

**HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**WORK SESSION MINUTES**  
**5:00 P.M., MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2023**  
**HABERSHAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE**  
**JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM**  
**295 LLEWELLYN STREET, CLARKESVILLE, GA 30523**

The Habersham County Board of Commissioners held a work session on Monday, September 18, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. in the Jury Assembly Room of the Habersham County Courthouse located at 295 Llewellyn St, Clarkesville, GA 30523.

Present was Chairman Ty Akins, Vice Chairman Bruce Harkness, Commissioner Bruce Palmer, Commissioner Dustin Mealor, Commissioner Jimmy Tench, County Manager Alicia Vaughn, County Attorney Ralph Taylor, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, county staff, members of the media and public.

Chairman Akins called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m.

Commissioner Tench lead the invocation.

Commissioner Mealor lead the pledge of allegiance.

**ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Harkness and vote unanimously (5-0) to adopt the agenda as presented.

**DISCUSSION:**

**a. Discussion Regarding Landfill Operations**

**1) Projected Life of Remaining Cells at Landfill**

Interim Landfill Director Johnnie Vickers addressed the Commission. New surveys were recently completed on September 1, 2023 for use in determining the remaining capacity of the landfill. He just received the results this past Friday. At this time, the C&D cells (Cells 6-7) have 18,563 cubic yards of airspace left. This translates into an estimated remaining life of around 8.5 months. He informed the Commission that they should expect the C&D cells to be completely full sometime around March of next year. Mr. Vickers stated that it is his professional opinion that once the C&D cells are full, no more C&D material should be accepted by the County as putting it into the MSW cells takes up the air space and closes the cells 3-4 times faster than MSW material. Mr. Vickers says that he has been contacted by Mr. Timothy Loggins and Mr. Doug Oliver regarding the fact that they operate a private C&D landfill that could handle taking in this waste. Private C&D landfills like these are options for alternative locations for citizens and contractors to dispose of their C&D waste.

County Manager Vaughn addressed the Commission, informing them that not accepting C&D waste will have a large financial impact on the landfill's enterprise fund, which operates like a business. She feels that the county needs to provide as much notice as possible to citizens and businesses before making the change and advises that we monitor the remaining space and give at least 60 days' notice prior to refusing further C&D materials. The public would be informed through press releases as well as posting notices at the landfill and Planning Office. She feels that it would also be important to attempt to contact surrounding landfills that accept C&D materials as they will see the greatest impact from the change.

Mrs. Vaughn asked Chief Financial Officer Tim Sims to give the Commission more details regarding the possible financial impact of not accepting C&D materials. Mr. Sims informed the Commission that the revenue the landfill receives from accepting C&D was \$632,000 last fiscal year (July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023).

Regarding actual cash, the landfill will still be able to maintain its operating costs if it no longer receives revenue from accepting C&D, however the landfill's enterprise fund would still show a loss every year due to the non-cash entries of "depreciation" and "post closure costs". Those two entries affect assets and liabilities respectively. Mr. Sims stated that this is typical with business enterprise funds. He suggested that some of the revenue loss could be offset by increasing fees in other areas such as the amount charged for mattresses, which take up a lot of space in the landfill. Commissioner Akins asked how much revenue the MSW portion of the landfill receives? Mr. Sims informed him that this amounts to \$2.2 million based on last year's numbers after removing the \$632,000 in revenue from C&D. Mrs. Vaughn informed the Commission that not receiving the revenue from accepting C&D materials will greatly reduce the amount that is contributed to the fund balance of the landfill's enterprise fund. This fund balance is used for capital purchases like equipment. Once the landfill's fund balance runs out, the burden of paying for capital expenses like equipment or transfer stations would be put on the county's general fund. Mr. Sims informed the Commission that the landfill's fund balance was \$5.4 million as of the last audit and was projected to be around \$4.8 to \$5 million this year after some equipment purchases. Commissioner Akins stated that he remembered last year that the landfill had a significant expense from outsourcing the treatment of leachate. He asked if there was a possibility that this would occur again? Mr. Vickers stated that the cost varies with the amount of leachate and that this fluctuates depending on rainwater. Commissioner Palmer stated it was his understanding that some of the extra leachate last year was from opening cell 5 and that now that they are further into the cell, they shouldn't see the quantity of leachate that they saw last year. Mr. Vickers confirmed Commissioner Palmer's understanding, saying that he feels that there isn't an issue at this time with excessive leachate. Commissioner Harkness inquired as to what is done with yard waste that comes into the landfill? Mr. Vickers informed him that they collect they accumulate this material and then periodically have a vendor come in to grind it into mulch that is used at the landfill. Commissioner Harkness next inquired as to what is done regarding tires that are brought in? Mr. Vickers informed him that the county charges citizens to take in tires based on their size. The EPD does not allow tires to be buried, so the county accumulates the tires and then pays to have a trailer come around once a month that they pack full for hauling off. The county does not recoup the money that it spends on having the tires hauled off from the fees that are charged to citizens to take them in. Commissioner Palmer asked why the landfill doesn't increase the fee for taking in tires to break even with the cost of hauling them? Commissioner Akins and Mrs. Vaughn both agreed that, while they need to make sure they are sufficiently charging for services, they must be careful as raising the fees too high too quickly will lead to individuals dumping tires on the side of the road. Mrs. Vaughn suggested that the fees for items like tires be reviewed on a periodic basis such as every 6-months.

Commissioner Palmer stated that he had attempted to reach out to Representative Andrew Clyde about purchasing property that the US Forest Service (USFS) owns that adjoins the landfill. Representative Clyde referred him back to the USFS. When Commissioner Palmer contacted them, the USFS informed him that they were not willing to sell the land, but they would be willing to trade at a 1:2 or 1:3 ratio where the county would have to swap 2-3 acres for every acre received from the USFS. This would have to be land that the USFS wants, however they won't directly come out and say what property they would be interested in. Acquiring property from the USFS is the only way that he could see for expanding the existing landfill. A little less than a year ago, someone reached out about being interested in selling the county property across the railroad tracks, however it is unlikely that Norfolk Southern would be agreeable to this. Commissioner Harkness stated that he would like for the Commission Office to follow up on the work that Commissioner Palmer started in reaching out on a federal level to get the ball rolling in having the USFS work with the county on knowing what land they are interested so the county can purchase it to swap. Mr. Vickers stated that being able to acquire property adjoining the landfill would make the process of getting a permit much easier. For land that is not already connected to an existing landfill, the process can take anywhere from eight to nine years minimum. Commissioner Mealor informed the rest of the Commission that he had participated in discussions on a previous Commission about attempting to purchase the property in question from the USFS, and at that time they were also unwilling to sell but open to a land swap. He recalled that they believed they could get two to three additional cells out of the property that was being looked at in addition to reopening Fern Springs Park, which the USFS closed, as a county park.

Commissioner Tench asked if it was possible to build the landfill up rather than expanding out? Mr. Vickers informed him that there is an elevation cap according to the C&D plans that were originally approved by the EPD. Once they hit that cap, they can't go any higher. Commissioner Palmer clarified that he thinks Commissioner Tench was referring to cells 3-5 for MSW. Cells 3-5 can be built over, however there is a limit as to how high they can go. Mr. Vickers confirmed that this is the plan, and once cells 3-5 are filled they are going to combine the filled MSW cells into one large cell and build it up for maximum usage. Commissioner Akins asked if the MSW cells are built up and they don't take any more C&D what the expected life of the landfill would be? Mr. Vickers informed him that based on the current intake volume, it is estimated that the MSW cells have 17 years of remaining life as there is 963,325 cubic yards of available airspace left in cells 3-5. Commissioner Harkness further inquired about the process for building up cells 3-5 and Mr. Vickers informed him that this is considered a major modification by the EPD, and it takes about a year to get the paperwork approved. All the surveys and calculations would have to be redone from the bottom up.

Commissioner Palmer wanted to highlight the importance of a recycling program, as more material getting recycled means less going into the landfill, which will extend its overall life. Mr. Vickers stated that he has done several studies over the years, and he found that about 55-60% of material that gets thrown into landfills are recyclable commodities. He feels that about half of the material in Habersham County's landfill is probably recyclable, however the cost of removing it would be substantial. Mr. Vickers plans to come back before the Commission at a later time to discuss the best way that the county can move forward with expanding recycling on the limited budget.

## 2) Hours of Operation & Staffing

Mr. Vickers has analyzed the operations at the landfill since May and he feels that the current hours of operation are not efficient. The first issue is that the opening time of 6:00 a.m. is often during dark. The staff ends up having to line up and crank tractors and vehicles and leave them running for an hour to provide lights for patrons to be able to navigate their way through the landfill. Working in the dark is also not safe for the employees, especially when there are only 3-4 patrons who come to the landfill between the hours of 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. He advises that the hours of operation be changed so that the staff clock in at 7:00 a.m. and the landfill opens to the public at 7:30. This would allow the staff to begin work while it is daylight out and have thirty minutes to fuel and inspect the equipment prior to the arrival of the public. They would still shut the landfill down to the public at 4:30, as is current practice, to allow thirty minutes for staff to be able to finish pushing dirt to cover trash and run reports inside of the scale house in time to clock out by 5:00 p.m. Making this change would also have the dual benefit of being able to adjust staff scheduling for better coverage. Currently, there are two shifts at the landfill with each shift having 2-3 employees running the entire landfill. This means that there are only around 1-1.5 days a week where he has the usage of all his employees at the landfill at the same time. Making the suggested change would allow him to have three days a week where all the employees are at the landfill at one time. This would allow them to be able to gain ground on EPD regulated tasks that have been neglected due to not having enough staff to do extra work beyond the normal daily operations. It would also allow them to run the compacter every day, which would extend the life of the landfill. This change would also alleviate a second issue, which is that the current scheduling makes it nearly impossible for his staff to be able to take breaks. If there are only two people working on a shift, they must shut the landfill down just to even be able to have a bathroom break. They then come back to find eight or nine vehicles waiting on them. At lunch his staff don't even have the time to be able to take their legally required 30-minute lunch breaks. Making the suggested change to the clock in time for employees and the opening time of the landfill will allow for the scheduling of staff to provide sufficient coverage for their being able to take breaks. Commissioner Akins asked if these changes would cut back on overtime and Mr. Vickers confirmed that it would, as the employees would be able to accomplish their work within normal business hours. Commissioner Akins inquired as to when Mr. Vickers would like to make these changes effective. Mr. Vickers and Mrs. Vaughn proposed that the change take place on November 6<sup>th</sup> as it would not only give them time to inform the public and vendors of the change but also allow it to take place at the start of a new pay period. Commissioner Meador asked when they should plan to stop taking C&D material? Mrs. Vaughn informed the Commission that the timeline depends on whether the Commission wishes to reserve landfill

space for materials resulting from the demolition of the old courthouse. She explained that Rochester is working on a demo plan for the old courthouse and later it needs to be decided whether they wish to put out an RFP that includes recycling of the materials or hauling it off. If they end up having to haul it off, it could potentially save a lot of money having this material taken to the county's own landfill.

Mrs. Vaughn informed the Commissioners that all these discussions regarding the landfill are operational in nature and that they don't have to take any official action on them. She and Mr. Vickers just wanted to keep the Commission informed due to the public impact of any potential changes.

**b. Discussion Regarding ACCG Legislative Updates**

Commissioner Palmer had attended the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) Policy Committee meetings. He briefed the rest of the Commission on the proposed Policy Committee recommendations for the ACCG 2024 legislative agenda as well as the ACCG Federal Policy Committee's 2023-2024 Platform.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: NONE**

**ADJOURN**

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Tench and voted 4-0 to adjourn the meeting at 5:57 p.m. Commissioner Harkness had to momentarily excuse himself four minutes prior to adjourning and was thus not present for the vote.

Respectfully submitted,

By:

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Commission Chairman Ty Akins

Attest:

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County Clerk Brandalin Carnes