

State of the County 2023

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to share the present State of Ben Hill County. It is important for the community to know if the county government is healthy, stable, and able to function adequately to provide the services to her community. However, is reflecting on the true state of the County based on what we have done and how we have progressed, or in the ability to achieve short term and long-term goals and be prepared for the unknown? The standard parameters used to determine a government's health are the financial position, management, and policies and procedures. I feel these are important, but I submit the true state of Ben Hill County and our community is determined by our ability to operate tomorrow.

In evaluating the financial position of Ben Hill County, I can share that we continue to progress toward our goals of building a stronger reserve and being fiscally responsible with the tax payor's money. There are decisions made in which some may not agree with, but these decisions are guided toward maintaining a strong financial position and having funds available to meet the needs of our community. Through exceptional leadership of County Manager, Mike Dinnerman, we continue to advance the health of your county government.

One can find the following words in last year's address: "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. We build our future based on the foundation we establish now, because we understand a strong foundation will stand the test of time. We are committed to making the effort to move beyond the current or existing state. We commit to you that we will continuously strive to improve because status quo is not acceptable." Those words continue to be applicable today and are the driving force in our decision making.

We continue to achieve goals and set new ones. Mr. Dinnerman continually evaluates our assets and makes recommendations regarding replacing or upgrading with the idea of providing the most effective and efficient services that are in the best interest for our citizens' safety and well-being. Some highlights of this past year include infrastructure updates in Information Technology upgrades, road improvements throughout the county, and EMS upgrades. Upgrading software and computers is now a necessity in local government. These upgrades allow for better service as well as enhanced security. We have plans in place to meet this need. Paving projects included paving or resurfacing all or part of 34 roads this year and plans to replace bridges. This represents the largest number of paving projects in one year as compared to the previous 10 years. Also, we entered into a contract with Ameripro for emergency ambulance service. Mr. Dinnerman has previously stated, "AmeriPro brings the citizens of Ben Hill County much needed new equipment, superb management, higher wages and benefits for employees. They also will provide real time tracking that interface with our 911 Center, along with a new sense of professionalism and a focus on excellent patient care for our citizens."

The County shares several joint services with the City of Fitzgerald. We feel through a collaborative effort the community can be better served. The relationship between the City and County is a cornerstone of meeting the needs of our citizens. I continue to be grateful for the relationship I share with my friend, Mayor Jason Holt, and I look forward to working with him as we have a better tomorrow.

As noted, I have focused on the future of this community with the above remarks. We are at an important crossroads where improvements community wide need to be addressed. Most of these are related to vehicles, equipment, and infrastructure which allow our employees to serve the community in the safest and most efficient manor. Over the past six years both the City of Fitzgerald and Ben Hill County have been able to use Special Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) toward improving infrastructure and assets. In a community our size, both entities would struggle to provide the necessary services without the availability of SPLOST funds. A few

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examples of the use of these funds include: maintaining and upgrading the fleet of vehicles for our law enforcement officers; heavy machinery including garbage trucks, tractors, and road equipment; upgrading facilities including the E911 building and dispatch equipment; providing new lighting at the Lions Club Park allowing safer conditions for our children to participate in recreational activities; Paulk Park paving; playground equipment at the Monitor Center; and the above mentioned road resurfacing and paving projects.

In March of 2023, we as a community have the opportunity to strengthen the position of the City and County by passing the SPLOST. It will basically be a renewal of a one cent sales tax that is currently in place. These funds will assist in the continued pursuit of improving and strengthening the foundation necessary to allow government to be viable and sustainable now and in the future. Our tomorrow depends on it.

Please note that your County Commission makes decisions with your best interest in mind. We work together with management to make sure the citizens are served while we maintain a good financial position. We review policies and procedures and make proper adjustments as recommended to provide for a stable and consistent operation of county government. We feel the current State of Ben Hill County is encouragingly strong and would not be possible without the dedication and hard work of management, administration, Constitutional Officers, judges, department heads and each and every employee. As always, the commission and I are honored to serve this community.

As we enter into 2023, I am encouraged about our future. As a small community in rural south Georgia we have a lot to be thankful for. The tomorrow of our community looks promising because of valid and functional working governments, the businesses and industries that have invested in us, the hard-working employees, volunteers, and elected officials that serve our community, and most importantly, the people that live and work in our community.

It is an honor to serve and to work toward a better tomorrow,

God Bless our country and community,

Steve Taylor,
Chairman,
Ben Hill County Board of Commissioners