

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
OF THE BEN HILL COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON FEBRUARY 04, 2020 AT 6:00 PM IN THE
BEN HILL COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX

Those present for the meeting were as follows:

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| Steve Taylor | Chairman |
| Hope Harmon | Vice-Chair |
| Bennie Calloway | Commissioner |
| Daniel Cowan | Commissioner |
| John Mooney | Commissioner |
| Michael Dinnerman | County Manager |
| Donna Prather | County Clerk |

Call to Order

Chairman called the meeting to order and gave the invocation.

Everyone gave the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of the Agenda/Agenda Changes

Chairman Steve Taylor stated USDA Grant need to be added to the agenda under New Business.

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon made a motion to approve the amended agenda. Commissioner John Mooney seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner John Mooney, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, and Commissioner Bennie Calloway all voting for the motion.

Acceptance of Prior Minutes

Commissioner Bennie Calloway made a motion to approve the Regular Monthly Meeting minutes held on January 07, 2020. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner John Mooney, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting for the motion.

Commissioner Bennie Calloway made a motion to approve the Workshop Meeting minutes held on January 22, 2020. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner John Mooney, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting for the motion.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to close the Regular Monthly Meeting to enter the Public Hearing with the right to re-enter the Regular Monthly Meeting. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon second the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner John Mooney, and Commissioner Bennie Calloway all voting for the motion.

Public Hearing

Special Exception for Cell Tower/Garrett Tree Farms, LLC

County Manager Michael Dinnerman stated a Special Exception petition was submitted by owner Garrett Tree Farms, LLC regarding property at 1550 River Road, to have Cable Link erect a 370' cell tower on said property zoned G-F County. The Fitzgerald Ben Hill County Planning Commission voted in favor of the Special Exception.

Cable Link Representative Jay Sanders stated the tower will accommodate other carriers in the future. He stated 911 calls will go through the tower and county equipment will use the tower to eliminate dead spots in this area.

There were no public comments.

Rezone Application from GF to CC/ Young Tractor Co.

County Manager Michael Dinnerman stated a Rezoning petition was submitted by owner Young Tractor Co., regarding property at 758 Ocilla Hwy, to rezone 1.05 acres of said property from G-F County to C-C County. The Fitzgerald Ben Hill County Planning Commission voted in favor of the Rezoning Application.

There were no public comments.

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to close the Public Hearing to re-enter the Regular Monthly Meeting. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon second the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting for the motion.

Constitutional Officer: NONE

Department Head Reports:

4H Agent Geri Gelliland gave an update on activity regarding the Ag Agent and 4-H.

County Board Reports: NONE

County Manager's Report:

Mr. Dinnerman reported:

- ❖ The County is financially sound
- ❖ He will meet with Christina Graham next week to get an update on the census.
- ❖ All departments have phones except the Tax Commission Office.
- ❖ An Authorization Letter has been sent to get back the original county numbers.

Annexation Request: NONE

Rezoning Application: NONE

Alcohol Application:

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to approve Rockin Wolf Saloon alcohol licenses. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, and Commissioner Bennie Calloway all voting for the motion.

Consent Items: NONE

Appointments: NONE

Old Business: NONE

New Business:

4H Student Recognition/MLK Day of Service Visual & Literary Art Contest

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon stated Community In Schools partnered with 4H to complete a Martin Luther King project. Thirty students participated from different grades. 4H also participated in a trash clean up on Martin Luther King Day.

Defined Contribution Plan 401A/457B

County Manager Michael Dinnerman stated employees hired January 1, 2018 will be eligible on January 1, 2022 for the Defined Contribution Plan 401A. Employees will have to contribute 3% and the county will match 3%. Employees will be eligible to pay into the plan after their third-year anniversary of employment. Employees will be totally invested at five years. 401A is the employer's portion and 457B is the employee's portion. The old plan is closed.

Tax Anticipation Note

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to authorize County Manager Michael Dinnerman and Chairman Steve Taylor to obtain bids for a \$1,000,000 Tax Anticipation Note and to negotiate the interest rate. Commissioner John Mooney seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner John Mooney, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, and Commissioner Bennie Calloway all voting for the motion.

Special Exception

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to approve the special exception petition by owner Garrett Tree Farms, LLC regarding property at 1550 River Road, to have Cable Link erect a 370' cell tower on said property zoned G-F County. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting for the motion.

Rezone Application from GF to CC

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to approve rezoning petition by owner Young Tractor Co., regarding property at 758 Ocilla Hwy, to rezone 1.05 acres of said property from G-F County to C-C County. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting for the motion.

Hospital Authority Board

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to submit Richard Baxter Jr., Eric Stone, & Brian Braddy names to the Hospital Authority Board. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Commissioner John Mooney all voting for the motion.

Fitzgerald Ben Hill County Library Board

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon made a motion to appoint Becky Gay and Nickie Smith to the

Fitzgerald Ben Hill County Library Board. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Commissioner John Mooney all voting for the motion.

Budget Amendment Resolution

CFO Darlow Maxwell stated this budget amendment is just clean up to balance the 2019 budget. Expenditures have reached 95%.

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to adopt the Budget Amendment Resolution. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting for the motion.

USDA Grant

County Manager Michael Dinnerman stated the County applied for a USDA Grant to build a building for the Road Department. Since applying for the grant, the rules have changed. The County must work with the State on this project. We will get up to 35% or \$50,000. Mr. Dinnerman recommendation is to amend the original grant in order to separate it into small grants.

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to amend the original grant and to separate it into small grants. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Commissioner Daniel Cowan all voting for the motion.

Agenda Changes and/or add on:

Legislative Report: NONE

Public Comments: NONE

State of County Address/Chairman Steve Taylor

The State of the County is an opportunity to reflect on the present position of Ben Hill County. It is also an opportunity to review our achievements, our challenges, and where we need to concentrate our future focus. Less than three years ago, we began efforts to restore the county's financial strength and establish policies to promote a strong and sustainable government. I am honored on behalf of the Ben Hill County Commission, constitutional officers, management, judges, support staff, and employees to announce the state of Ben Hill County is significantly sound in the areas of finance, operation, and organization. We have made substantial gains in updating and improving our assets. Policies to control spending and optimize revenue have resulted in our replenished fund balance and increased reserve. In fact, a representative from the county's accounting firm stated that it was exceptional for a county government to experience such a large financial turnaround in such a short time.

We as a commission recognize that in everything we do, or every decision we make, we must be focused on investing in the people of our community. Our people are our greatest resource for our future. The tomorrow of Ben Hill County depends on the choices we make today. We build our future based on the foundation we establish now, because we understand a strong foundation will stand the test of time. We consciously made the effort to move beyond the current or existing state. Although maintaining the status quo is the

easy way, we take the position that it is not the best for our community or our future. I am excited to share with you the following highlights of 2019:

- ❖ Renovation of E-911. The E-911 department was completely renovated and restored. Modern and updated equipment was purchased and the physical building interior was renovated to provide a professional environment for the operators. The majority of these expenditures were paid for using SLOST funds. Now your Ben Hill County E-911 center is considered one of the best in Georgia for a community our size.
- ❖ Continued upgrades to the Sheriff's fleet of vehicles and computers as well as needed safety equipment including cameras, vests, tasers, and radios. Through the use of SPLOST funds and leveraging these funds with USDA grants, the Sheriff's department physical assets are now in the best condition they have been in for many years. Sheriff Cone continues to work closely with county management to improve operations and provide a safer environment for our citizens.
- ❖ The purchase of an existing building at 602 South Grant Street that will be the new location for Ben Hill County Elections. This will provide for a more user friendly location for voters, and a better alternative for housing as well as securing the new State of Georgia mandated voting machines.
- ❖ Upgrades in equipment for the road department and improvement in the physical plant.
- ❖ Saved approximately \$70,000.00 in interest expense by not drawing any funds on the Tax Anticipation Note.
- ❖ Tax Commissioner Barry Foster continues to provide an exceptional service for the citizens by collecting taxes due. To date he reports 2017 collections at 99.5%, 2018 collections at 98.5%, and 2019 collections at 90.5%.

For the fourth straight year, our community has experienced a rejuvenation in capital investment which has increased employment in our manufacturing sector. As we begin 2020, unemployment rates have dropped to just below 5 percent. The lowest we've seen since the early 2000's, and a 33 percent drop since January 2019. Through the wise use of SPLOST funds and the initiative of Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County Executive Director Jason Dunn, vital infrastructure improvements and key decisions have been made which allowed existing manufacturers to freely expand.

Over the past 18 months 150,000 square feet of new manufacturing and warehouse facilities have been constructed and another 150,000 square feet of existing facilities have been repurposed to welcome three new entrepreneurial starts into the community. The old Delco property is under much needed redevelopment by Modern Dispersions. 2020 will see more of the same as new employers are entering the community and capital investment from existing employers will continue to strengthen our position and provide additional opportunities for our community.

Along with new employment, these investments have helped us grow the county's tax digest and establish a much healthier county government.

2019 was a good year for Ben Hill County. County manager Mike Dinnerman shares the vision of the commission, and his exceptional performance continues to assist in advancing Ben Hill County forward. We continue to communicate and work with Mayor Puckett and the City of Fitzgerald. Also, I must recognize the hard work of our constitutional officers, judges, department heads, administration team, and all employees for believing in our

direction and working to advance Ben Hill County. All departments commit to a true team effort in striving to improve Ben Hill County daily.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge your Board of Commissioners. Each commissioner contributes to the goal of making Ben Hill County a better place to be. Although we don't always agree, we listen to each other and work together for all citizens. We understand there are new challenges every day. Some of these challenges we are aware of and some are unexpected. The Commission is receptive to new ideas and we seek to promote the best solutions for the health, safety, and welfare for the people of this community. In closing, please know I am honored to serve this community. Allow me to share a quote from last year's address: "management and commissioners refuse to be content with our current position, and we continue to explore ways to improve our services, assets, and resources for Ben Hill County". This statement continues to be true today for the tomorrow of our community.

May God continue to bless our country and our county.

Chairman Steve Taylor

Executive Session

Commissioner's Remarks:

Commissioner Bennie Calloway stated things have changed since Chairman Taylor been in office.

Commissioner Hope Harmon reported the 3rd neighborhood watch meeting will be held on February 24th at 5:00 pm. Sheriff Cone, Chief Smallwood, and the Victim Advocate Talisa Esteves will be in attendance.

County Manager Michael Dinnerman stated it has been a privilege and an honor to work with the Commissioners. They allow me to lead the way. The County also has a good working relationship with the Mayor and the City.

Meeting adjourned

_____ Steve Taylor, Chairman

_____ Pamela Turner, Acting County Clerk