

7/17/2024 - Minutes

1. 9:00 A.M. WELCOME, GETTING STARTED, AND OPENING REMARKS

The meeting retreat began at 9:02 AM.

Present was Facilitator Suzette Arnold, County Administrator Hampton Raulerson, HR/Finance Coordinator Becky Harden, Deputy Clerk Madeline Nettles, Chairman Jesse Crews, Commissioner Drew Jones, Commissioner Luke Gowen, Commissioner Alphya Benefield, and Commissioner Everett. Guests are recorded here after.

Commissioner Everett led the retreat in invocation.

Chairman Crews made opening remarks, thanked the Facilitator for her presence, and shared that he was looking forward to having a good meeting.

2. 9:10 A.M. PRIORITY AREAS OF FOCUS

a.) Annex Building Repairs

County Administrator Raulerson explained the areas of need and where the estimates for repairs came from. Currently, the proposal for repairs includes replacing the roof, replacing all exterior doors and windows, repainting the exterior, repairing gutters, and replacing the old Okefenokee paneling in the front offices with sheetrock and paint. Currently, the county is looking at using ARPA, LATCF funds, and the administration lines from the 2020 SPLOST to cover the repair costs. Costs are currently estimated at \$939,817.00. County Administrator Raulerson provided updates regarding the auditorium project. The old humidifier has been taken out, which marks the completion of the project. He reports there should not be any more issues with the ceiling. Commissioner Jones asked if a metal roof would be better for the county to purchase. County Administrator Raulerson stated that due to maintenance issues with the county's other metal roofs, it was not being considered. County Administrator Raulerson informed the retreat that some of the county CDs will slowly be added to the General Fund, and some of them will have to be brought in to fund the Annex Repair project. Commissioner Gowen asked if a full inspection had been done, including the fire system. County Administrator Raulerson said the fire system is inspected annually. Commissioner Everett asked about asbestos in the building. Chairman Crews said the asbestos had been removed prior to the county moving into this building. Commissioner Jones asked about constructing a new building. Facilitator Arnold said there are federal grants regarding preservation of historical buildings. The USDA may provide a loan, but for the financial wellbeing of the county, they did not qualify for the grant. The board asked County administrator to further research potential USDA loans.

b.) Recreational Facility

County Administrator Raulerson said the county applied for certain funding; however, the current committees were not considering applications. There are other grants that have a 50/50 match of 1 million dollars that the county could apply for. County Administrator Raulerson presented ideas of improvement, including soccer fields and baseball fields. There was discussion regarding the other parks, with retreat stating that the other parks would still exist, but Deuce Lloyd would be the main sports facility. The retreat discussed funding options including USDA programs, SPLOST funds, fund balance, and 50/50 match grants. The retreat also discussed speaking with representatives regarding the plan, with Commissioner Gowen saying he would be willing to donate his time to meet with the representatives face to face. Facilitator Arnold asked if the Georgia Recreation Parks Association had been

contacted regarding this. The county has been referred to the grant when they previously reach out.

c.) Fire Station

County Administrator Raulerson presented an update on the fire station project. The fire station property has been acquired. An ad will be sent to the newspaper to acquire bids. The land clearing permit has been acquired. The bid process will be about 3-4 weeks. The county will move forward with the land clearing after the bids come back. The county may move forward with accepting bids for the building itself, so they can all come in at one point. The location will be across US Highway 121 from the current fire station in the Georgia Bend. Commissioner Jones asked about the radio tower. County Administrator Raulerson stated that it is not up yet, as they are waiting for the county to move forward. d.) Community Center County Administrator stated that the county has applied for funding and expects to hear by October. The grant applied for would be to help the planning phase, which is a part of the larger goal in agreement with Ware County, Clinch County, and Charlton County. The retreat discussed pursuing alternative funding options if the grant is not received. The retreat discussed the priority of other projects over this.

THE RETREAT TOOK MORNING BREAK AT 10:32 AM AND RETURNED AT 10:47 AM.

3. 10:45 A.M. WORKFORCE STRATEGY AND PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT

The retreat discussed the new Department of Labor salary regulations. County Administrator Raulerson said the Supervisor of Elections has already been changed from salary to hourly. He presented a list of positions and employees that would be affected by the Department of Labor changes. The retreat discussed the options for each position, the effect on the county budget, and whether the position itself would benefit from being hourly or salary.

4. 11:15 A.M. EMS

County Administrator Raulerson informed the retreat about EMS staffing issues and the multiple strategies previously implemented that have been unsuccessful. County Administrator Raulerson said he has been approached several times about privatizing, and informed the retreat that the only reason keeping EMS in house would be cost saving is because of the current low staffing numbers. The retreat discussed the benefits and issues with each option, including cost, coverage, county owned vehicles, and facilities. They discussed the bidding process, insurance payments, use of county facilities, county coverage needs, and cost comparisons. Facilitator Arnold asked if the county was speaking with career high schools and workforce boards. The county has reached out to career high schools, where there was some interest with students enrolling in classes. However, the county currently does not have any active workforce boards. Facilitator Arnold recommended a Request for Information or Request for Quote to gain more information from potential vendors. County Administrator Raulerson said he would gather more information regarding current call levels and pursue using Requests for Information or Requests for Quotes.

Retreat took lunch at 12:03 PM. Retreat resumed at 12:55 PM.

5. 1:00 P.M. BUSINESS INVESTMENT/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

County Administrator Raulerson updated the board, regarding the progress Pender Lloyd, Jenny Robbins, and himself have made in pursuing the Rural Tax Zone Credit. County Administrator Raulerson shared those discussions regarding the need for a strategic plan for updating downtown. County Administrator Raulerson encouraged the board to consider the current

Development Authority Board appointments and discuss potential changes. Facilitator Arnold recommended training for the Development Authority Board and the Director to better understand their roles, review the bylaws, and make changes from the inside out. Commissioner Gowen stated they should also consider how appointments are made, suggesting the inclusion of business owners instead of just residents. The retreat discussed the benefits and disadvantages of this, with County Administrator Raulerson recommending appointing a non-voting member that would serve as the business representative.

6. 1:30 P.M. RETIREMENT SYSTEM REVIEW AND UPDATE

Kristine Swanson with ACCG was present for discussions regarding retirement services and ways to potentially save county costs with the pension plans. The county discussed 5 possible options that could potentially save some county costs.

7. 2:00 P.M. PLANNING, ZONING, AND ORDINANCES

James Horton and Alexandra Arzayus from Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) Planning Division were present to discuss planning and zoning. The SGRC will be assisting the county with its comprehensive plan and 5-year plan over the next year. The comprehensive plan will be due to be adopted by June 30th, 2025.

The retreat took an afternoon break at 2:35 pm. The retreat resumed at 2:47 PM.

The retreat discussed zoning options, classification use of zones, planning tools used in Georgia, and advantages and disadvantages of zoning. County Administrator Raulerson asked if the board was okay with the SGRC reviewing current ordinances and holding another workshop at another time regarding subdivision plans etc. The retreat discussed the process of implementing zoning and planning.

8. 3:00 P.M. PRIORITIES FROM DISCUSSION- ACCOUNTABILITY

Agenda item not discussed.

9. 3:45 P.M. REFLECTION, CLOSING REMARKS, AND EVALUATION

Chairman Crews shared closing remarks about the retreat, commenting that it went well and overall was able to stay on task.

10. 4:00 P.M. ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 4:26 PM.

Jesse A. Crews, Chairman

Madeline Nettles, County Deputy Clerk

