

HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION MINUTES
5:00 P.M., MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2023
HABERSHAM COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING
COMMISSION CONFERENCE ROOM
130 JACOB'S WAY, CLARKESVILLE, GA 30523

A meeting of the Habersham County Board of Commissioners was held on Monday, February 20, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. in the Commission Conference Room of the Habersham County Administrative Building located in Clarkesville, GA.

Present was Commission Chairman Ty Akins, Commissioner Bruce Harkness, Commissioner Bruce Palmer, Commissioner Dustin Mealor, Commissioner Jimmy Tench, County Attorney Donnie Hunt, County Manager Alicia Vaughn, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, County Department Directors, Individuals from the Media and Public.

Chairman Akins called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

Commissioner Mealor lead the invocation.

Commissioner Palmer lead the pledge of allegiance.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

- a. Discussion Regarding Commission Projects: Commissioner Akins asked the other Commissioners if they had any projects that they would like to propose for the upcoming year?

Commissioner Mealor said he would like to see a potential site plan for the trail system that is being proposed for the same property where the new animal shelter is being built. He stated that having a site plan would allow the county to apply for potentially \$200,000 in federal grants for a \$50,000 match. He stated there were also several state grants available with few counties competing for them, over \$1,000,000 of which went unclaimed last year. Commissioner Akins asked inquired about whether the Commission had included this in the budget last year, to which Commissioner Mealor informed him that the \$50,000 for a grant match had been budgeted but the money ended up being as some of the funding towards the pickleball court resurfacing. Mrs. Vaughn informed the Commissioners that there is an agenda item at tonight's Commission meeting for the Carl Vinson Institute to develop a master plan for the Parks and Recreation Department. She states that a lot of grant opportunities are available, but in order to successfully compete for them it is necessary to show where a plan for the projects are already in place.

Commissioner Harkness wants the Commission to setup a Water and Sewer Committee that will work with the cities to drought-proof the county. He feels that getting water and sewer down 365 will bring industry into the county. He would also like to start an annual program that accepts nominations from the public to recognizes and honors community members that have a positive impact in Habersham County.

Commissioner Tench had no projects he wished to propose at this time.

Commissioner Palmer wants to look into starting a county farmers market that would operate two days a week. There was a big push to build a farmers market back in the early 90's and a SPLOST referendum was passed that included \$250,000 towards building the Dewey Trench Pavilion. There was also money received from the governor's discretionary fund towards this purpose. He feels that, considering the rising demand, this could be a huge benefit to both citizens looking to purchase or sell fresh locally grown produce. Commissioner Palmer also wishes to establish a citizens academy that would meet one day a month for eight or nine months. These citizens would be taken to visit all of the different departments in the county so that they can understand the services they offer and how tax dollars are being used. Lastly, he brought up Commissioners Harkness' ideas in the previous year regarding making Habersham County a bee sanctuary. He offered the idea of planting pollinator friendly flower plots around the administrative building and designating it as a bee pollination area?

Commissioner Akins had no projects he wished to propose at this time. He told County Manager Vaughn that he would reach out to her in the coming weeks to discuss these projects and then bring them back before the Commission for consensus regarding their budgeting and implementation.

b. Discussion Regarding Recreation Department Fitness Center

Parks and Recreation Director Brook Whitmire provided the Commission a breakdown of the current registration for spring sports from the RecDesk software. In spring of 2022, they had 116 children participating in spring sports. Their current registration for 3-4 t-ball, 5-6 coach pitch, 7-14 baseball/softball, girls volleyball, track and field is at 598 participants for a growth of over 500% in 6 months. In addition to this, the number of room rentals have doubled. Ms. Whitmire states that this growth is the result of the combined efforts of Gymnastics Coordinator Lenay Tanner and herself, and that it highlights the importance of bringing in a programs coordinator who delve further into the work of advertising and marketing to continue this growth.

Mrs. Whitmire informed the Commission that Habersham County has an opportunity to bring fitness center that is currently being operated by Habersham Medical Center in-house. There has been a lot of outreach from the public regarding desired continuity of this program. Habersham Medical Center has offered to donate all the fitness equipment so there would be no startup costs associated with the county taking on this new program. The only additional cost would be associated with the salary from the creation of a position to supervise the center, which would be necessary for the safety of the participants. Mrs. Whitmire states that the fitness center is only open for 31 hours a week, so this new position would also be able to dually work on expanding program offerings in addition to the responsibility of supervising the center. She believes that this position could fund itself with the additional membership and programming fees and revenue from special events it would bring into the Rec Department. Commissioner Akins asked if there was any way to know what the potential revenue would look like for the fitness center and County Manager Alicia Vaughn stated that it would be a difficult comparison to make due to the fact that they don't have an ability to bill insurance like the hospital does, however that the Commission should also keep in mind that this could be an opportunity to promote employee wellness by providing discounted memberships. The county is self-insured, so healthy employees reduce overall insurance costs as well as providing as supplementing the benefits package. Mrs. Vaughn would like to have a meeting with the members of the fitness center regarding the formulating the potential fee structure. She feels like this is a great opportunity and stated that by absorbing the fitness center, the county will also get back the usage of

a room that is attached to it that can be used to offer additional fitness classes. There has already been interest expressed from individuals who wish to provide this kind of instruction.

c. Discussion Regarding Landfill Tipping Fees

County Manager Alicia Vaughn reminded the Commission that the topic of tipping fees and concerns regarding the acceptance of construction and demolition (C&D) materials at the landfill were brought up during the planning retreat. Landfill Director Laurie Church informed that she had reached out to surrounding landfills and none of them plan on increasing their tipping fees this year. She states that our current tipping fees remain competitive and in-line with these other counties. The topic of conversation turned to the concerns around C&D materials going into the landfill. Mrs. Church stated that the actual C&D site that was meant for this purpose was filled almost 2 years ago. Currently C&D makes up about 1/3 of the tonnage going into the landfill, however it's bulky nature means it consumes closer to 1/2 the space. Eliminating further C&D going into the landfill would extend its life and provide more time for planning for future needs. Several private individuals and businesses have reached out to the Commission, Mrs. Vaughn and Mrs. Church regarding solutions and offering their services. Mrs. Vaughn and Mrs. Church suggested that an RFP be put out so that all of the options can be reviewed in a fair manner. Mrs. Vaughn states that if it is the Commissions wish, the landfill consultant can draft an RFP for her to bring before the board for approval. Chairman Akins asked Mrs. Vaughn to proceed. Mrs. Vaughn also informed the Commission that, in the meantime, Grant Coordinator Lauren Long has submitted for a grant for recycling centers.

d. Discussion Regarding Harvest Church Development

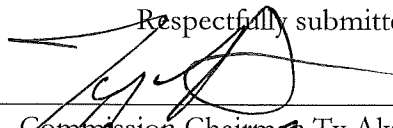
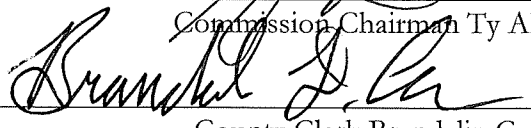
Commissioner Akin stated that, though it is not a topic that is coming before the Commission, he thought that it would be prudent to get Public Works Director Jerry Baggett to brief them on the situation with a subdivision planned for Harvest Church. Mr. Baggett showed them a plat of the proposed Harvest Church Estates subdivision and informed the Commission that he had six recommendations that he has passed along to the Planning Department for the Planning Commission to consider (see attachment).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

There were no Commissioners wishing to make additional comments.

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Harkness, seconded by Commissioner Mealor and voted unanimously to adjourn at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
By: 
Commission Chairman Ty Akins
Attest: 
County Clerk Brandalin Carnes

