

CHARLTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
COMMISSIONERS CONFERENCE ROOM
68 KINGSLAND DRIVE, SUITE B
FOLKSTON, GA 31537
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7TH, 2024
6:00 PM

11/7/2024 - Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM.

Present was Chairman Jesse Crews, Commissioner James Everett, Commissioner Drew Jones, Commissioner Luke Gowen, Interim County Administrator David Headley, HR/Finance Coordinator Rebecca Harden, County Attorney John Adams, and County Clerk Madeline Nettles.

Absent was Commissioner Alphya Benefield.

2. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

Invocation was led by Commissioner James Everett.

3. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Commissioner Gowen motioned to adopt the agenda as presented. Commissioner Everett seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

4. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Commissioner Everett motioned to adopt the minutes as presented. Commissioner Jones seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

5. CONSIDER INSURANCE RENEWAL

Johnathan Shaw, the county's insurance broker, was present to discuss the insurance renewal. The current provider would be a 17.88% increase in 2025 if renewed. Mr. Shaw got competitive quotes from the market and suggests that the board change to Anthem, which would only see an 8.49% increase.

Mr. Shaw highlighted areas that Anthem would be considered an upgrade from the current plan and areas that would be considered equal or a downgrade from the current plan.

Commissioner Gowen made a motion to use Anthem as the county's health insurance provider. Commissioner Jones seconded it.

Commissioner Jones asked if HR/Finance Coordinator Harden had any questions or comments regarding the change of insurance, which she stated that she did not. Commissioner Jones asked if this provider plan would still mean employees are fully insured, which Mr. Shaw and HR/Finance Coordinator Harden confirmed it would be.

Motion carried unanimously.

6. CONSIDER COUNTY FINANCIAL COMMITMENT FOR THE LOCAL BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

Interim County Administrator Headley and HR/Finance Coordinator Harden discussed the bridge repair proposal from GDOT.

Commissioner Jones made a motion to approve the county's financial commitment to the repair. Commissioner Gowen seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

County Clerk Nettles asked the chairman to clarify for the record where the funding would come from. Funding will be sourced from TSPLOST monies.

Commissioner Jones wants it communicated with the county and citizens about upcoming road closures.

Commissioner Gowen asked about the match requirement. County Interim Headley and HR/Finance Coordinator Harden confirmed that the match had to be monetary.

7. CONSIDER EASEMENT FOR BRANTLEY TELEPHONE COMPANY

The board discussed the easement request.

Sheriff Robert Phillips is okay with the location and confirmed that it is not an issue for the sheriff's office.

County Attorney Adams reviewed and revised the easement.

Commissioner Jones asked if there was any issues with the propane tanked being so close to the road. Sheriff Phillips stated that it would be between Brantley Telephone Company's current equipment and the Sheriff's Office, which creates some space from the road.

Commissioner Gowen made a motion to approve the easement. Commissioner Everett seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

8. CONSIDER PARTICIPATION IN SGRC REGIONAL TRANSIT PROGRAM

Commissioner Jones asked about the cost to the county. HR/Finance Coordinator Harden confirmed there would be no cost.

Commissioner Gowen made a motion to approve participation in the 2026 SGRC Regional Transit Program. Commissioner Gowen seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

9. DISCUSS GA BEND FIRE STATION PROJECT

Interim County Administrator Headley updated the board on the progress with the project and the current issues. Interim County Administrator Headley informed the board that no one bid on the building due to lack of drawings/plans.

Interim County Administrator Headley asked that the board consider having civil drawings created before going forward. He has requested quotes from civil engineers and architect plans which would cost roughly \$8,000.

Commissioner Jones asked about the fireboard's opinion. Chairman Crews explained that the fireboard was never really involved in the project and does not have an opinion on the current situation.

Gary Tippins talked about how they had built the Winokur Fire Station previously. Mr. Tippins clarified that the steel building is a shell only and would need the interior to be built.

Commissioner Gowen asked where the quotes for the plans came from. Interim County Administrator stated that the county engineer, Chad Hofstader, recommended that he contact Fred Dean.

The board asked where the funding for the plans would come from. Interim County Administrator Headley and HR/Finance Coordinator Harden confirmed that the funds would come from ARPA and SPLOST.

Commissioner Alpha Benefield arrived at 6:21 PM. From this point on, her presence is reflected in all comments, votes, and otherwise statements throughout the minutes.

Commissioner Gowen recommends that the county get the plans, but he would like Interim County Administrator Headley to obtain further bids or quotes and compare prices. Commissioner Gowen made a motion to reflect his recommendations.

Commissioner Jones asked if there were parts of the fire station that made it complicated to design or build.

Commissioner Everett seconded Commissioner Gowen's motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Gowen asked Mr. Tippins for recommendations on local architects. Mr. Tippins recommended Mr. Brock in St. Simmons. Commissioner Gowen asked that Mr. Tippins provide the contact information to Interim County Administrator Headley along with any other recommendations.

10. DISCUSS CHANGES TO THE CURRENT ANIMAL ORDINANCE

Interim County Administrator Headley discussed a proposed amendment to the current animal ordinance. Sheriff Phillips and County Attorney Adams have looked at the ordinance.

Commissioner Jones and Commissioner Gowen talked about changing the language in the proposal from "animal control officer" to "sheriff's deputy/designee."

Sheriff Phillips made comments regarding the proposed amendment. Sheriff Phillips would like to see the fees for violations start at \$100. Commissioner Jones asked if it would be better to have a flat rate for violations. The board and Sheriff Phillips discussed this.

Commissioner Jones asked about the verbiage classifying violations as a misdemeanor. County Clerk Nettles explained the reasoning behind this and cited the research into other municipalities who have similar verbiage.

Commissioner Gowen would like to see the first offense be given as a warning, the second offense to be \$100-150 fee, and then it double for each offense afterwards.

County Attorney Adams asked about the goals of the commissioners. Commissioner Gowen and Commissioner Jones asked that the attorney review it and give feedback.

Commissioner Benefield asked about what to do with the animals who are surrendered and what to do about animal control. Commissioner Benefield asked if there will ever be a point where the animals will need to be surrendered for repeat offenders.

County Attorney Adams is going to meet with Sheriff Phillips and bring another draft to the board.

Chairman Crews discussed the proposed draft ordinance, draft lease, and draft contract for animal control that was brought to the commissioners' office by the animal control project group. Chairman Crews asked County Clerk Nettles to make copies of the drafts and have them for the commissioners.

11. ACKNOWLEDGE MONTHLY WELLNESS REPORT

HR/Finance Coordinator stated that the report is just for the board's information.

12. PUBLIC COMMENTS: (PLEASE LIMIT TO 3 MINUTES)

Elaine Bailey brought concerns about the Elections Office and lack of Supervisor of Elections to the board. Mrs. Bailey asked about how much involvement the board has with the Board of Elections positions. Mrs. Bailey mentioned the LNA testing and retesting. Mrs. Bailey mentioned HR/Finance Coordinator Harden and Interim County Administrator Headley were present on the same day as the LNA testing and has a closed-door meeting with Mrs. Teresa Guinn. Mrs. Bailey stated on the night of the election, all precincts had reported except for the Folkston precinct until after 9:30 PM. Mrs. Bailey stated that Mrs. Teresa Guinn and Mrs. "Jo" Dube went over to get the memory cards at that time.

Chairman Crews stated that HR/Finance Coordinator and Interim County Administrator Headley went over to help the Elections Office get in touch with the state liaisons to help them. Chairman Crews also stated that the commissioners are not involved, and the Supervisor of Elections position is up to the Board of Elections.

Mrs. Bailey stated that Mrs. Teresa Guinn called Brenda Hodges, the previously Supervisor of Elections, to come help her.

Mrs. Bailey asked about employment and the Board of Commissioners paying wages for the Elections Office. Commissioner Jones explained that the Board of Elections is there as a supervisory board and is separated from the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Jones clarified that the county does pay wages and provides support, when necessary, but otherwise allows the Board of Elections to act independently.

Interim County Administrator Headley spoke about the gentleman who came to the Board of Commissioners Office and commended the poll workers and staff at the Elections Office for being so nice.

Michael Lusk, with the Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge, addressed the board about the proposed land acquisition. Chairman Crews asked how many acres of the current refuge exist within the county. Mr. Lusk stated that it was 187,132 acres within Charlton County. Chairman Crews asked how many acres of the proposed land is within Charlton County. Mr. Lusk stated that of the proposed 22,000 acres for acquisition, approximately 9,792 acres are in Charlton County.

Chairman Crews and Commissioner Jones talked about the loss of tax revenue to the county if the acquisition occurs.

Commissioner Everett asked what the purpose for expanding was. Mr. Lusk stated that the refuge is trying to create a fuel reduction zone to make wildfires easier to put out. The refuge is also going to take most of the Twin Pines Mine, if they are willing to sell, in this acquisition.

Chairman Crews asked if this would be a voluntary sale. Mr. Lusk confirmed that the acquisition would be voluntary and discussed the new Fish and Wildlife policy that says they will only deal with willing sellers.

HR/Finance Coordinator Harden stated that the tax assessor's office told her that the refuge only 91,000 acres in Charlton County.

Commissioner Gowen asked if anyone was advocating for the counties to raise the tax dollars brought in from the refuge. Mr. Lusk stated that it does come up in Congress and there have been efforts to raise it in Congressional sessions previously, but he recommended that the board talk to the Congressman about that.

13. COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Benefield thanked everyone for attending. Commissioner Benefield discussed the bad weather and flooding in Waycross, GA. Commissioner Benefield asked Sheriff Phillips to keep the board informed about the animal control efforts occurring. Commissioner Benefield stated that she was glad to see County Attorney Adams and Sheriff Phillips present despite recent illnesses.

14. EXECUTIVE SESSION (IF REQUIRED)

Commissioner Benefield made a motion to enter executive session to discuss possible personnel. Commissioner Gowen seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The Board of Commissioners, Interim County Administrator Headley, County Attorney Adams, and County Clerk Nettles entered executive session at 7:02 PM. HR/Finance Coordinator Harden was excused from executive session.

The Board of Commissioners, Interim County Administrator Headley, County Attorney Adams, and County Clerk Nettles exited executive session at 7:38 PM. No action was taken during executive session.

Commissioner Benefield motioned to offer Glenn Hull the position of County Administrator for a salary of \$100,000 annually plus standard county employment benefits and retirement. Commissioner Everett seconded the motion. The motion carried with three (3) votes in favor from Commissioner Benefield, Commissioner Everett, and Chairman Crews, and two (2) votes not in favor from Commissioner Jones and Commissioner Gowen.

Chairman Crews addressed Mr. Hull regarding Interim County Administrator Headley reaching out later with the contract.

Commissioner Gowen stated that he voted with his heart but will be behind Mr. Hull in full support. Commissioner Jones shared similar sentiments.

Commissioner Benefield thanked all the applicants and addressed HR/Finance Coordinator Harden and Ronnie Pollock directly.

Commissioner Everett stated that HR/Finance Coordinator Harden and Ronnie Pollock do a wonderful job in each of their respective positions.

15. NEXT MEETING:

16. ADJOURN

Commissioner Jones motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Benefield seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:43 PM.

Jesse A. Crews, Chairman

Madeline Nettles, County Clerk