

## 2024 State of the County

It is a privilege to report to you on behalf of the Ben Hill County Board of Commission the current position of Ben Hill County as we begin 2024. Once again, I am happy to share that your county government is healthy with a strong financial position as well as exceptional leadership throughout the government organization. Through the efforts of our administration, Constitutional Officers, Judges, department heads, and county employees we have once again been able to present a balanced budget to service the community for 2024. Allow me to speak to three areas related to the position of Ben Hill County government. These include competence, challenges, and commitment.

### Competence:

As stated above, your county government's financial position is healthy and strong with a significant reserve and substantial fiscal policies. Both of these are necessary to responsibly allocate the tax payor's dollars in an efficient manner to provide the required and expected services to the citizens. They are also necessary so we can be prepared to meet unexpected or extraordinary challenges we may face in the future. Most funds are provided through property taxes, fees, local sales taxes including Local Option Sales tax, Special Local Option Sales Tax, and Transportation Special Option Sales Tax. Other funds are secured through federal and state grants. Funds are leveraged to gain the greatest benefit to the public without adding an unnecessary burden to citizens.

I am excited to share the advancement of our policies and procedures. Uniform policies and procedures are imperative for an organization to operate and provide services efficiently and effectively as well as provide a continuum for service delivery. Also, key personnel at each level of government is necessary to implement the policies and procedures. Ben Hill County has these persons in place. We continue to improve facilities and equipment. We have established a process where designated funds are used to provide annual updates for sheriff deputy vehicles as well as annual upgrades and replacement of computers and IT related equipment.

### A few highlights for 2023 include:

- \*Provided additional new deputy vehicles for the Sheriff's fleet to rotate out older and damaged vehicles
- \*Continued to upgrade computers, cameras, and informational technology equipment to allow for continuation of services
- \*Purchased and renovated the old Media Center building from the Ben Hill County School System. This property is located west of the Ben Hill County Elementary School campus and will house the County Extension Service and the 4-H program. This facility will also provide a board meeting room for monthly county commission meetings.
- \*Grant funds were obtained for a new community facility at Monitor Center that includes a playground for children ages 2-7, an upgraded outdoor basketball court and a covered community area. This project is another example of using grant funds to provide a much needed facility in our community.
- \*Awarded a million-dollar Community Development Block Grant to pave Flint Road and install a box culvert.
- \*The commission voted to use the roll back option on property taxes which allowed for a decrease in the millage rate
- \*Obtained most easements and certificates to begin construction of the Ed Ward Road project.
- \*Passage of the 2023 SLPOST for capital improvements
- \*Passage of the TSLOPST for road improvements
- \*Dorminy Medical Center's ground breaking for the renovation of the Emergency Department which is a much needed facilities improvement for our community. DMC is a vital part of our community for economic growth. I would like to express a special thank you to Scott Spivey,

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Chairman of the Hospital Authority, for his leadership and commitment as well as to the Hospital Authority board members and administration for their commitment to providing health care for our community.

### Challenges:

In the game of golf you try to manage the things you can control and adjust to or evaluate the things that you cannot control. Operating a local government has similarities. A lot of the funding received for use in government is based on property values, a healthy economy that drives local spending for sales tax, and fluctuations of the cost of commodities and the cost of goods. Therefore, the need of a realistic balanced budget to use as a road map for daily operation is essential. Other challenges include providing services that best meet the needs of all of Ben Hill County and funding these services. As a small community there are limited resources and funds available for each local government. The Board of Education, the City of Fitzgerald, and Ben Hill County rely on these funds and the challenge is to work in concert with each other for the good of the entire community.

We are challenged to maintain and upgrade infrastructure as it is important for the safety of the citizens and the county employees. Another challenge includes knowing and meeting the needs of our citizens. My good friend Tim Anderson opined in a recent editorial the importance of citizens to "make your voice heard" at public meetings. I agree and encourage people to do just that as it is vital to understand the needs of the community. Our citizens can also make their voice heard by electing candidates from Ben Hill County that are running for district, regional, or State positions. Lastly, we are challenged to meet present goals, complete ongoing projects, and continue building a foundation for the county's future.

### Commitment:

Over the past seven years the Ben Hill County Board of Commissioners has been committed to provide a county government that is healthy, stable and able to function in a capacity adequate to provide services to promote the health, safety and well being of her community. Through developing policies and procedures, passing a functional balanced budget, and having key personnel in place this has been accomplished. We have never wavered from our commitment to be the best commission for our community.

County Manager, Michael Dinnerman has provided exemplary leadership and vision in the advancement of Ben Hill County. His expertise in county government, his relationships throughout the State, and his ability to manage the County's human resources, funding, and infrastructure has had a major positive impact on our government. These attributes are key contributions toward the position one finds our county government in today. Mike makes Ben Hill County his top priority which is evident through his exceptional management, vision, dedication, work ethics, commitment, passion, direction, and communication with this Commission.

Furthermore, our county government would not be in the position she is in without the commitment of each employee, department head, the administration staff, Judges, Constitutional Officers, and those appointed to various boards and authorities throughout the county. I would be remiss if we did not recognize the excellent work of Jason Dunn at the Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County Development Authority. His influence has been a contributor for the jobs we have maintained over the past several years while other communities struggled in this area. I would like to extend a high expression of gratitude to all of you mentioned above and thank you for your commitment and willingness to serve and work to make Ben Hill County a better place.

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Finally, it is an honor to be a part of a group of individuals from different walks of life who are committed to work as one entity to advance and promote Ben Hill County. Your Board of Commissioners including; Vice Chairman Hope Harmon, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Commissioner John William Mooney are an integral part in providing a foundation for the future of our county government and our community. Each of us on the commission make decisions in the best interest for the whole of Ben Hill County. The Commission adopted the position of being a policy making entity and allowing the county manager to manage. This Commission has never accepted status quo and has not been fearful of challenges and making difficult decisions. As mentioned above, all decisions have been in the best interest of our Ben Hill Community. I am reminded of a quote from Zig Zigler related to fear. He once said, "FEAR has two meanings: Forget everything and run or face everything and rise". Your commission and management have been more than willing to face everything and raise the position of the county government. I am grateful for being allowed to serve along side these individuals and I also thank you for your service to your community. As we enter into 2024, we will continue to make decisions that are in the best interest for Ben Hill County.

To my community, thank you for allowing me to serve you.

May God Bless our country, our community, and everyone living in Ben Hill County.

Steve Taylor  
Chairman, Ben Hill County Board of Commissioners