

**HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION MINUTES
5:00 P.M., MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2025
HABERSHAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE
JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM
295 LLEWELLYN ST, CLARKESVILLE, GA 30523**

The Habersham County Board of Commissioners held a work session on Monday, February 17, 2025 at 5:01 p.m. in the Jury Assembly Room of the Habersham County Courthouse located at 295 Llewellyn St, Clarkesville, GA 30523.

Present was Chairman Jimmy Tench, Vice Chairman Bruce Harkness, Commissioner Ty Akins, Commissioner Dustin Mealor, Commissioner Kelly Woodall, Interim County Manager Tim Sims, County Attorney Donnie Hunt, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, staff, members of the media and the public.

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

Commissioner Woodall lead the invocation.

Commissioner Mealor lead the pledge of allegiance.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

a. Safe Streets for All Safety Action Plan

Jerry Baggett, Public Works Director

Tracy Lehman, Kimley-Horn

Jourdyn Fuga, Kimley-Horn

Ben Blair, Kimley-Horn

Sarah Wilson, Kimley-Horn

Public Works Director Jerry Baggett addressed the Commission. In 2023 the BOC voted to accept a Safe Streets for All Grant that was federally funded by the federal highway administration and the US DOT. It had a 20% match. This grant was to assist local governments in paying for a traffic engineer to complete a safety action plan that would identify solutions to decrease traffic accidents that result in serious injury or fatalities. Having this safety action plan enables the county to apply for grants to implement the safety solutions identified by the plan. Part of this process was to conduct a public input meeting, which was held today prior to the Commission meeting. This input meeting was open to the public, cities, sheriff's office, schools, Emergency Services etc. They also need the Commission to vote on a resolution.

Tracy Lehman with Kimley-Horn addressed the Commission. She is part of the Kimley-Horn/Atlas project team assisting with the safety action plan. Ms. Lehman informed the Commission that thousands of lives are lost each year in traffic fatalities. She reviewed a graph with the Commissioners showing them that traffic fatalities have increased since 2011, and though the traffic volume decreased in 2020 during covid the number of fatal accidents increased. It is believed that this is due to increased speeds on the roadways. She stated that while national roadway fatalities overall have increased, there has been a dramatically higher increase in pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities. It is because of this that a Federal Program called the Safe Streets for All Initiative was created. Part of this is to develop a safety action plan. These safety action plans proactively rank projects and come up with plans for safety solutions to allow for informed decisions to be made

rather than chasing crashes within an area. They look for trends and solutions, such as if there are a lot of people running off of the roads, they can look at rumble strips, widen shoulders, have a safety edge to get people back onto roadway to keep them from having deadly crashes. They are trying to see which segments of roadway or intersections that they should rank higher, not just by where people have previously died. They are looking at what caused the deaths to occur and how they can prevent this from occurring in areas that have similar conditions. The Safe Streets and Roads for All program (SS4A) awarded a grant to Habersham County for the purpose of developing a safety action plan. This safety action plan is required for consideration of additional grant funding for implementing the road safety improvements identified during the safety action plan. The SS4A grant is a discretionary grant program that was established as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) with \$5 billion being allocated to the program over 5 years (2022-2026). This funding was meant for local governments projects, not state. They held the summit today and have a goal of having a draft of the report by April with a final report being available in July. The study area is focused only on the county roadway system, so the county knows where to best direct their funds. In an effort to engage the public, they have launched a webpage that has an interactive map where individuals can mark areas of concern and leave comments. Habersham County normally has around 500 to 600 vehicular crashes per year which has remained fairly consistent, however the number of crashes with serious injuries and fatalities has increased since 2019. The Safe System approach aims to eliminate fatal and serious injuries for all road users by making accommodations that take into consideration human mistakes and keeping impacts on the human body at tolerable levels (lower kinetic energy). There is a resolution tonight on the agenda for the Commissioners that is required for the SS4A requirements. Must have a resolution or acknowledgement from the Commission regarding their goal to reach zero traffic related deaths and serious injuries by 2040. This resolution showed the Habersham County Board of Commissioners would:

- 1) Establish a goal of reducing traffic-related deaths and serious injuries by 50% by the year 2030, as compared to the year 2023.
- 2) Establish a goal of working towards zero traffic-related deaths and serious injuries by the year 2040.
- 3) Measure the progress of this goal and provide quantitative metrics that are reported with future updates of the Safety Action Plan.

Commissioner Harkness asked how much it was going to cost the taxpayer to move forward with the Safety Action Plan? Ms. Lehman informed him that Habersham County received a grant to pay Kimley-Horn to draft the Safety Action Plan. Mr. Baggett further stated that the County's match for this grant was 20%, however it is "in-kind" meaning that the county is able to costs of staff time towards the match.

Commissioner Harkness asked if Kimely-Horn is working on Safety Action Plans with any of the surrounding counties? Ms. Lehman stated that they are not working on one for the neighboring counties, however that they would coordinate with other counties as needed.

Commissioner Harkness asked for clarification regarding the roadways that the Safety Action Plan would focus on. Ms. Lehman informed him that it would be county roads only, not state roads.

Commissioner Akins asked if Kimley-Horn assists the County with applying for grants and funding sources after the study is completed? Ms. Lehman stated that Kimley-Horn can put together a proposal for providing this type of assistance if they desire, however the scope of services provided

for their work on the Safety Action Plan only entails them pulling together all the necessary information and then turning it over to County staff to move forward with applying for grants. Commissioner Woodall stated that he had read the original legislation for this and that it seemed to him that it focused primarily on speed reduction rather than distracted driving, though he feels that distracted driving is the main reason people leave the roadways.

Discussion was had regarding the different types of safety measures that could potentially be implemented. Commissioner Mealor expressed concerns regarding rumble strips on the sides of the road leading bicyclists riding in the roadway instead of having the option of riding on the shoulder, which could cause an increase in accidents involving bicyclists. Ms. Lehman informed him that there are options that allow for balancing the needs of cyclists with the needs of drivers to benefit both.

Commissioner Woodall expressed concerns that the resolution did not specify that these goals were for County roadways. He felt that this was important given that the Commission does not have authority over state road systems to be able to implement any safety programs.

Commissioner Woodall inquired as to whether the reduction goal for traffic related deaths and serious injuries was numeric or a rate? Ms. Lehman informed him that it was numeric. Commissioner Woodall expressed concerns about this, as it does not take into consideration population growth. He felt that a better metric would be based on a per capita rate.

Commissioner Woodall stated that he felt that there should be a change to the resolution to reflect a reduction in deaths and injuries on county roads only. Mr. Baggett asked if the Commission could go ahead and vote on the resolution with the two changes made.

The Commission decided to have this fixed and then voted on it at the next meeting.

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Harkness, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn the work session at 5:51 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

By: Bruce Harkness
Bruce Harkness, Vice Chairman

Attest: Brandalin D. Carnes
Brandalin Carnes, County Clerk

