

HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION
4:30 P.M., MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2021
HABERSHAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE
JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM
295 LLEWELLYN STREET
CLARKESVILLE, GA 30523

A work session of the Habersham County Board of Commissioners was held on Monday, March 15, 2021 at 4:30 p.m. in the Jury Assembly Room of the Habersham County Courthouse in Clarkesville, Georgia.

Present: Chairman Dustin Mealor; Vice-Chairman Tim Stamey; Commissioner Bruce Palmer; Commissioner Bruce Harkness; Commissioner Jimmy Tench; County Attorney Donnie Hunt; County Manager Phil Sutton; County Clerk Lindsay Underwood; County Department Directors; Individuals from the Media and Public.

Chairman Mealor called the work session to order at 4:30 p.m.

Commissioner Harkness led the Invocation.

Chairman Mealor led the Pledge of Allegiance.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION:

a. Demorest Fire Services Discussion

Phil Sutton, County Manager, and Chad Black, Emergency Services Director, addressed the Board. The potential merger of Demorest Fire Services with the County's Emergency Services Department has been discussed by a small committee consisting of Commissioner Palmer, Chairman Mealor, Phil Sutton, Chad Black, two council members from Demorest, and the Demorest City Manager. The County is set to give a presentation to the full Demorest Council in a public meeting within the next week or so, although a date/time has not been set. Benefits of the potential merger include reducing Demorest's current Fire Department budget by half, a station that is in better shape and better located than the current station the County uses on Robertson Loop, merging of equipment and personnel, etc. The proposal is that a special tax district be created by an IGA, written by attorneys for both parties, and approved by the County and City. Discussion ensued regarding the potential merger, namely, regarding funding and personnel concerns. This topic will continue to be discussed at future meetings.

b. Fern Springs Discussion

Phil Sutton, County Manager, addressed the Board, stating that this is just the beginning of discussions for Fern Springs Park. Joel Katz, who works for Representative Clyde, has contacted Mr. Sutton, and said that their office is willing to discuss a land swap or lease for the County to obtain control of the park. The County currently does not have enough land to swap for the park, so the question is whether the Commission is interested in pursuing a lease agreement to obtain control of the park. There is a significant amount of work that will need to go into repair, maintenance, monitoring access, and monitoring use of the park, if the County were to take it over in any capacity. The Commissioners expressed interest in pursuing the following options: 1) Ask if Representative Clyde's office will work with the Federal Park Service to reopen and manage the park themselves, 2) Investigate what an MOU/lease would look like if the County were to reopen and manage the park,

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3) Investigate what funding and assistance the County might be able to get from community partners/third-party organizations. This topic will be discussed further once these options are investigated.

c. National Association of Counties (NACo) Membership Discussion

Phil Sutton, County Manager, addressed the Board. ACCG Executive Director Dave Wills has sent a request to Chairman Mealor asking that the County consider rejoining NACo. NACo advocated for the 2021 Reconciliation Act recently approved, and county by county estimates of funding were calculated by NACo, Habersham County's estimated funding is \$8,869,414. The County is currently unsure of how those funds can be used, and any communication from the Federal level about the use of those funds will come down to counties from NACo, so there are concerns that if Habersham County is not a member, there may be a delay in the receipt of important information pertaining to the funding and acceptable use of the funding. This topic is on the Commission's regular meeting agenda for consideration.

d. Jail Funding Strategy: Urban Redevelopment Agency

Phil Sutton, County Manager, addressed the Board. A community member had approached him to discuss an Urban Redevelopment Agency as a potential option for funding construction of a New Jail. Cornelia has recently used an Urban Redevelopment Agency for their Water Treatment Plant. The advantage to this option is that it does not require legislative action, whereas a Facilities Authority (that has been discussed as an option in the past), does require legislative action. The Urban Redevelopment Agency is a citizens committee that the Commissioners would appoint and regulate, like the Airport Commission. Mr. Sutton stated that he was not recommending this option, he just wanted to make the Commission aware of the option, and to see if they were interested in researching it further. The Commission agreed it would not hurt to investigate this as an option, but they feel other options would have been, or will be, better suited for funding construction of a New Jail.

ADJOURN: 5:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

By: _____

Chairman Dustin Mealor

Attest: _____

County Clerk Lindsay Underwood