

**HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
CALLED MEETING MINUTES
5:00 P.M., WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 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 Wednesday, March 1, 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 Palmer, Commissioner Dustin Mealor, County Manager Alicia Vaughn, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, County Department Directors, Individuals from the Media and Public.

Absent was Commissioner Harkness, Commissioner Tench and County Attorney Donnie Hunt.

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

Commissioner Palmer lead the invocation.

Commissioner Mealor lead the pledge of allegiance.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Mealor and voted unanimously 3-0 to amend the agenda to allow for public comment prior to "Old Business". Members of the public were given an opportunity to sign up for public comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Joey Brown: Mr. Brown stated that he requested information from the hospital showing that from 2021-2022 the total loss for operating the hospital was over \$126,000. He has dropped by at random times during the past six days and that there were never more than one or two people using the facility. He asks why the county wants to get into the gym business when there are plenty of private companies in the county offering the same services and more? He states that he keeps hearing about how this will provide a higher level of service to the community, but that the focus needs to be put on the level of service for things that really matter such as the jail, landfill, and staffing for public safety. Regarding the new position that would be created to supervise the gym, he feels that the job description has been setup to push through the creation of an "events coordinator" position. He states that once the gym inevitably fails, the position will remain on the county payroll for this purpose.

Keith Canup: He feels that expanding already bloated government does not make fiscal sense to him. He guarantees that the Commission will be going up on the mileage rate. He is asking that the county classify essential personnel (road dept, sheriff deputies, EMT) and cut non-essential personnel and cut the non-essential to add to the essential. He knows that total fitness is going to fail because the hospital couldn't even make money on it and they had the capability of charging Medicaid, which the county cannot. There are 47,000 residents of the county and they shouldn't shoulder the burden of a bad deal for such a small minority. He states that he feels that there were no facts, figures or background info from the hospital presented to the Commissioners or discussed

prior to the last Commission meeting and expressed his concern with calling a sudden emergency meeting on the item after it was supposed to have been tabled.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

- a. Consider/Approve Creation of Programs & Fitness Specialist Position: Recreation
Department Director Brook Whitmire provided a recap of the issue at hand. Habersham Medical Center is closing their Total Fitness Program and many citizens have reached out regarding their desire for the county to absorb its operation. Mrs. Whitmire feels that this transition can happen smoothly, however it will require the creation of a position to supervise the facility. The current posted hours of operation for this facility total only 31 hours a week, which would mean this position could also dually function in assisting with other services and program offerings. Between the gym memberships and the fees for other classes and programs that can be offered she feels that the county would be in a good financial position to take over operation of the fitness center. She stated that Habersham County would not be unique in providing a fitness center, informing the Commission that there are seven other counties in Northeast Georgia that do so (Towns, Hall, White, Hall, Forsyth, Gwinnett, Clarke and Oconee), with Hall County having one in each of its four recreation facilities. Mrs. Vaughn wanted to rebut the comment that was made earlier by Keith Canup regarding the county not being able to receive reimbursement from Medicare. The hospital has agreed to transfer their silver sneakers account over to the county, so they will get reimbursed \$3 for every silver sneakers participant if they use the gym, walk or use the aquatic center. A personal number is assigned to each individual and they are logged in for each activity they do, with the county getting reimbursed \$3 per activity up to \$30 a month per participant. This averages around \$1300-\$1400 per month alone. The hospital only got reimburse for people using their gym. Mrs. Vaughn also wanted to speak on the concerns regarding the hospital's losses on the fitness center. Mr. Brown was what his documents showed as being the most recent loss experienced by the hospital and he stated it was a little over \$62,000. Mrs. Vaughn brought up that the difference between the hospital and the county is that the hospital had over \$100,000 in labor costs a year plus from one full-time and three part-time positions to run the center as well as the cost of leasing the space from the county. The county's only added costs will be from the salary of one full time position, as it already has part time staff on its payroll in the building that can assist with the fitness center, the equipment is being donated and they own the space. Commissioner Palmer stated that he feels that we should move forward with this and reevaluate its success and whether or not to continue it during the budget process. Commissioner Meador stated that he has talked to a local gym owner and he feels that we should take over the fitness center temporarily and in the meantime put out an RFP to see about getting a private company to take it over. He doesn't agree with the county competing with local businesses. If the gym doesn't lose money and they don't get an RFP he wouldn't mind the county taking control of it, however he doesn't want to keep it going if it loses money. Mrs. Vaughn recommended that the Commission move forward with the county taking over operations of the fitness center, give them a time period to stabilize it and get all of the memberships and silver sneakers accounts transferred into their software and then reevaluate it prior to the new budget starting July 1st. This would give them time to have good numbers to give to the Commission so they can determine if they wish to keep the fitness center, and if not it gives

them information to use in putting out an RFP. Commissioner Mealor asked how long an RFP would take and Mrs. Vaughn mentioned it would be a 90-day process from start to finish and they would need two weeks' notice to issue the RFP. Commissioner Mealor stated that, given we already have membership and usage numbers from the hospital, could we not just go ahead and put out the RFP now? Mrs. Vaughn informed him that because of the way the hospitals fee structure was setup and the fact they were getting reimbursements from Medicare the current financials wouldn't give a good indicator to a private business about the financial viability of taking over. It would be better to put the RFP later once they have more solid data. Commissioner Mealor stated that he would reluctantly agree to take it over if the county is making progress towards unloading it.

Motion was made by Commissioner Palmer, seconded by Commissioner Mealor and voted unanimously 3-0 to approve the creation of a full-time program and fitness specialist position to be re-evaluated at the beginning of the 2024 budget year either to maintain or submit an RFP for operations.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Commissioner Palmer stated that contrary to what people think, there is a lot of research and discussion that goes into their decisions. They are actively looking at their public safety, they have increased pay for the county employees and they are looking at solutions for the landfill and recycling centers.

Commissioner Akins stated that we are going to have three days of budget meetings on March 28th-March 30th and that he invites the public to attend. Those budget meetings will be held in the Administrative Building and livestreamed onto the county website. All of the department heads and elected officials come and present what they are requesting in their budgets in great detail, so it is an excellent way for the public to find out exactly what taxes are being spent on.

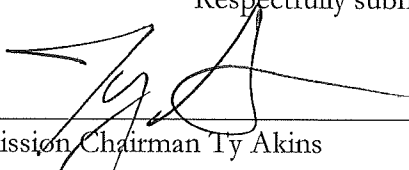
Commissioner Mealor had no additional comments.

ADJOURN

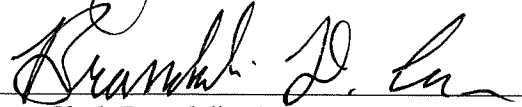
Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Palmer and voted unanimously 3-0 to adjourn the meeting at 5:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

By:


Commission Chairman Ty Akins

Attest:


County Clerk Brandalin Carnes

