

MINUTES
MERIWETHER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION
JULY 22, 2024
4:00 PM

Commissioners Present: Chairman Gene King, Vice Chairman Adam Worsley, Commissioner Rosla Plant, Commissioner Emmett Collins, and 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.

II. INVOCATION

The Invocation was given by Assistant County Administrator Blue Cole.

III. PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

All

IV. ADOPT AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Threadgill and seconded by Commissioner Plant to Adopt the Agenda. All were in favor.

Vice Chairman Worsley stated that before the Work Session started, he would like to make a Motion to go into the Executive Session to discuss Real Estate.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Threadgill at 4:01 p.m. All were in favor.

A motion was made by Commissioner Threadgill and seconded by Commissioner Plant to come out of the Executive Session at 5:04 p.m. All were in favor.

A motion was made by Commissioner Threadgill and seconded by Vice Chairman Worsley to go back into Regular Session at 5:06 p.m. All were in favor.

There was no action taken in the Executive Session.

V. NEW BUSINESS

1. County Administrator McCarthy stated that provided to the Board was a tentative layout of how the offices could move around to different buildings, as well as a suggested money layout, with money coming from the Fund Balance and recommended priorities. County Administrator McCarthy stated that work is underway at the Jail, and it is considered a priority, as well as the Courthouse. Administrator McCarthy stated that one of the buildings, that was previously one of the Pathways buildings, has been allocated to Elections. Administrator McCarthy stated that one of the other buildings at the Pathways site could be used for the offices in the Tax Building, to include the Tax Commissioner, Tax Assessors, and Building and Zoning, with the remaining building being used for DFACS. Administrator McCarthy explained that DFACS really has the most dominos behind them. Administrator McCarthy stated that with the chart provided there are a lot of other departments behind them. Administrator McCarthy stated this would get things moving immediately, and the

other would get things moving in the long-term for succession of departments. Administrator McCarthy stated this would put us in the position of getting one contractor, which may be advantageous to maximize repairs. Administrator McCarthy stated these were some initial thoughts, but this was really set up to be an open-ended discussion. Administrator McCarthy provided the Board with a package that provided the square footage of the buildings as well as aerial photos of the buildings. Commissioner Threadgill stated that the Tax Assessor, Tax Commissioner, and Building and Zoning are currently in one area, and there was talk of putting them in the other building that was originally allocated to the Sheriff's Office, and he knows there is an issue with Building and Zoning currently being in the middle of the Tax Offices and the access to them. Commissioner Threadgill stated that he firmly believes that Building and Zoning needs to move and if part of the building could be renovated to where the two tax offices could be moved together and give more space if that is feasible. Mr. Theron Gay of Special Projects explained that his thoughts were starting in one section, moving another office out, and that he feels the building has a lot of functional obsolescence which will always have chopped up offices and large halls. Mr. Gay stated the building probably needs wiring, a new HVAC system, and plumbing, due to that being problematic. Mr. Gay stated that there would be a good bit of work needed. Mr. Gay suggested that you could shuffle offices around to allow one office to move while renovations were occurring. There was discussion regarding the age of the building as well as what could be done with the Tax building. Mr. Gay stated that the downside of renovating the building would be that you cannot move the load bearing walls and while there would be new paint, ceilings, and renovations, there would still be chopped up offices. Commissioner Threadgill stated there would definitely be more parking at the old Pathways location, but he had concerns about it being too cumbersome with two departments and an office in that building. Commissioner Threadgill stated that the building is really not that much larger than the building they are in now. Commissioner Threadgill stated that he had concerns about if there needed to be more expansion. Mr. Gay stated that there is another building in the back of the former Pathways facility. that may require more work than the front building to repair. Administrator McCarthy stated that the front building on the old Pathways site is estimated at 6,060 square feet and the Tax building on the Square is about 8,400 sq. ft. There was discussion about the lack of space in the Tax Building. Commissioner Threadgill asked about the security issues. Tax Commissioner DeAnn Cruse stated that most Tax Offices are set up with windows in front of the clerk, and they are not set up that way and people can walk right up to the clerk. Vice Chairman Worsley asked how much usable square footage was available at the DFACS building. Administrator McCarthy stated that there were 14,160 total square feet. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that he understood DFACS was in the building, but wanted to know how much available usable space was left. Commissioner Threadgill stated that the last time he spoke with someone from DFACS they had 8-9 people in offices and there were 32-35 offices available. Mr. Gay explained that that office likes to be isolated due to dealing with children and needs privacy. Discussion continued on how to move offices around and about additional parking. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that DFACS in the isolated building sounds good, but it is a lot of money to get them in there. Vice Chairman Worsley suggested moving the tax offices to one end of the building while the building is being renovated. Commissioner Threadgill stated that DFACS pays rent based on square footage to the County and if the back building worked for them based on square footage, the County could recoup money on renovations. Mr. Gay stated that most of the offices could work without a counter, but the Tax Commissioner would need a counter. Discussion continued on the square footage of Building A. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that Building A is 6,060 sq.

ft. and Building B, which is Elections, is 6,733 sq. ft. Commissioner Plant asked if Building A could accommodate Tax Commissioners and Tax Assessors Offices. Assistant County Administrator Blue Cole stated that if the Tax Commissioner were to be moved to Building C, there would be less construction needed than if they were to move to Building A, due to needing the teller line. Administrator McCarthy stated that if DFACS were to go to the back building, the basketball court area could be a playground. Mr. Gay stated that the back building is not in as good shape as the front building. Mr. Gay stated that the back building may work for the Sheriff's Office. Vice Chairman Worsley asked if DFACS paid on square footage or just utilized space. Commissioner Threadgill had concerns about putting three offices in the 6,060 sq. ft building. Vice Chairman Worsley asked why the Administration Office needed the large building. Discussion continued among the Commissioners regarding moving. Superior Court Clerk Kye Gibson asked if anyone had thought of moving all the courts to the DFACS office, including the DA's office, because she stated that they were going to eventually have to be out of the Courthouse. Ms. Gibson stated that she has employees that can't get well because of the mold and there were more leaks this morning. Ms. Gibson stated they would have to have somewhere to have court. Ms. Gibson stated there was 1 1/2 inches of water in the basement and in the closet where the controls are for the elevator. Ms. Gibson stated that she didn't want to leave the Courthouse. Commissioner Threadgill asked if there was 1 courtroom used for superior and probate and a small courtroom used for magistrate. Ms. Gibson stated they have only one courtroom for all courts right now because the Magistrate Court's calendars are too big and there is only room for 10 people. Commissioner Threadgill stated that he and Ms. Gibson had spoken about using one of the rooms in the West Georgia Technical Building for court and working out something contractually with Dr. Post. Ms. Gibson stated that she is open to that and with the DFACS building being across the street, that wouldn't be a nightmare logistically. Commissioner Threadgill asked Ms. Gibson about the need for two courtrooms. Ms. Gibson stated that she would like to have two courtrooms back, as she could have two trials at the same time. There was discussion about roof leaks and Asst. Administrator Cole stated that the leak was from backed up drains. Chairman King asked if anyone had thought of or taken into consideration about building a two-story building in the tax building location, as there would be double the square footage and have all the buildings in one location. Mr. Gay stated that in Coweta they built a justice center and only utilized the Courthouse for Probate and ceremonies, such as a judge being sworn in. Mr. Gay explained that building a new building will cost money. Commissioner Threadgill stated that as a Board they can talk all day about what each department needs, and they will get it wrong. Commissioner Threadgill stated that we need something from each area about what the specific needs are, and then compare what buildings are available that could meet those needs. Mr. Gay stated he feels that is important as well as a list of priority of where offices are going and when. Mr. Gay stated that you need a real plan and a plan of continuity that moves from project to project. Mr. Gay explained that this will not all get done right away and the County will have to use SPLOST and future SPLOST. Commissioner Threadgill stated that he feels the Board needs to ask the State for help. Commissioner Threadgill stated that Dr. Post was more than willing to utilize the big rooms for court as long as there was a contract for security and with the court. Commissioner Collins stated that he understands they all want new offices and Building and Zoning hasn't changed much in 10 years. Commissioner Collins stated that the Courthouse should be the main focus. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that if there are health concerns in the Courthouse, why can't they be moved immediately, as he would not want to go to work in those conditions. Mr. Gay stated that

he agreed with Vice Chairman Worsley and the plan was to get the roof done and then begin remediation and replace the HVAC. Mr. Gay stated that if you don't get the roof and HVAC done, the issue will come back. Ms. Gibson stated that she has concerns about remediating HVAC systems, as she has seen what comes out of those. Commissioner Collins asked if there was enough parking at the Pathways location to accommodate all the offices. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that in the interim, why could we not move the Court to the DFACS office? Chairman King stated this has been discussed for two years. Asst. Administrator Cole stated that we can pursue that option if given direction from the Board. Commissioner Threadgill explained that DFACS would have to be moved completely out of the building before any other office moved in due to it being a state entity. Mr. Gay stated that notice would have to be given to DFACS per the lease to have them relocate. Mr. Gay stated that what is needed from the Board is what they would like to see, which gives staff action to move and do what is needed. Mr. Gay explained that right now our priorities are the jail, courthouse roof, and pathways building to accommodate elections. Mr. Gay stated that the jail has the roof done and the locks and plumbing have been let and will be starting. Mr. Gay explained the courthouse roof had also been bid, but after that the Board needed to give directions on what they would like to do next. Commissioner Threadgill stated that DFACS was not required to rent from the County and could rent from a private entity. Commissioner Threadgill stated that under the current lease, there would be a process that would have to be followed for their eviction to do it legally. Commissioner Threadgill stated that if they don't lease from the County, the County will lose the monthly rent amount. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that, in his opinion, the next project on the list would be to get Building A ready for DFACS and begin the process of getting them moved over and let the DFACS building be the landing spot to get the Courthouse right. There was discussion regarding parking. Commissioner Threadgill suggested walking through the building with Kenya. Commissioner Threadgill thinks it may be less work to get DFACS moved than any other entity and use the DFACS building as a temporary source for everyone else. There was discussion regarding the storage of records and Ms. Gibson stated that she would need to move all of her open case files, but closed case files would be fine where they are, and she would have to access them from time to time at the courthouse. Chairman King stated the process needs to get started regarding the DFACS building. Commissioner Threadgill stated that this had been discussed for a long time and the decision had not been made to move forward. Mr. Gay stated that with a decision being made, it allows staff to move forward. Commissioner Threadgill stated that taking Kenya and Jennifer to the building to see what could be done minimally would be a good idea. Discussion ensued on getting specifics on the lease agreement with DFACS as well as touring building A with them. Commissioner Plant stated that to the left on the west side of the courthouse there is some sinking going on where there was an old tree. Commissioner Plant also stated that there needed to be new rugs around the buildings. Vice Chairman Worsley asked how quickly the Elections building could be ready for IDA. Mr. Gay stated that could be done rather quickly as long as the building didn't require a new roof, and elections were moved first. Discussion began regarding the Tax Offices and Building and Zoning. Vice Chairman Worsley asked what it would take to get the building in good healthy working order instead of demolition. Mr. Gay stated that the building would need new HVAC and new plumbing, but you would still have a 1940s building design. Ms. Gibson stated that with moving computers she would be able to get assistance from the Clerk's Authority. Mr. Gay stated that he feels that we have some directions on where to start as far as getting in touch with DFACS and letting them know what we are planning and taking them to tour the building. Mr. Gay stated that he has a

meeting with Patty on Friday and will try to work on the reset of the specifications to get that worked out. Mr. Gay stated that he could get someone to come in and look at the Tax building and see what the better option would be, whether to remodel or tear it down and build a two-story building. Mr. Gay stated that even if you had to go back on the same footprint, you would get some benefit of having a better design layout. Commissioner Threadgill stated that he would like to go to the state as there has to be some form of help for counties who are having issues housing their own employees. Mr. Gay explained that the state does have some discretionary funds. Discussion ensued regarding funding and the various sources to contact regarding funding. Mr. Gay stated that ACCG used to have a program on new building construction that was similar to a lease and will lease it to you without having to go through a General Obligation (G.O) bond. Mr. Gay stated that you can dedicate future SPLOST to pay off this lease. Commissioner Threadgill suggested that there are many options, and we may need to look into a rental or lease program on larger portable buildings to accommodate offices while renovating is happening. Vice Chairman Worsley asked what type of agreement the County is in with West Georgia Tech. Mr. Gay stated that the County owns the land, and there is an encumbrance on that where both parties would have to agree.

Commissioner Threadgill stated that if the school system does not utilize or provide services to the County within an "x" number time frame, then the building does revert to the County. Commissioner Threadgill stated that they wanted to give up rights to the property to get loans for repairs such as a new roof, but he believes they offer welding right now. Commissioner Threadgill stated that when he went over a year ago, they were doing CNA classes and welding. Mr. Gay stated that we could also explore other entities to see if there was space available. Commissioner Threadgill stated that the contract needs to be pulled for DFACS as well as the contract with WGTC to check the reversion clause. Discussion continued on how to move offices around for renovations. Commissioner Threadgill stated that the Elections area needs to be done and ready to move in, get with DFACS and tour them in the other areas, and pull the contract for DFACS and West Georgia, and he would be glad to talk to Dr. Post regarding courtroom space. Commissioner Threadgill asked if the second floor courtroom was still okay and could be utilized for court. Ms. Gibson stated that it could. Vice Chairman Worsley asked for an update to be put on the August 14th, Agenda. Mr. Gay stated that he would review the contracts and highlight any concerns and get those back to the Board. Commissioner Threadgill stated that if there are areas that are leaking majorly and creating a mold issue, they may need to look into leasing some mobile units to at least get the employees out of those particular areas. However, there is not a lot of area to secure records, and if the records are secure and safe where they are, they may have to visit the area to retrieve those records. Vice Chairman Worsley asked where we are on the proposal for the Elections. Mr. Gay stated that he has a meeting on Friday and hoped to have a proposal ready to the Board at their meeting in August.

VI. EXECUTIVE SESSION

A motion was made by Vice Chairman Worsley and seconded by Commissioner Threadgill to go into the Executive Session at 4:01 p.m. All were in favor.

A motion was made by Commissioner Threadgill and seconded by Commissioner Plant to come out of the Executive Session at 5:04 p.m. All were in favor.

A motion was made by Commissioner Threadgill and seconded by Vice Chairman Worsley to go back into Regular Session at 5:06 p.m. All were in favor.

There was no action taken in the Executive Session.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Commissioner Plant and seconded by Commissioner Threadgill to adjourn the Work Session at 5:19 p.m. All were in favor.

Approved by:

Attest:

Date:

Majority Vote of the Board of Commissioners
Alyson L. Stephens, County Clerk
August 14, 2024