

MINUTES
MERIWETHER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
JULY 23, 2024
6:00 PM

Commissioners Present: Vice Chairman Adam Worsley, Commissioner Rosla Plant, Commissioner Emmett Collins, and Commissioner Bryan Threadgill.

Commissioners Absent: Chairman Gene King

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

Staff Absent: none

I. CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chairman Adam Worsley called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. INVOCATION

The Invocation was given by County Administrator Jarrod McCarthy.

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 with the following Amendment: *Add Under New Business #6 - Consideration of Purchase of Sheriff's Office Vehicle.* All were in favor.

V. PRESENTATIONS

None

VI. FINANCE REPORT

Finance Director John Gorton provided the Bank Balances as of 4:00 p.m. Director Gorton stated that the balances are holding steady and there is no concern about the funds or finances. Director Gorton stated that the HOST fee check came in the mail and the Tipping Fees check should be in by the end of the week. SPLOST was at \$88,000 and is now at \$203,560.54 due to a June allocation that was not recorded due to him being on vacation. Director Gorton stated that the TSPLOST balance was reduced from over half a million to down to \$318,346.11 and feels that in about three months that balance will be back to zero, and it will start to regain a surplus.

VII. DEPARTMENT HEADS

Cassandra Sharpe, Planning and Zoning Director: Director Sharpe stated that as of last week, every address that has been requested since January has been caught up and any new requests for addresses are handled within the same day or within the next day. Director Sharpe stated that they have had concerns about and staying on top of timber companies going in and out of the roads due to rain and bringing mud out on the paved roads.

County Administrator Jarrod McCarthy: Administrator McCarthy stated that I.T. Director, Matt Brown helped with the 911 non-emergency lines and assisted while County Clerk Stephens was out of the office. Human Resources continue to work on the Wellness Program as well as hiring. Animal Control is still at full capacity with the shelter having 52 dogs in 34 kennels and 14 cats. There were 162 calls for animal services with 8 adoptions. Administrator McCarthy

stated the Animal Shelter had a yard sale and raised \$385.00. Administrator McCarthy stated that Chief Stephens of Fire/Rescue, located several fire trucks which will be discussed later.

VIII. CITIZEN COMMENT

Vice Chairman Worsley read the procedures for Citizen Comment.

Evie Kettler of 514 Lindsey Taylor Way, Lagrange. Ms. Kettler thanked the Commissioner for allowing her to speak and stated that she was there about a post she was tagged in regarding a tethered dog. Ms. Kettler stated she felt it was necessary to come forward and share what the City of LaGrange, along with many others in Georgia, have implemented. Ms. Kettler stated that currently, the law permits dogs to be kept on a runner for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, without any supervision. Ms. Kettler stated that it is important to know that the packaging for runners explicitly states that their product is not intended for permanent restraint and should never be used unsupervised. Ms. Kettler stated that those who enacted the law may not be aware of this and wanted to bring it to the Board's attention. Ms. Kettler stated that tethering a dog can lead to aggressive behavior and, additionally, many of them may become pregnant by roaming dogs as they are often not spayed, contributing to overpopulation. Ms. Kettler stated that, furthermore, tethered dogs are unable to protect themselves due to vulnerability. Ms. Kettler urged the Chairman and Commissioners to address this issue as their role and action regarding this matter could make a significant difference. Ms. Kettler stated the push for ordinances against unsupervised tethering is part of a larger initiative to ensure the humane treatment of animals. Ms. Kettler stated that the regulations aim to prevent dogs from being tied up alone for long periods, enhancing their quality of life and reducing potential harm. Ms. Kettler stated that a no unsupervised dog tethering ordinance can significantly improve animal welfare, enhance public safety, and promote a more compassionate community. Ms. Kettler stated that by educating the public, enforcing these regulations, and supporting pet owners, communities can ensure the humane treatment of dogs and mitigate the risks associated with unsupervised tethering. Ms. Kettler stated that the ordinance is not just a regulation, but a crucial step towards fostering a healthier and more caring environment for animals and humans. Ms. Kettler provided the Commissioners with a copy of the County Ordinance, the City of LaGrange shelter requirements, and the tethering Ordinance, which she stated she helped get passed. Ms. Kettler stated that she asked the City of LaGrange to give residents a year to get into compliance to help with animal control. Ms. Kettler stated that if the Board had any questions, please feel free to contact her and thanked them for allowing her to be in attendance.

Ryan Moore of 7007 Williams Street, Greenville, stated that he was in attendance to talk about the Tax Assessors' office. Mr. Moore stated that the county's taxes need to be reassessed, and that the taxes have not been assessed as a county since 2009. Mr. Moore stated that is a fact, and you can find that at the Tax Assessor's office. Mr. Moore stated the Georgia Department of Revenue recommends that the County reassess every 3 years and, according to Mr. Moore, Meriwether County has gone 15 years without the County taxes being reassessed. Mr. Moore stated that every time the Tax Assessor asks for a budget to get reassessed by hiring an outside entity, the Board has denied it the last three years. Mr. Moore stated they are about to request it again with the new budget coming up and assumes the Board will deny it then as well. Mr. Moore stated he would like to call the Board out on that because the Board is not the police of the tax assessor's office. Mr. Moore stated the Tax Assessor's office, according to Georgia law, is allowed to request funds and the Board is supposed to write the check and that's as simple as it gets. Mr. Moore stated that if the Board has an issue with the Tax Assessors' office or how they spend the money or need the money, they are allowed to contact the Department of Revenue, and they will do a formal review of the Tax Assessors' office. Mr. Moore stated that is the way the law is set up. Mr. Moore stated that, for some reason, in Meriwether County, we don't follow Georgia law. Mr. Moore stated that he would like to get an answer on why the Board

is denying the budget request and assumes they are going to deny it again. Mr. Moore stated that there are 17,000 parcels in Meriwether County that need to be reassessed. Mr. Moore stated those parcels are commercial, residential, industrial, agricultural and all kinds. Mr. Moore stated that \$40 a piece is the average amount to hire an outside company to assess the taxes. Mr. Moore stated that is \$680,000 dollars and if the Tax Assessor's office asks for that amount, the Board is supposed to give them that amount. Mr. Moore stated to the Board if the cost was \$1 million dollars, then it wouldn't matter, and the Board still had to write the check. Mr. Moore stated that as long as all the properties are reassessed, everything gets leveled out and the millage rate goes down. Mr. Moore stated that the people that haven't been reassessed in 15 years' taxes will go up and the people who have moved into the county in the last 5 years, taxes will probably go down because of the millage rate. Mr. Moore stated that the millage rate in Manchester is 50 and the millage rate in Molena is 8. Mr. Moore states that all the problems are solved with money and that is how America works. Mr. Moore stated that is how capitalism works and if the money is not collected, the money can't be spent. Mr. Moore stated that the Board is sitting on a gold mine of taxes, and all that has to be done is assess what is currently in the County. Mr. Moore stated when a company wants to come in and buy commercial property and see that commercial property on the Greenville square is valued at \$33,000, but the owner wants to sell it for \$150,000, that person walks away from that sell,

IX. MINUTES

1. A motion was made by Commissioner Collins and seconded by Commissioner Plant to approve the Minutes of the July 10th, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. Regular Meeting. Voting in favor were Commissioner Collins, Commissioner Plant, and Vice Chairman Worsley. Commissioner Threadgill abstained. The motion passed.

X. PUBLIC HEARING

None

XI. APPOINTMENTS

1. **Appointment to Region IV EMS Council for Position 2 to fill the term that expired on June 30, 2024. This is a 3-year appointment to expire June 30, 2027.**

Fire Chief Danny Stephens stated that the position was previously filled by Captain Robert Etheredge. Chief Stephens stated that the position has expired, and he would like to recommend Training Chief Christie Grice to the three-year term for position 2. Chief Stephens stated that Chief Grice is a paramedic and has experiencing serving on this council in Region 2. A motion was made by Commissioner Threadgill to and seconded by Commissioner Plant to appoint Christie Grice to serve on the Region IV EMS Council for Position 2. All were in favor.

XII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. **Intergovernmental Agreement Regarding the Conducting of the 2024 Municipal Special Election for the City of Lone Oak.**

Ms. Patty Threadgill, Elections Supervisor, stated that the City of Lone Oak contacted her about them conducting the election, and she had not seen a call placed in the paper and the deadline was approaching. Ms. Threadgill stated that if they made the call, she could conduct the election, but if they do not make the call, she would not conduct the election. Ms. Threadgill stated that the City has to legally make the call in order for the election to be held. Commissioner Threadgill asked when the last day would be for that to happen. Ms. Threadgill stated the last date for the call to happen is August 8, 2024, but the last publication is August 1, 2024. Mr. Morgan Lamb, Council member for the City of Lone Oak, stated that he was not prepared to speak, but noticed the City of Lone Oak had

business on the Agenda. Mr. Lamb stated that he would try to reach out to someone from the City of Lone Oak after the meeting, to see what needs to be done to meet the deadlines and get everything together. County Attorney Hill stated that since there are deadlines, he doesn't want the County to get stuck in an agreement if the City doesn't meet its obligations. County Attorney Hill states that if there is a motion on the table, he would suggest that it be contingent upon Lone Oak timely calling the election. Ms. Threadgill asked if that meant the date for the IGA would not be until then. County Attorney Hill stated that was correct. County Attorney Hill stated that meant that the Chair would be able to date and sign it on the date Lone Oak makes the call. County Attorney Hill stated the motion would be that the Board approve the Intergovernmental Agreement contingent upon the City of Lone Oak timely making the call sufficient to satisfy all deadlines under Georgia election law. A motion was made by Commissioner Plant based on lawyers' suggestion. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Collins. All were in favor.

2. Approve Contract with Southern Sky, LLC for Fireworks July 4, 2025, at Lake Meriwether

Administrator McCarthy stated Southern Sky, LLC provided the County with a fireworks display offer for what they could do for \$20,000. Administrator McCarthy stated he contacted two other companies. Pyrotechnico wouldn't be able to perform the event on the 4th, and Pyro Products couldn't do the event for less than \$35,000 on July 4th. Southern Sky, LLC went ahead and provided a contract and he would suggest, in the interest of time and quality of work, that the Board go ahead and approve them to perform the fireworks' event on July 4, 2025, contingent upon legal review of the contract. Commissioner Threadgill stated that he knew the event at Lake Meriwether went well and also knew that Manchester would continue to do their event and wished that both parties could come to an agreement so there is not so much taxpayer money being spent throughout the County on the same type of event. Commissioner Threadgill suggested possibly meeting with Manchester and would like to see everyone come together. He doesn't want it to be a competition between the County and Manchester. Commissioner Collins stated that he wanted to do the event for the whole County, including Manchester, Greenville, Woodbury, and all cities into one firework event at Lake Meriwether. County Attorney Hill asked if a deadline was given on entering the contract. County Attorney Hill stated that no deadline was given, but there was no guarantee on the date. A motion was made by Commissioner Collins to approve the contract with Southern Sky, LLC for Fireworks on July 4, 2025, at Lake Meriwether contingent upon legal review of the contract. Vice Chairman Worsley seconded the motion. Voting in favor were Commissioner Collins, Commissioner Plant, and Vice Chairman Worsley. Commissioner Threadgill opposed. The motion passed. Commissioner Threadgill stated that he did not really want to oppose it but wished there could be some type of talk regarding the tax money that was spent on doing both events. Commissioner Threadgill stated that Manchester has been doing the event for 12-13 years and always invited the County to participate. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that Manchester has done a fantastic job and feels that the County should continue to fund in some sort as they are part of Meriwether County and the largest municipality. Vice Chairman Worsley stated that the event at Lake Meriwether was really appreciated by the community this year. County Attorney Hill asked Commissioner Threadgill if he was a non-vote. Commissioner Threadgill stated he opposed it, but only because he would want talks to take place.

3. Pay Scale - Salaried Employees

Commissioner Threadgill made a motion to table this until the next meeting, when all 5 Commissioners were present. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Collins. All were in favor.

XIII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Jail Annex Fire Exit Door

County Administrator McCarthy stated that there is a door in the Jail Annex that does not open and, for safety reasons, needs to be replaced. Administrator McCarthy stated that the cost for the door is

\$9,375.00. Administrator McCarthy suggested approval for the replacement of the door. Commissioner Threadgill asked how this would be funded. Finance Director Gorton stated this was a contract that was with C.A. Owens and was approved to be paid out of SPLOST. County Attorney Hill asked if this was just a change order. Administrator McCarthy stated this was a change order for the existing contract. Commissioner Collins asked if other bids were obtained. Administrator McCarthy stated that this was a change order to the existing contract, that included the door, door frame, removal, and the disposal of the pre-existing metal work. A motion was made by Commissioner Plant to move forward with the change order to replace the Jail Annex Fire Exit Door in the amount of \$9,375.00, with the original funding source of SPLOST. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Collins. All were in favor.

2. Appoint ACCG Legislative County Voting Delegate - Legislative Leadership Conference Business Session

County Administrator McCarthy stated that this was to appoint someone to attend the ACCG Legislative Leadership Conference Business Session on October 10, 2024. Administrator McCarthy stated the purpose of the session is to consider policies to be adopted by the membership and other business that may come before the body. Administrator McCarthy stated that the voting delegate is not the same as the ACCG Legislative delegate. A motion was made by Commissioner Threadgill and seconded by Commissioner Plant to appoint Chairman Gene King as the ACCG Legislative County Voting Delegate for the Legislative Leadership Conference Business Session on October 10, 2024. All were in favor.

3. Update Fee Schedule for Building and Zoning

Assistant County Administrator Blue Cole stated that the Georgia Legislature recently passed House Bill 461, which changed the way that Building, Planning, and Zoning can charge for permits and fees, requiring them to go at a flat rate, instead of using fractionals or a multiplier. Planning and Zoning Director Cassandra Sharpe stated that the fee schedule in front of them is actually what is already charged. Director Sharpe stated that, as an example of a residential home, the application fee and review fee are being charged. Director Sharpe stated that if you do an 8% factor on the value of that, it averages out to about \$0.43 per square foot. Director Sharpe stated she changed that to \$0.45 per square foot to make it simpler and updated this throughout the whole fee schedule. Director Sharpe stated that none of these have gone up more than a penny or two and just means this is updated to the flat rate. Commissioner Plant made a motion to adopt the Fee Schedule as proposed effective July 23, 2024. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Threadgill. All were in favor.

4. Approve Purchase of 3 Fire Engines from Coweta County Fire Department

Fire Chief Danny Stephens stated that he received a call about a week ago that Coweta County was purchasing 5 new engines to replace some vehicles in their fleet. Chief Stephens stated that Coweta County would like to offer the existing vehicles in their fleet to Meriwether County first. Chief Stephens stated he had an opportunity to go and look at one of the trucks that was having routine maintenance performed. Chief Stephens stated that Coweta had five, but recommended the purchase of the 3, which they felt were the three best trucks, which are 1500 GPM Pumps with 1,000 gallon tanks on them and do have the capability of doing quick drops with drop tanks mounted on the side of them. Chief Stephens stated they also have some Hearst hydraulic extrication tools that they are going to let go with the trucks, as well as all the ladders, and hoses, except for the large 5-inch diameter hose that Coweta will use on their new trucks and some hand tools. Chief Stephens stated that Coweta has given the option to purchase the three trucks at the amount of \$12,500 a piece. Chief Stephens stated that if the County were to try and purchase these trucks, brand new in this market, the cost would be around \$500,000 dollars each. Chief Stephens stated the trucks had been meticulously maintained and Coweta was up front with him and said these were the three trucks recommended. Chief Stephens stated that they came up with these amounts based on what a broker was going to purchase them for, and thanks to the relationships built with Coweta County, they reached out to the Meriwether County

Fire Department. Chief Stephens stated they are very nice trucks. Commissioner Plant asked when they would be delivered. Chief Stephens stated they would not be delivered until Coweta County received their new trucks and that those were originally ordered in 2020 and just now coming in. Chief Stephens stated it may be towards November before we can get them. Chief Stephens stated that the reason this is so quick is that there are two other counties looking at the trucks and Coweta wanted to give Meriwether first option. Chief Stephens stated he was only able to view one of the trucks because the other two were out on calls. Chief Stephens stated that because Coweta is swapping vendors, there is also a load of parts that will come with the trucks. Commissioner Collins asked if the trucks would fit in the stations. Chief Stephens stated that they will fit in the new stations, and he is looking to make them frontline trucks as soon as Meriwether takes possession of them. Vice Chairman Worsley asked if there was a law that determines the life of a fire engine and if the insurance rises in cost due to age. Chief Stephens stated there is a recommendation of 10 years, but no law, and he is not aware of any increase in insurance. Commissioner Threadgill stated that his concern would be that the trucks are still in the same condition when we take possession as we feel they should be. Commissioner Plant asked if a letter should be sent to let Coweta know that the County definitely wants the three trucks, and if there is anything legal needed. County Attorney Hill stated that a letter of commitment could be sent, contingent on the trucks being in a similar and operable condition. Assistant County Administrator Cole stated that he would speak with Coweta and felt that a letter would be fine, but if not, he would bring it back to the Board. Commissioner Threadgill feels that the County needs to reserve the right to look at the trucks again. Vice Chairman Worsley asked if Chief Stephens would be coming back to the Board for a signage request. Chief Stephens stated that this could be absorbed into the budget. Finance Director Gorton stated that the funding source would be SPLOST. A motion was made to provide a letter of commitment to Coweta County for the three mentioned fire trucks with the right to review at the time they are ready to release to make sure they are in the same working order for a total of \$37,500 to be paid out of SPLOST. Commissioner Collins seconded the motion. All were in favor.

5. Reschedule Called Meeting for Execution of Resolution for TSPLOST for August 1, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

County Administrator McCarthy stated that this has to be done 30 days from the previous meeting and would request that this be rescheduled for August 1, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. County Administrator McCarthy explained that if anyone wanted to make an argument, due to the last meeting being on July 2, 2024, it could cause some heartburn and wanted to make the request for the sake of simplicity. Administrator McCarthy stated that Elections would be meeting at noon that day. A motion was made by Commissioner Threadgill and seconded by Commissioner Plant to reschedule the Called Meeting for Execution of Resolution for TSPLOST for August 1, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. All were in favor.

6. Vehicle Replacement for Sheriff's Office

Finance Director Gorton stated that the County received an insurance check in the amount of \$23,553.84 for a vehicle that was involved in an accident about a month prior and deemed a total loss. The Sheriff's Office is in dire need of replacing this vehicle and has submitted a quote in the amount of \$44,000 for a 2023 Dodge Durango. Staff recommended approval of \$23,553.84 for the purchase of the vehicle, as well as an additional \$15,000 dollars for the outfitting, bringing the total to \$35,500. Finance Director Gorton stated that Meriwether County had a \$10,000 dollar deductible and the County was not found at fault, which should be returned to the County. Director Gorton stated there should also be a check coming for the equipment costs. A motion was made by Commissioner Collins to approve the purchase of a Vehicle for the Sheriff's Office, not to exceed \$35,500 from SPLOST, with the application of insurance proceeds of \$23,553.84, with any deductible being reimbursed into the SPLOST account. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Threadgill. All were in favor.

XIV. REPORT FROM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

County Administrator Jarrod McCarthy: Administrator McCarthy reminded the Board of an email he sent to them about possibly setting up a Work Session in August to discuss Fleet Management and asked if they could get back on a good time. Administrator McCarthy stated Mr. Theron asked him to ask the Board for any road that they may have in mind for patching, regarding the 2024 Road Patching project. Vice Chairman Worsley asked if there wasn't a list already. County Clerk Stephens stated that Mr. Bill Cawthorne has a list and will provide it when he is back in the office. Administrator McCarthy stated that this was just to get a list of roads from the Board to consider beyond the current list. Administrator McCarthy gave an update on the progress of repairs at the Jail and stated that Mr. Theron was scheduled to meet with a gentleman to come in and look at the roof of the Courthouse. Administrator McCarthy thanked the Board for a productive Work Session regarding office space and stated he was able to attend a quick meeting today with the IDA and a large employer, where they discussed taxes. Administrator McCarthy stated it was nice to be a part of that meeting. Administrator McCarthy stated that he attended the Department Head meeting and continues to look at road and maintenance issues. Administrator McCarthy stated that he attended a fireworks closeout meeting and thanked everyone for their contributions in making it a great event. Administrator McCarthy stated that he discussed safety regulations regarding foliants and continued to email updates to the Board.

Assistant County Administrator Blue Cole: Assistant Administrator Cole stated that Public Works had 5 individuals go through motor grader training. Asst. Administrator Cole stated there was a good response and feedback from the class, and they look to continue that training with future classes. Assistant Administrator Cole stated that he attended Chief Stephens graduation, where a number of firefighters and recruits graduated, as well as two EMTs and one Paramedic. Asst. Administrator Cole stated it was very inspiring to see the firefighter recruits and their families and the pride the families had in the graduates. Asst. Administrator Cole stated there is a meeting with an engineer regarding the Courthouse roof at 4 p.m. July 24, 2024, just to look at the roof and get feedback. Asst. Administrator Cole stated that training continues at Public Works and there was an all-hands meeting with Barry that went very well. Assistant Administrator Cole stated that he also attended a meeting with Planning and Zoning and the IDA and there was positive work done this week. Assistant Administrator Cole thanked the Board for the Work Session and hoped to have information back to them very soon.

XV. REPORT FROM COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Rosla Plant: Commissioner Plant had no report.

Commissioner Bryan Threadgill: Commissioner Threadgill had no report.

Commissioner Emmett Collins: Commissioner Collins thanked the staff and all County employees and stated there is a lot of things going on and working in the County to try and get some things fixed.

Vice Chairman Adam Worsley: Vice Chairman Worsley thanked the Board, staff, and employees for all the work they were doing. Vice Chairman Worsley stated there are a lot of things happening and appreciated everyone's commitment.

XVI. REPORT FROM COUNTY ATTORNEY

County Attorney Michael Hill had no report.

XVII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

County Administrator McCarthy stated there was a need for an Executive Session to discuss Personnel. A motion was made by Commissioner Threadgill and seconded by Commissioner Plant to go into the Executive Session for Personnel at 6:50 p.m. All were in favor. A motion was made by Commissioner Threadgill and seconded by Commissioner Plant to go out of the Executive Session at 7:03 p.m. A motion was made by Commissioner Plant and seconded by Commissioner Threadgill to go back into Regular Session at 7:05 p.m. All were in favor. There was no action taken in the Executive Session.

XVIII. FUTURE MEETINGS & NOTICES

Vice Chairman Worsley announced the Future Meetings prior to the Executive Session.

XIX. ADJOURNMENT

With no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Commissioner Plant and seconded by Commissioner Threadgill to adjourn the meeting at 7:06 p.m. All were in favor.

Approved by:

Attest:

Date:

Majority Vote of the Board of Commissioners
Allyson R. Stephens, County Clerk
August 14, 2024