner pays for homeowner's insurance.

Both the rating system and the inspection criteria have changed since the last ISO visit. There is conflicting information about what this new Public Protection Classification will really mean to the rates homeowners will pay in the unincorporated areas.

Skip Starling of National Fire Services, Inc. is a nationally-recognized expert on fire safety and ISO inspections. The County hired Mr. Starling to evaluate our fire protection posture and advise us on what we can do to improve it. We have asked Mr. Starling to help us better understand the new rating we just received.

Mr. Starling explained the letter received from ISO. He explained the ratings received by the Volunteer Fire Department and things that could be done to improve them.

Public Transportation Update

DOT says they expect to receive our 3 vans later this month. They will be painted and stenciled with Ben Hill Transit; then our contractor can pick them up in Atlanta. We plan to begin operating the Ben Hill Transit System within a week of receiving the vans. All three of these vans will have lifts for wheelchairs and scooters. We will begin by offering on-demand service to all our citizens; from one point to another within Ben Hill County; for a one-way fare of \$ 3. Trips must be scheduled 24-hours in advance by calling (229) 426-RIDE. After we begin operating and make adjustments, we will look at offering service outside of Ben Hill County as well.

We met with RMS, our third-party-contractor who will operate the system for us. They have identified, hired and trained local drivers; and will be storing the vehicles with our Maintenance Department. They have prepared brochures announcing the service and how it will work.

New Business:

Planning & Zoning Commission Appointments

Vice-Chairman nominated Reverend George Vereen. Commissioner Daniel Cowan nominated Palmer Parrott.

Commissioner Bennie Calloway made a motion to appoint George Vereen and Palmer Parrott to the Planning & Zoning Commission. Vice-Chairman OD Netter seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Vice-Chairman OD Netter, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting on the motion.

Ben Hill County Youth Summer Work Program

County Manager Frank Feild stated the Commission budgeted money to support the Ben Hill County Student Summer Hire Program. He gave a brief presentation on how we can implement the program.

The Commissioners denied the request from Reverend Herbert Jones to help fund his Youth Summer Program in order to invest in its own program.

Commissioner Bennie Calloway made a motion to approve the Ben Hill County Summer Work Program, hire five youth employees from Reverend Herbert Jones, and hire five youth employees from the community. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, and Vice-Chairman OD Netter all voting for the motion.

Agenda Changes and/or add ons: NONE

Legislative Report:

Vice-Chairman OD Netter gave a brief update on NACO.

Commissioner's Remarks:

Commissioner Bennie Calloway stated at least with the Summer Work Program the children will receive minimum wage and none of it will be taken away them.

Meeting adjourned

_____ Philip C. Jay III, Chairman

_____ Donna R. Prather, County Clerk