

HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION MINUTES
5:00 P.M., MONDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2021
HABERSHAM COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
COMMISSION CONFERENCE ROOM
130 JACOB'S WAY
CLARKESVILLE, GA 30523

The Habersham County Board of Commissioners held a work session on Monday, October 18, 2021 at 5:00 P.M. in the Commission Conference Room of the Habersham County Administrative Building. Present was Chairman Dustin Mealor, Commissioners Bruce Harkness, Bruce Palmer and Jimmy Tench), Interim County Manager Alicia Vaughn, County Attorney Donnie Hunt, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, Department Heads, Staff, members of the media and the public.

Chairman Mealor called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Commissioner Palmer lead the invocation.

Chairman Palmer lead the pledge of allegiance.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

a. Discussion Regarding Design of Fire/EMA Building:

Interim County Manager Alicia Vaughn informed the Commission of the need to hire an architect for the design of the new Fire/EMA building. In the past, there had been talk of including space for a new E911 center in the design. While ARP funds could not be used directly for this, the money the county saves by being reimbursed from the ARP funds in other areas of the public safety budget can be moved to cover the expense. She stated that, even though it may add to the cost, we should go ahead and ask for a design and cost estimate both with and without a new E911 center included in the design. If not, it will eventually have to be included in a future SPLOST as the current E911 center is very outdated. Emergency Services Director Chad Black brought up the benefits of being able to keep the old E911 center available for a backup and for storage. E911 Director Lynn Smith discussed the benefits of having a new E911 center in place prior to the completion of the radio project, as the old center would still be functional and operating during the transition in case any issues arise.

b. Discussion Regarding ARP Funding:

Finance Director Tim Sims gave the Commission an overview of the American Rescue Plan Act, the available funds and allowable uses. The American Rescue Plan was enacted March 2021 and covers a period of March 3, 2021, through December 31, 2024. The county can use the funds through December 2026; however they must be obligated prior to the end of 2024. Eligible uses are to respond to the COVID health emergency or its negative economic impacts (i.e. PPE purchases), Respond to workers performing essential work during the COVID-19 public health emergency (i.e. premium pay), Assist with reduction of revenue from government provided services experienced due to the COVID emergency and to make necessary investments in broadband, water and sewer infrastructure. Habersham was allotted 8.8 million dollars, half of which was received in June 2021 the second half of which will be received in June 2022. So far, the plans are to use \$6.2 Million for payroll costs for public safety, \$430,000 for premium pay for employees,

\$950,000 for the technology and security upgrades that were necessary to make remote work possible for social distancing, and \$1.2 Million for revenue replacement. The recommended uses for the reimbursement ARP Funds are \$2.5 Million for the E-911 Radio System Replacement, \$400,000 for Old Iron Ore Road Sewer in conjunction with Cornelia and GDOT, \$685,000 for possible grant matches to state ARP funds and \$3 Million for building projects. Additional ARP funds have been made available to the State of Georgia that the county can apply for. So far we have requested \$3.25 Million for stormwater expansion at the Airport Business Park, \$3.5 Million for Highway 365 sewer expansion, \$150,000 for a stormwater survey and master plan, \$185,100 for Chase Rd Stormwater Construction, \$14.7 Million for broadband expansion in partnership with Windstream and \$15.7 Million for broadband expansion in partnership with HEMC. There are plans to apply for funds for finishing out the upper level of the Courthouse, however the costs have yet to be determined.

c. Discussion Regarding SPLOST VII:

SPLOST VI ended in March of 2021. The county collected \$37.7 Million. Which is slightly more than the \$37.5 Million that was projected back in 2014. SPLOST VII started in April. So far, the county has collected \$3.5 Million. Initially, it had been projected that the county would collect \$47.1 Million over the course of the next six years, however we are currently 17.8% over prior year collections. Mr. Sims explained that this was likely due in part to the online sales taxes. With the current trend, sans any economic downturn, recession or change in tax structure, he believes that the county could potentially collect \$52-\$55 Million from this SPLOST depending on the formula used.

d. Discussion Regarding Recent COVID-19 Relief Fund Public Safety Pay Supplement:

Finance Director Tim Sims informed the Commission that there has been a lot of confusion since the governor announced using ARP funds to establish this grant program. Initially all that was said was that it would provide a \$1,000 one-time pay supplement to full-time public safety officials and first responders. Now it is coming out that there are many stipulations. Not all public safety employees are eligible. The employee must be actively certified and had to have been employed between August 1st and August 31st of 2021. If they were not employed by the county in that specific month, the employee will not receive the pay supplement. Also, though the county will be reimbursed for the FICA, the \$1000 paid to the employees will still be taxable.

ADJOURN 5:24 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

By: _____
Chairman Dustin Mealor

Attest: _____
County Clerk Brandalin Carnes