

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
OF THE BEN HILL COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON JANUARY 05, 2021 AT 6:00 PM IN THE
BEN HILL COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX

Those present for the meeting were as follows:

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

Commissioner John Mooney was absent.

Call to Order

Chairman Steve Taylor called the meeting to order and gave the invocation.

Everyone gave the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of the Agenda/Agenda Changes

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Commissioner Bennie Calloway seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Acceptance of Prior Minutes

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the Workshop Meeting Minutes that were held on December 03, 2020. Commissioner Bennie Calloway seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes that were held on December 16, 2020. Commissioner Bennie Calloway seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the Special Called Meeting Minutes that were held on December 28, 2020. Commissioner Bennie Calloway seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon entered the meeting.

Required Annual Actions

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon made a motion to rehire County Manager Michael Dinnerman. Commissioner Bennie Calloway seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, and Chairman

Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon made a motion to rehire County Clerk Donna Prather.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon made a motion to rehire County Attorney Hall, Smith & Booth Managing Partner. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Tony Eckler introduced himself to the Commissioners. He stated he began working with Meeks CPA in 1999 and became a partner in 2000. Meeks CPA changed their services to preparing income taxes because of various reasons. Mr. Eckler will prepare audits and is looking forward to moving Tony Eckler CPA Auditing Firm to Fitzgerald and continue working with Ben Hill County.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to hire Tony Eckler CPA Auditing Firm.

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve Wells Fargo, Planters First, Colony Bank, Community Bank, & Local Investment Pool as the County Financial Institutes.

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon made a motion to approve the Herald Leader as the County Legal Organ. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan nominated Commissioner Hope Harmon for Vice-Chair.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to close the nominations. Commissioner Bennie Calloway seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Chairman Steve Taylor, and Commissioner Hope Harmon all voting for the motion.

Constitutional Officer: NONE

Department Head Reports: NONE

County Board Reports: NONE

County Manager's Report:

Mr. Dinnerman stated:

- He is looking for a brighter day. Overall, we have done well.
- SPLOST collection are up \$266,000 more than last year. This is year to date.

- LOST collection are up \$238,400 more than last year. This is year to date.
- We didn't use the TAN for this year.
- He recommend submitting an application for the TAN.

Annexation Request: NONE

Rezoning Application: NONE

Alcohol Application: NONE

Appointments: Economic Development Update/Jason Dunn

Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County Economic Development Director Jason Dunn gave an update on the past five-year Economic Development.

- Since 2016, FBHCDA has recruited 5 new employers in Ben Hill County.
- Assisted with 14 industrial expansions that will create 300 plus new jobs and an \$100 million plus investment.
- New manufacturing construction increased 350, 000 square footage and filled or renovated increased 600,000 square footage.
- They have improved 215 acres of land and sold 203 acres.
- Installed 3.3 million in new electric, water, road, and sewer infrastructure.
- 14% increase in good produced and 4.75% increase in serviced produce; which means manufactures are making and selling more.
- Personal income has increased \$40 million within Ben Hill County since 2016.

Old Business: NONE

New Business:

2021 Holiday Calendar

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the 2021 Holiday Calendar. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Agenda Changes and/or add on:

Legislative Report: NONE

Public Comments: NONE

Executive Session/Legal

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to suspend the Regular Monthly Meeting to enter Executive Session to discuss legal. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Executive Session lasted 20 minutes.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to close Executive Session and return to the Regular Monthly Meeting. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie

Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

State of the County/Chairman Steve Taylor

As you are aware, 2020 was an unprecedented year. It started off as a promising year but quickly presented challenges for our entire community. It is because of unforeseen events like the impact of Covid-19 on our community that we pressed forward in the past to establish a strong and healthy county government. Although county government operations were affected just as with everyone in our community, we continued to focus on providing the necessary services to Ben Hill County in the most effective and efficient method possible while emphasizing safety and health to both our citizens and our employees. The status of Ben Hill County continues to be positively strong in the areas of finance, operation, and organization. This State of the County allows me to review not only the challenges from last year, but also some significant accomplishments.

As the coronavirus altered our everyday life, we felt it necessary to establish a coronavirus task force that would communicate on a weekly basis to identify the needs of the greater community. This group included county and city government, public safety, EMA, the hospital, the health department, media, public information, utility services, pastoral care, community services/organizations, faith based/volunteer services, social support services, the school system, operational risk services, mortuary services, senior services, business/industry, judicial services and recreational services. This platform allowed for the identification of the needs of the community related to medical supplies, food, information and announcements. This group continues to communicate usually on a weekly basis. Information is shared on community needs, a general idea of the number of positive cases, and strategies related to containment. Thank you to everyone that volunteers to participate on this task force. Although I hesitate to name names, I would be remiss if I didn't mention two individuals that spent many extra hours organizing and following up with the different entities as well as disseminating information which includes anything from updates from the State of Georgia to daily numbers of positive cases. Thank you, Brandon Fletcher and Scott Spivey.

While the community continues to experience Covid case numbers larger than we prefer, your county government continues to conduct the day-to-day business expected by the citizens. As mentioned earlier, our priority is the safety and well-being of our employees and the public. The county continues to operate with precautions in place to promote safety barriers for employees and the public. Precautions of distancing, sanitizing and wearing face coverings where appropriate are in place in the public areas of our county buildings. Occasionally we have had to limit public access to county departments based on the number of positive Covid-19 cases. I realize this may have inconvenienced some people but thank you for understanding.

As we move into the year of 2021, I would like to reflect on accomplishments of this past year. The Ben Hill County Commission continues to put emphasis on building a strong foundation. This includes improving services by developing new departments, reorganizing existing departments, evaluating services offered, updating equipment,

improving infrastructure, strengthening our financial position, and planning for future needs of the community. Under the excellent management of Mike Dinnerman, I am

pleased to report, on behalf of the County Commissioners, we are accomplishing our goals of building a strong foundation. This was recently evident through Dinnerman's direction and the exceptional teamwork of our constitutional officers, judges, department heads, and employees as we were in a position to "weather the storm" of 2020.

Highlights of 2020 include:

- The County once again had a strong financial year as reflected by an increase in reserves achieving the targeted goal of approximately \$500,000.
- Improved the Elections property on Grant Street by purchasing land and paving the lot for parking.
- Leveraged over \$450,000.00 in grant money to purchase equipment as follows: Road department equipment that included: a wheel loader and tractor, two (2) motor graders, five (5) trucks, a mower, a trailer, a welder, a tractor and backhoe. Sheriff department: two (2) patrol cars
- Courtroom: installed a camera system and software
- Continued updating IT equipment and wiring
- TSPLOST project completed: the re-engineering and paving of Appomattox Road
- Passed a special event ordinance which included requirements for a special event in the unincorporated area along with an application related to special events
- Sold surplus property
- Passed a balanced budget.
- Initiated and participated in a Community Development Block Grant project with the City of Fitzgerald to provide renovations and upgrades to the Monitor Enrichment Center.

Our community experienced some positive economic results during the past year. Although unemployment demonstrated a slight increase it was still below the state average. This is due to the fact we have a strong base of essential industries and manufacturing. Also, previous investments through the Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County Development Authority made it possible to realize an additional 50,000 SF for a distribution warehouse for Polar Beverage. Other previous Development Authority investments helped fuel an ongoing expansion for Mana Nutrition that will result in new jobs and an additional 30,000 SF in new construction. 2020 saw two new companies move into the community. They will be located in the former Shaw buildings. These buildings are being renovated to house these new manufacturing processes. Millex, a leading producer of furniture and case goods for the hospitality industry should begin production this year and Sun Crest Stone will begin manufacturing their cast facade products. Also, MDI continues to redevelop the old Delphi property site. As noted by the above examples, economic expansion and the addition of new jobs are promising for our future.

In conclusion, your Board of Commissioners understands the importance of health, safety, and the well-being for this community. This group along with all of Ben Hill County Government makes every decision with the benefit of our community in mind. Although we may have to meet wearing mask or via a virtual teleconference, we will discuss all opportunities and solutions to keep building a strong foundation that can withstand unforeseen situations like the one we experienced in 2020. I continue to be honored to serve alongside these commissioners, our management, the constitutional officers, and our employees. Please allow me to share on behalf of this commission, our thoughts and prayers are with each of you that experienced illness or loss either financially or the loss of a loved one over this past year.

May God bless our country, and our community.

Steve Taylor, Chairman
Ben Hill County Board of Commissioners

Commissioner's Remarks:

Commissioner Bennie Calloway asked when he will get a raise. He has been a Commissioner for ten (10) years. The Commissioner discussed how Commissioners obtain raises.

Meeting adjourned

_____ Steve Taylor, Chairman

_____ Donna R. Prather, County Clerk