

MINUTES
MERIWETHER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Work Session
MAY 7, 2024
4:00 PM

Commissioners Present: Chairman Gene King, Vice Chairman Adam Worsley, Commissioner Rosla Plant, Commissioner Emmett Collins, Commissioner Bryan Threadgill

Commissioners Absent: None

Staff Present: County Administrator Jarrod McCarthy, Assistant County Administrator Blue Cole, County Clerk Allyson Stephens, and Finance Director John Gorton

Staff Absent: None

I. CALL TO ORDER

The Work Session was called to order by Chairman Gene King at 4:00 p.m.

II. NEW BUSINESS

1. Finance Director John Gorton provided the Board with the prior year of costs, which he explained is the current year of what the County is paying. Director Gorton stated the total cost per employee is \$861.19, with the employee paying \$149.50 and the County paying \$711.69 per month. Director Gorton explained that with the proposed increase with Anthem, the total cost increases to \$1033.43 per month with \$179.40 of those costs to the employee and \$854.03 to the County. Director Gorton stated this is using the same percentages as the prior year. Director Gorton explained the employee costs would increase by \$29.90 per month for an individual plan to the employee. If the employee has coverage for a spouse, the costs will increase by \$73.46 to the employee. If the employee has coverage for a child or children, the costs will increase by \$58.77 to the employee. If the employee has family coverage, the cost will increase by \$116.11 to the employee. Director Gorton explained this is the proposed renewal provided by NFP. Director Gorton provided a sheet to the Board that provides a breakdown of the budget and behind it is a report from the system that matches that sheet. Director Gorton provided what was budgeted year to date, May encumbrance, which is what will be paid for in May, and estimates for June. Director Gorton stated that he included the County paying \$25,000 from July 1st through October, which would be the County paying completely the entire \$295,000 dollar increase. Director Gorton stated that the County would still come up to almost a quarter of a million dollars of savings in the budget if the County took on the entire increase. Director Gorton stated that he realizes there were concerns about what the increase would be and giving that increase to the employee. Director Gorton stated that it came out to about \$0.17 cents for the individual. Director Gorton stated that if he gave every employee in the County \$0.17 cents, the ones that do not have insurance would make \$0.17 cents an hour more, and if we offset the pay increase with \$0.17 cents per hour, the County is essentially paying for the insurance on its own anyway. Director Gorton proposed that the County, as a benefit to the employees, this year only absorb the excess cost on the increase of the premium. Director Gorton stated at the very end of the page, that for total FY25, he provided an estimate for 9 months to October, and even increased the amount to \$35,000 dollars for three months in case it went higher. Director Gorton stated the budget for that is \$1.73 million which is only \$23,000 dollars more, if budgeted and there is a substantial

increase next year as well. Director Gorton stated the money is already in the budget if the County was to absorb this one time increase for employee benefits to help retain our employees, keeping the current insurance rates, not passing anything onto the employees. Commissioner Threadgill asked if it was \$25,000 per month. Director Gorton stated that was to finish out the fiscal year. Director Gorton stated that was for the nine months at \$1.24 million and then the \$480,000 dollars is the three months of July, August, and September to finish out the fiscal year with a \$35,000 increase and would come out to the same amount that is budgeted now in the amount of \$1.7 million dollars because of the \$250,000 dollar savings. Commissioner Threadgill asked how we are saving that amount. Director Gorton stated vacancies and not everyone is on the County insurance. Commissioner Threadgill stated that was a broad negative outlook. Finance Director Gorton explained that the previous Finance Director budgeted as if every employee were to elect to have at least employee coverage. Finance Director Gorton stated that this is how he estimated to get to the \$1.7 million was if every employee were to elect to have individual coverage, and right now there are only 109 employees who have elected coverage. Commissioner Threadgill raised the concern about the cost if more people enrolled in the coverage. Finance Director Gorton explained that for 1 month the cost is \$1,000 dollars for the employee, which is \$12,401.16 for the year, which is a little over \$1,000 per employee that the County would pay. Assistant Administrator Blue Cole stated that the budget allows more employees to elect coverage. Finance Director Gorton stated there is enough in the budget to take on 18 additional employees. Chairman Gene King stated he understood the way Director Gorton explained it by finishing out this current year, but agreed with Commissioner Threadgill that next year, if looking to be fully staffed, since the Board is looking to vote on this tomorrow if this was just to finish out the current year. Director Gorton stated that staff would budget for the increase next year as well. Chairman King stated that if we don't increase the amount on the employees this year, then when it comes time for the budget for next year, could the cost be looked at then to see if the employees need to start putting in a little more per pay period. Finance Director Gorton stated that the plan will go into effect on July 1, 2024, then he will be able to tell by how many employees elect coverage after open enrollment. Director Gorton explained that if it is 20-30 more people, then we could go back and take a look at the cost. Chairman King stated that he feels it can be looked at if we are able to hire that many employees. Assistant Administrator Cole stated that it would be dependent on whether or not the employee chose insurance. Finance Director Gorton stated that if the County chooses to accept the renewal through Anthem, they are offering the employee an option for a Buy-up plan that would offer the employee a lower deductible. Director Gorton stated if the employee opts for the Buy-up plan, then the extra amount for that plan would be the responsibility of the employee. Finance Director Gorton stated that staff would recommend the Wellness Program, that will cost the County \$15,000 dollars after the Anthem allotment of \$15,000 dollars, and it will be strongly encouraged to the employee to sign up for the Wellness program to help bring down costs, since the Board of Commissioners would be absorbing the increase of the renewal. Director Gorton explained that the employee cannot be mandated to sign up for the Wellness program, but it is highly encouraged to avoid the employees having to take on additional costs. Chairman King stated it would be his opinion for the County to absorb the cost of the increase at this time, due to short-staffing and the need to keep employees. Director Gorton stated that out of the 106 employees covered, 29 have spouse, child, or family coverage and this would require them to pay at least \$50 or more dollars a month. Chairman King stated that the point of the Work Session is to move forward and the Pay Scale will be a

topic of discussion and feels if the increase is absorbed now and the pay scale is worked out and everyone gets a little bit more, if we have to turn around and ask for some of that back, at least the employees can see the Board is trying. Finance Director Gorton stated that as of now, the county has taken in an excess of \$300,000 dollars in property tax funds from what was budgeted. Director Gorton stated that we can reevaluate after open enrollment to see how many people enroll and get true numbers knowing that each employee will be around \$1,000 dollars per month. Director Gorton stated that he ran the numbers numerous times and came up with what he felt was the fairest solution. Director Gorton stated that staff recommends raising the life insurance amount from \$35,000 to \$50,000, as it will save the County \$150.00 per year. Director Gorton stated he would recommend the Wellness Program over Long-term disability at this time to encourage better health and reduce insurance costs. Commissioner Plant asked if the employee is responsible for the LTD. Director Gorton stated that LTD and STD are both employee elected and paid for by the employee. Director Gorton stated that the County just pays the life insurance and there was no change in dental or vision costs for the upcoming renewal. Director Gorton stated that staff would recommend moving the life insurance, STD, and LTD to Symetra, as they were able to save us money and increase the life insurance benefit for the employee to \$50,000 dollars from \$35,000 and save the County money. Commissioner Plant asked if there was one charge or two for both LTD and STD. Director Gorton stated there are two separate charges and it is based on salary and age. Commissioner Plant stated she realized there was no vote to be taken today, but she is in favor of the County paying the increase and not passing that off to the employees. Commissioner Threadgill stated he would like to clarify his questioning, because the County is looking to move to some type of grading system, to increase the salaries and it will be based on their evaluations, and because we don't know what that increase will be, it will need to be balanced at some point as there is a limited budget. Commissioner Threadgill stated that we are already nearing "X" number of employees, which is half the budget being paid out and we need to make sure that the amount for other things for the County doesn't go down. Commissioner Plant felt that benefits are important and could help retain employees. Asst. Administrator Cole stated it was a step in the right direction and staff has been working extremely hard to get good information and provide options. Asst. Administrator Cole stated every one of the conversations came back to how we can improve it for the employees. Asst. Administrator Cole stated that better benefits are a small step, but a step to improving the retention rate. Commissioner Plant discussed how insurance is always changing. Director Gorton stated that ACCG did decline to quote the insurance for the County at this time. Commissioner Threadgill stated that is another problem he has with ACCG, as they tend to do that on an annual basis and refuse it, but the amounts the County pays out to ACCG each year is astronomical when all added up and feels the County needs to start finding other sources to put our educational part into. Commissioner Threadgill stated that it doesn't have to be with ACCG, and he doesn't agree with having to pay out \$100,000 dollars or more each year for ACCG to cover certain things, but they always refuse our partnership with the insurance. Commissioner Threadgill stated that ACCG is a private entity and has nothing to do with government.

2. Finance Director Gorton provided the Board with a statement from the State Office of Treasury. Director Gorton stated that last month, \$37,000 dollars was earned in interest and so far, this year \$212,709.00 has been gained in interest from the Investment Pool. Director Gorton provided the Board with the Real Property statement and explained that as of right now the County is almost \$250,000 over budget, with an excess revenue of over \$300,000 dollars.

Director Gorton stated if raises are implemented, the tax money is there to pay for them already, and he expects the current \$8.1 million dollar budget to go up to around \$9 million or higher. Director Gorton stated another \$1 million was added to the Investment Pool, and he expects that account to earn over \$40,000 dollars per month. Director Gorton stated the interest rate is pretty good and the yield was at 5.38816 percent. Director Gorton provided the Board with a Pay Scale at a 3% step increase with grades 8-30, and Department Heads 1-10. Director Gorton stated there is a 3% increase between steps. Director Gorton stated that throughout the pages of the report, there are current rates, job titles, full-time, part-time, grade entry level, grade step, new rate, differences, current salary, new salary, and a salary increase annually. Director Gorton explained that he bumped the Sheriff's Office from \$21.50 to \$22.50 due to the Sheriff's Office experiencing turnover. Director Gorton stated just about everyone in the Fire Department moved up a little on the pay scale. Director Gorton stated the Firefighter recruits and Firefighters are already on the scale. Director Gorton stated he spoke with Chief Stephens, and he was fine with that until they get the certification for paramedic and then they would get an increase. Director Gorton stated that staff would recommend forming a committee that consisted of himself, HR Director Chambers, the HR Director, and Administrator McCarthy to get evaluations from the Department Heads and Elected Officials to move them on the scale, making sure that it is within a budget approved by the Board. Commissioner Threadgill asked if the current evaluations are scored on a 1,2,3,4 basis and if this is the maximum that can be done for each step, will each evaluation to get that maximum requires a 4, and is it 75% if a 3, 50% if a 2, and 25% at a 1. Director Gorton stated that preliminary discussions were that the employee had to score a 3-4 on two evaluations, required certifications, and training. Director Gorton stated there would need to be something to justify moving up to the next step. Director Gorton stated that it is not guaranteed that every year the employee will move up to the next step. Vice Chairman Worsley joined the Work Session at 4:38 p.m. Administrator McCarty stated that evaluation methods would have to be looked at as they are ultimately linked to the Budget and performance will also have to be considered. Director Gorton stated that the criteria would have to be set to determine what constitutes a step increase. Director Gorton stated that staff recommends accepting the Pay Scale, but not giving any step increases until the next budget year so it can be budgeted. Director Gorton stated during that time frame controls can be tightened on how an employee moves step to step. Director Gorton stated that each department will have to develop their own operating procedures on what constitutes their employee moving step to step, as each department will require something different. Commissioner Threadgill stated that recommendations can always be made to Constitutional Officers, however what they request for their budget is completely up to them. Director Gorton stated that he did sit down with all Elected Officials and his numbers are based on their recommendations for their department. Commissioner Plant stated that the job description is critical to the pay scale because each job description is not the same. Commissioner Plant used EMS as an example, each level has different requirements and certifications. Commissioner Plant stated that goals and objectives should be uniform across the board. Commissioner Plant stated all of that goes back into the pay scale. Director Gorton stated there are job descriptions for over 95% of County employees. There was discussion from Commissioner Plant about the certifications required for each level of job. Commissioner Collins discussed the entry level rate for a Firefighter. Director Gorton stated that he requested pay scales from other counties on the list serve and out of 5 counties, 3 of them included all employees on the same pay scale, one county had Fire and EMS on a separate pay scale, and 1

county had their Sheriff's Office on a different pay scale. Director Gorton answered Commissioner Collins and stated that he did speak with Chief Stephens and in January, recruit Firefighters pay was increased from \$9.50 to \$11.00 per hour. Director Gorton explained that Chief Stephens stated he has had plenty of recruits come in at \$11.00 per hour, but he is having problems with the EMT Intermediate A and B positions that he is having trouble keeping and this is where he wants to focus on getting those salaries up. Director Gorton stated that his recruits and Firefighters making \$11-\$13 dollars per hour is good for him and he has plenty of applications and employees filling those positions who are working towards their certifications. Commissioner Collins had questions about the hours worked and overtime. Director Gorton stated that he is not as familiar with FLSA laws as Chief Stephens, but right now an hourly employee in the Fire Department working 106 hours is making on average \$47,755.00 per year. Commissioner Threadgill asked Director Gorton about the placement on the schedule and why some are all the way over to the H column. Director Gorton explained that the intentions were originally to allow employees to double their salary after 10 years, and he moved it to 3% to allow 13-15 years to double the salary. Chairman King asked what the difference was in a step C and step D. Director Gorton stated that each step is a 3% difference. Chairman King asked why an Equipment Operator II making \$22.09 per hour would be making more than an Equipment Operator II-Crew Leader. Director Gorton stated that is something that would have to be discussed with the department head as to the discrepancy. Chairman King stated there was supposed to be an Equipment Operator I, II, and III and wanted to know where the III is. Commissioner Threadgill stated that this was discussed but has to be voted on and approved by the Board. Chairman King explained that this came from the meeting he and Commissioner Collins had. Chairman King stated that there is a need for motor grader operators, and they need to be making \$22-\$25 per hour, or they will go somewhere else. Chairman King stated that Bill was going to make some modifications to the job description so that Equipment Operator I would be someone who basically does bush hogging, mowing, and weed eating, Equipment Operator II would be able to operate skid steers, mowers, weed eaters, and can operate a mini excavator, and Equipment Operator III would be someone who can run a motor grader, operate all equipment, have a CDL license, and can run a dump truck. Commissioner Threadgill stated that the position being created has to come before the Board and then HR Director Chambers would have to properly grade those positions. Chairman King understood and stated the question remains is why a crew leader is making less than an operator. Director Gorton stated the purpose of this study was to find discrepancies and agreed that a crew leader should be making more. Director Gorton explained that each job will be graded. This will help HR Director Chambers when she has applicants wanting to know the starting pay. Director Gorton stated she will have something to go by. Commissioner Threadgill stated there also needs to be consideration on levels of experience and how that can differentiate on the schedule. Director Gorton explained the current process of budgeting for new hires coming in and the approval that is given based on budget and final approval from the Administrator. Chairman King stated the main reason he was focusing on Operator III is because the County needs motor grader operators and they are going to have to have good pay. Chairman King stated that would justify when an Operator II finds out that an Operator III is up to \$23.50 an hour and he is at \$19, mad and upset, then the Department Head can go to them and tell them as soon as they run the motor grader and get their CDL, they can move up to an Operator III. Chairman King feels this will be an incentive to employees to get the certifications to run the equipment and make better money and have better staffing in Public Works. Director Gorton

stated that 6 individuals have been approved for Operator I and Operator II motor grader training. Director Gorton stated that they will be coming on site and training 6 individuals how to operate a motor grader. Discussion ensued regarding motor graders and getting staff trained to take care of the roadways. Commissioner Threadgill left the meeting at 4:58 p.m. Chairman King stated he understands that the Fire Chief stated he didn't need it right now but felt entry level Firefighter pay could go up another dollar and that might attract more to the County. Director Gorton stated he can run the numbers again if that is what the Board would like. Vice Chairman Worsley stated he felt this is what initiated the discussion for the pay scale were the Firefighters, EMTs, and Public Works. Director Gorton explained that Chief Stephens is having a problem keeping employees after they get their certification. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that he felt there was something in place requiring an employee to stay a certain amount of time if the County paid for their certification. Director Gorton stated that some of the Firefighters pay for their own certification and then leave to make more money. Commissioner Plant explained how the Fire department was completely volunteer until the passing of the Fire Bond and Fire District in 2017. Commissioner Worsley left the room at 5:04 p.m. and returned at 5:04 p.m. There was continued discussion on volunteer Firefighters and if there were still volunteers. There was a long discussion on how the Fire taxes are paid within the County. Director Gorton stated that if the Firefighters pay were increased by \$1.00 per hour, it will cost \$3,264 per employee per year, with the 106 hours and built in overtime. Director Gorton stated right now the recruit Firefighters making \$11.00 per hour have a salary of \$35,904 per year and if you increase that by \$1.00 their salary would go up to \$39,168. Chairman King asked what the step up is making for the Firefighters. Director Gorton stated that a Firefighter is currently at \$12.00 per hour, Firefighter EMT-B is at \$14.33 per hour, and EMT-B is \$13.51 per hour. Director Gorton stated when they get their certification is when they are leaving according to Chief Stephens. Director Gorton stated that this was just to get them on the scale and their December evaluation would be looked at, along with another evaluation, to make sure they are at a 3-4, and parameters would have to be discussed on what constitutes them moving up a step on the scale. Director Gorton stated that staff recommendation would be himself and HR Director Chambers, after receiving the Department Head's evaluation, discuss with County Administrator McCarthy and he determined what the increase would be. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that to him it leaves too much ambiguity among four people and what the employee needs is a clear path. Director Gorton stated that without a scale they have nothing to go on and are just throwing out numbers. Vice Chairman Worsley asked if the total increase would be well within our budget for this year and with interest earned, either or? Vice Chairman Worsley asked if that was to move everyone to J on the scale or if that was entry level. Director Gorton stated that on the initial scale that he presented there was enough to pay for it now and going into the new budget year. Director Gorton stated that we also have the money to cover this scale as well because the tax revenue is already over \$300,000 and we can't go over \$200,000 in the Investment Pool right now, because that is all we have. Chairman King asked if the Investment Pool that Director Gorton is talking about is money that hasn't been spent on road projects and so forth, right? Director Gorton explained that it can be used for operating and maintenance of the General Fund only, and is not taxpayer dollars, and is off investment only of the fund balance of the County. Chairman King stated that he would like to discuss Department Heads. Chairman King stated that if this pay scale is ironed out and is passed, he cannot see the Department Heads getting a large increase at this time, when they are not even 50% staffed, and he has talked with some of them. Chairman King stated if there is a

department that is to have 40 employees and there are only 20 that a department head is overseeing, where does he deserve a large increase, before taking that money and hiring people. Chairman King stated he looks at it as why does the Chief need so much money if he hasn't got enough Indians to build the tribe. Vice Chairman Worsley stated he agreed. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that what he is getting at is the department head's work is half as much if he is not managing a full staff. Chairman King stated he is not disrespecting any Department Head in this County and has tried to reach out to them, and they know where he stands. Chairman King stated he appreciates what they are doing. Chairman King stated what he is getting at is you can't give your employees a dollar raises, and they find out the Department Heads are getting this large amount of money but can't even get enough help to fight a Fire or get a road straightened out or replace a culvert pipe because we don't have the employees. Chairman King stated it is not that he is not doing his job as a department head, he is not having to oversee as much. Chairman King stated that if there was a full staff at Public Works, Barry and Bill would be running all over the County every day because there would be multiple crews with problems. Chairman King stated that this would require mental hustle, but when you only have 2-3 crews and they are fixing potholes on such and such road, it is not the same. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that they were told that Public Works was fully staffed and only short three positions. County Administrator McCarthy stated they still have the full demand for work but he understands the need to build up the team first. Chairman King stated suggested if the pay scale was passed, showing the Department Heads with an increase, but stipulating their increase won't take place until there is a certain number of staff or at least 6 months from now and not immediately. Vice Chairman Worsley stated there is something to be said on the other side of that argument, is when you are short-staffed, you are working harder and feels there are things that can be done to reward those who are performing outside of the pay scale on a regular basis. Vice Chairman Worsley stated if the department is short-staffed and the department is performing at a good level above where your staff is at then you absolutely deserve it, but if you are understaffed, performing like you are understaffed, and keep complaining about how understaffed you are, then you don't need it. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that those instances of departments that are still performing at a higher level with lower staff should be rewarded and that needs to be looked at. Chairman King stated that he feels that if you give it to one department another will get upset. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that we need to be careful and make sure the increases are based on skill level and certifications. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that there needed to be a clear and transparent path on how to get the increases, because if not it appears to be favoritism. Commissioner Collins concern was on the entry level, as well as Chairman King. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that whatever is done and when it is done, will be a mess and people will be upset. Director Gorton stated they will because if you look at the Firefighters it is the number of hours they work times their salary, it will be equivalent to someone working in an office making \$16-\$17 per hour. Vice Chairman Worsley stated he doesn't like that analogy. Director Gorton stated that is how some may view it because a Firefighter working 3000 hours making \$39,000 worked more hours, which is understandable, as they are public safety and have to be on call. Director Gorton stated when you break it out into 2080 that is equivalent to a \$16-\$17 dollar an hour job. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that Director Gorton needed to be careful with that, because if you want to tell me I had to work 3000 hours to make \$39,000 dollars, when someone else is working 2080. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that argument will not fly. Director Gorton stated that Fire almost has to have their own scale. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that is where Department

Heads manage and the Board manages on the budgetary side, because at the end of the day we only have this much money. Vice Chairman Worsley stated we have to decide how many qualified Firefighters we can get with that amount of money. Vice Chairman Worsley asked the question of is that 50 or 10, to pay and be competitive. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that it should be looked at as how many hours worked, divided by how much an employee is paid is how much they make. Chairman King stated he agreed with Vice Chairman Worsley. Chairman King stated that it may sound like they are making the same as a person making \$17.00 per hour, but that person is sitting in an office. Chairman King stated he is not knocking them either, but that person is making \$17.00 an hour with air conditioning and heat and can go to lunch and come back and have weekends and holidays off, but a Firefighter, depending on the rotation, is away from his family. Chairman King stated the number one thing he looks at with the Fire department, public safety, military, is that that employee risks his life, every time he goes into a Fire. Chairman King stated he understands they are getting those hours and some nights they sleep, but some nights they don't and have numerous calls. Chairman King stated that they are not full-staffed and finding out there is only 1 Firetruck a particular day and there are two, there's only two Firefighters, but they are in an ambulance, and this will be addressed on another day, but they are not fully staffed, and we have Fire stations with no one in them. Assistant Administrator Cole stated that he would be afraid of penalizing Department Heads, for a position that we put them in. Asst. Administrator Cole stated if they are understaffed because the pay is underwhelming, or the equipment is underwhelming, we have set that situation up. Assistant Administrator Cole stated that we need to support the Department Heads in their hiring and their staffing, don't we? Vice Chairman Worsley asked Asst. Administrator Cole, did we understaff the department? Asst. Administrator Cole stated that if we are not paying the position enough to bring the staffing in and not supporting the department head in their journey then. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that he could see what Asst. Administrator Cole is saying, but he doesn't want to take full ownership of that. Asst. Administrator Cole stated that he understands that, but we can't start them off in a hole either. Chairman King stated that he has been fighting since he came on Board to get Firefighters, EMTs, and Public Works people out there to get fully staffed and service the community and ensuring that in an emergency someone is getting to the scene on time, as well as being able to get on our dirt roads without sliding in the ditch and that is all his priority. Chairman King stated he didn't say Department Heads don't deserve a raise, but you don't see Department Heads leaving and going to Coweta and another place, because they are already making good pay and they deserve a raise, but they're not struggling like the ones that are down here and leaving us for an offer of 50 cents at the next County. Vice Chairman Worsley stated he feels it is a consensus that nobody on this Board is thinking that every person here doesn't deserve something at some point, but the Department Heads agreed to perform a function at a certain salary. Vice Chairman Worsley stated the Department Heads are not walking out the door or leaving or even threatening to leave to our knowledge but are coming begging for more tools to get their job done. Vice Chairman Worsley stated our first focus would be let's get them what they need to get the job done, now let's go back and make them equitable in what we just did. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that was a better way of saying it as they are not running from us and going somewhere else, and they are not upset and mad. Vice Chairman Worsley stated it is kind of like putting the cart before the horse if we go that way. Director Gorton stated the third page of his handout for the Department Heads is just putting them on a grade, so when they do deserve a raise, you know what grade they are on. Chairman King stated that Director Gorton

and HR Director Chambers handle all that, the Board is focused on approving a pay scale. Chairman King thanked Vice Chairman Worsley for his statement and stated he would love to see Chief Danny Stephens come in later on and say man, we appreciate what y'all did and I've got Firefighters, EMTs, and a department right now that the Board should be proud of. Chairman King stated that's when the Board will tell Chief Stephens he deserves a nice big raise too, because he is handling all that and making it happen, thanking him for his dedication and service. Vice Chairman Worsley asked if the increases were taken out from the first draft provided to the Board and if this was just to get them on the scale. Director Gorton stated that is correct and if looking at the third page that is a \$16,000 dollar increase for Department Heads, \$10,000 of it is what is already approved for the County Clerk, and the rest is what goes to the County Administrator after his 90-day evaluation. Director Gorton stated this is three-fourths of the increase on salaries, which is already half approved and set in stone so to speak. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that he feels this has already been addressed from the previous discussions. Chairman King stated that is where he allowed himself to get sidetracked as he was still focused on when they met and sat down at different meetings. Chairman King stated he is not taking anything away from Department Heads but doesn't want someone jumping up \$6,500 or \$8,500 a year bonus raises, and we can't get enough shovel operators out there to scrape the street. Director Gorton stated the highest one is \$33,000 and \$10,000 and \$11,000 of it has already been set in stone, getting the I.T. Director and Animal Shelter Director up to where they need to be, and the rest, just to get them on the scale. Director Gorton stated you would classify him as a DH8, but dropped himself to a DH7, as he is not making what a DH8 is making, he is at a 7. Director Gorton stated he will discuss his salary in open session and doesn't care. Director Gorton stated if it comes down to the employees, take his money and give it to the employees as that is how he feels about it. Look after the employees first. Director Gorton stated his staff has worked on this scale twice, and he has done it himself over the past two weeks and did not include them on it and is not expecting to get anything in return out of it. Director Gorton stated he is looking out for the County and the employees themselves. Chairman King stated to Mr. Gorton that he is an employee as well and should be eligible for the same benefits and understood, he was not doing this for himself. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that they need to understand those rankings and structure of where those steps are at from the Department Heads and which departments we want to go after first. Chairman King stated he reached out to 4 of the Department Heads and didn't give any numbers, but stated to them that the Board is trying to get a pay scale for their staff and to try to understand if it is not to your liking 100% for you personally as the department head, try to look at what we are doing below you to try to get staff filled, help provide great quality service to the taxpayers and bear with us and he promised them they would see their rewards too. Chairman King stated we have to have employees, because he would rather be outside working than to be in an office and is not knocking any staffers. Vice Chairman Worsley stated before he feels the Board can approve anything, we need to be able to pull the trigger in each department, relatively quickly for succession, because one area of the county gets it, even if they don't fall under the Board's purview, they are going to be upset wanting to know where's mine. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that those conversations are going to have to be held and backed up by data. Vice Chairman Worsley stated they went through the same thing during COVID. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that we will have to do it all and make sure it is clear and understood, because once it is started, we can't stumble and have to move right through. Finance Director Gorton stated that staff has had those discussions with every department head and elected official to let

them know they may not get what they are asking for and it may be lower, and we will have to go back and evaluate it back and forth. Director Gorton stated this was brought to their attention well before. Chairman King stated that there are people flipping burgers that are making \$17.00 per hour. Chairman King stated they probably don't have 401ks or insurance. Chairman King stated the younger people today that you try to recruit and want to come to work and make a career are only concerned with what is in their pocket on Friday. Vice Chairman Worsley asked what their next course of action would be for Director Gorton to go and bring the data back to get closer to. Director Gorton stated that the Board would need to adopt the scale. Chairman King stated the point of the Work Session was to look at the data that Director Gorton provided and discuss it and be prepared to take a vote. Chairman King stated he didn't know if the Board was ready to vote on it yet. Vice Chairman Worsley asked by adopting the scale, what that does. Director Gorton stated by adopting the scale it gives staff something to work towards to get employees grade and step. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that doesn't mean that automatically changes? Director Gorton stated correct. Vice Chairman Worsley asked where the control mechanism was to do it. Director Gorton stated it would be the evaluation from December, a new evaluation, and sitting with the department head and seeing what the pay is comparable to. Director Gorton stated that is why he is suggesting he, HR Director Chambers, and County Administrator McCarthy sit down and determine if it is in the budget and recommendations. Director Gorton stated that he doesn't feel the cost will be over \$200,000 dollars annually, but we have to have something to follow. Director Gorton stated the Board would form a committee with County Administrator McCarthy having the final say on where to put them on the scale. Vice Chairman Worsley asked if we have evaluation forms. Director Gorton stated yes and that we have job descriptions on everyone, just waiting on a few from E-911. Director Gorton stated that once we have a scale, each position will have a grade, and HR Director Chambers can tell an employee what grade they would be and the pay for that grade. Director Gorton stated if an employee has more experience, they may come out to an A or B. Vice Chairman Worsley asked if the job description clearly calls out what is required for that step. Director Gorton stated that is correct and gives responsibilities and duties. Director Gorton stated that once the scale is in place, Human Resources will know what that jobs starting pay will be. Vice Chairman Worsley asked if the experience level is addressed in the job description. Director Gorton stated that experience is listed on the job application. Vice Chairman Worsley stated 10 years to one may be worth two jumps and 10 years to someone else may be worth five jumps on the scale. Vice Chairman Worsley asked if that could be clarified. Director Gorton stated that the Board can set the criteria that staff would have to follow to move forward, because all that Finance and HR came up with was the two evaluations, scoring a 3-4, and performing exceptionally well. Director Gorton stated that an employee is not guaranteed a step every year and there is still a 2.5% merit increase. Director Gorton stated that the criteria need to be formed and once a schedule is adopted, Administration can do what it needs to do to get everyone on the scale and get with the Department Heads and Elected Officials to make sure the employees are fairly compensated. Director Gorton stated this is not to compete with Coweta or Fayetteville, but enough to keep them here in Meriwether County. Vice Chairman Worsley stated using Fire as an example, what he doesn't want to see happen is a Firefighter get certified and start making \$14.00 per hour and then go to Coweta making \$17.00 an hour and Chief Stephens saying I will keep you moving up the step if you'll stay. Director Gorton stated that procedure is for any payroll change to be signed off on by the County Administrator. Vice Chairman Worsley stated

there is two sides and that a department head should be able to negotiate some if an employee is stating they are receiving a competing offer, but at the same time it is important to protect the County from rogue management and handing out these increases left and right because somebody is saying this place is offering me \$20.00 to come over here. Chairman King stated it goes back to human nature and what if little Suzie Joe comes in and is evaluated and given a raise and another employee in that department doesn't get a raise, but in their mind, they work just as hard and just as good as she does. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that is the difference in the public and private sector, and in the private sector he can give an employee a little to keep them, but you can't do that in government. Vice Chairman Worsley stated it has to be clearly defined what those qualifications are. Vice Chairman Worsley stated he thinks they are close to coming to some sort of an agreement soon but thinks we do not as a group without getting more clarity and transparency around what those steps are, in order to protect ourselves from the situations we have been discussing. Director Gorton stated that if the 3% scale was implemented, and staff got everyone on the scale, no one would get a step increase until the next budget year, so that he can budget for it properly. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that if the scale is adopted, there is still too much ambiguity between what each step means as far as criteria, because it is now creating an imbalance, based on someone's perception of what their scale is. Vice Chairman Worsley stated we need that clarity of here is what it takes to be an A, B, or C and then it is clear and like a slide to show someone you have these qualifications and this many years of experience, and that puts you here. Vice Chairman Worsley stated he is in favor of the scale and getting it going, but needs more structure, because in those situations when an employee has someone wanting to go to another County, then if there are not barriers, what we are doing could be pricing ourselves in what Coweta and Fayette are paying, because we won't survive. Director Gorton stated that would be the oversight of the Administrator. Vice Chairman Worsley stated he would like it to be more than the Administrator and wants it clearly defined and establish a procedure, reducing liability to staff and the County. Director Gorton stated if we approve the scale, we can define those requirements. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that the only confidence he has is that Finance Director Gorton looks trustworthy. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that not saying anything against County Administrator McCarthy, but he doesn't want to see increases getting approved left and right and would like to see development of some of that plan, which may not be 100%. Director Gorton stated that he believed there was a memo from HR Director Chambers at one of the last meetings on the requirement of evaluations. Elected Officials determine through their standard operating procedures what constitutes a step, and County employees would have to set procedures on what constitutes an increase, such as employee performance evaluations, education, certifications, and training. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that he wants it in writing and procedures in place as it can be a living document and can be changed that can hold those accountable if they violate the procedure. Director Gorton stated that something can be put in the policy manual to back that up. Commissioner Plant stated that she wanted to go back to the job descriptions because she feels it is important to state in each job description what is required for each level and goals and performance. Commissioner Plant felt that job descriptions should be uniform across the board for each position. Director Gorton provided the Board with a memo that was in their last packet that shows the procedures that were developed by staff. Commissioner Plant asked about a COLA. Director Gorton stated that for the past 10 years, the Board has approved, up to a 2.5% merit increase and there has never been a COLA, as a COLA doesn't require an evaluation and is an across-the-board increase. Chairman King

asked if adopted when the employees would see a change. Director Gorton stated that it would take 4-6 weeks to get the employees on the scale, because of meetings that will need to occur to determine where they fall on the scale. Director Gorton stated that no step increase would be given until October 2025, unless someone obtained their certification. A motion was made by Commissioner Collins and seconded by Vice Chairman Worsley to adjourn the Work Session at 6:01 p.m.

III. EXECUTIVE SESSION

A motion was made by Commissioner Threadgill and seconded by Commissioner Collins to go into Executive Session to discuss Personnel at 4:22 p.m. All were in favor. A motion was made to go out of Executive Session at 4:31 p.m. by Commissioner Collins and seconded by Commissioner Plant. All were in favor.

A motion was made by Commissioner Threadgill and seconded by Commissioner Collins to go back into Regular Session at 4:33 p.m. All were in favor. There was no action taken in Executive Session.

IV. FUTURE MEETINGS & NOTICES

The future meetings were announced by Chairman King.

Approved by:

Attest:

Date:

Majority vote of the Board of Commissioners
Alyson R. Stephens
May 28, 2024