

HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION MINUTES
5:00 P.M., MONDAY, OCTOBER 16, 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, October 16, 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 were Chairman Ty Akins, Vice Chairman Bruce Harkness, Commissioner Bruce Palmer, Commissioner Dustin Mealor, Commissioner Jimmy Tench, County Manager Alicia Vaughn, County Attorney Donnie Hunt, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, staff, members of the media and the public.

Commissioner Akins called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m.

Commissioner Tench lead the invocation.

Commissioner Mealor lead the pledge of allegiance.

DISCUSSION:

a. Discussion of Proposed County Sponsored 4th of July Event

Commissioner Mealor informed everyone that he had been asked by multiple citizens if the county would consider holding its own 4th of July fireworks celebration. He had consulted Commissioner Harkness about how this was done in the past, and Commissioner Harkness informed him that the county event was usually held either the weekend before or the weekend after the 4th of July holiday so as not to coincide with the event being held by Demorest. Commissioner Mealor had also discussed this with County Manager Vaughn, and she suggested that the county may wish to reach out to the cities about partnering to hold a joint celebration. He feels that, even if the county can't hold the event itself, they could possibly sponsor one of the cities.

Commissioner Harkness stated that while is supportive of the idea of the county hosting an event, he represents the district that the City of Demorest is located in, and he does not want to interfere with the 4th of July event Demorest already hosts.

Commissioner Palmer suggested that they could possibly hold the 4th of July event at the fairgrounds, as there is ample parking. They could shoot fireworks from inside of the shop complex across the street and have a band at the Dewey Tench pavilion. He feels that there would be several individuals and businesses who would be interested in being sponsors, as he was able to solicit \$12,000 worth of sponsors for the Swim Safely day with only three hours of phone calls.

Commissioner Akins suggested that they potentially would need to find volunteers or pay to have extra staffing for the event, as it will involve the need for a lot of manpower to coordinate. He suggested that the county could look into partnering with the Chattahoochee Mtn Fair and sponsor fireworks during that event. This would have the added benefit of not interfering with the any 4th of July events the cities host. Commissioner Palmer stated that the one thing that would complicate such a partnership is that the Chattahoochee Mtn Fair charges admission and that it sounds like the Commission is wanting the fireworks to be free for the citizens.

Ms. Vaughn stated that it may be challenging to schedule a county sponsored 4th of July event for 2024 as firework vendors book up well in advance, but suggested they could plan for July of 2025. She went on to say

that construction of the new animal control facility is expected to be finished around that time, which could provide an alternative location to hold the event depending on the parking situation.

b. Discussion of Proposed Policy for Commission Travel and Training Budget

Commissioner Akin addressed the public, stating that he wanted everyone listening to understand how important training is to being a County Commissioner. He does not want anyone to think that discussion of this topic implies that the Commission is against proper ongoing training. The Board of Commissioners is a department just like any other in the county, and they have a budget for travel and training that is set at the beginning of the fiscal year. Currently, the total budget for travel and training for the Board of Commissioners is \$33,000. The question being posed is should they expect themselves to remain within their budget for travel and training? The reason for this discussion is that currently, if all of the Commissioners decided to go to the ACCG conferences and take more classes, they would end up overspending on their budget.

Commissioner Meador stated that he feels that if this is an expectation they have of other county departments, it should be an expectation for the Board of Commissioners as well.

Commissioner Harkness inquired how this was budgeted for in other counties? County Manager Vaughn informed him that the process is similar across counties, and that during the start of the budget process it is determined what training or conferences that the Commissioners would like to attend during the upcoming year and that is used to determine the amount that is requested. She stated that Whitfield County didn't have a policy that dictated how the Commissioners spent their budget once the amount was estimated and set. They would take into account ACCG conferences and ACCG classes needed for core certification as well as certification in specialty tracks. She feels that the training provided by ACCG is extremely beneficial to those serving in County Commissioner roles. Mrs. Vaughn suggested that consideration needs to be given for Commissioners who are appointed by the Commission to serve on other Boards or Authorities so that that additional funds are available for their travel.

Commissioner Akins stated that he feels that going forward, the Commission members need to be more clear about what their intentions are for training and conferences for the upcoming fiscal year so that the expenses can be budgeted for appropriately. He suggested that quarterly reports could be given to the Commission so that they can keep up with what is remaining in the budget. He wanted to know if the other Commissioners would like for this to occur as well as if they feel that they wish for Attorney Hunt to draft a formal policy?

Commissioner Harkness and Commissioner Tench both agreed that they wish to see quarterly reports through the end of the year and then revisit this topic at that point to determine what changes they would like made for the new fiscal year. Commissioner Meador stated that he feels that the budget needs to be tailored to each Commission and should take into account the many boards, commissions and authorities that Commissioner Palmer serves on. He appreciates the fact that Commissioner Palmer attends these on behalf of the Commission, as he knows he himself would be unable to serve on them due to working full-time. Commissioner Harkness and Commissioner Palmer agreed. Commissioner Palmer stated that there are meetings that some meetings that he attends with ACCG are regarding determining which legislative policies that the organization will make top priorities for lobbying on behalf of the counties, and that Habersham County should be represented. Commissioner Meador stated that he did not see a need for the Commission to vote on taking any action at this time, they could just ask County Clerk Brandalin Carnes to give the Commission quarterly reports on their budget and they can revisit if they wish to adopt a policy for the budget next year at a later time.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS : None

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Meador seconded by Commissioner Harkness and voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn the meeting at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

By: _____
Commission Chairman Ty Akins

Attest: _____
County Clerk Brandalin Carnes