

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING  
OF THE BEN HILL COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
HELD ON MARCH 05, 2024 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
John Mooney	Commissioner
Michael Dinnerman	County Manager
Donna R. Prather	County Clerk

**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**

Chairman Steve Taylor added agenda item County Manager Position and The Gateway Center to New Business

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon made a motion to approve the agenda that included agenda items County Manager Position and The Gateway Center. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner John Mooney, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

**Acceptance of Prior Minutes**

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to approve the Regular Monthly Meeting minutes that was held on February 06, 2024. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to suspend the Regular Monthly Meeting to enter the Public Hearing to discuss a Variance requested by Stephen Foster.

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

Chairman Steve Taylor asked the Commissioners if any of them had a conflict of interest regarding the Variance request. Their answer was no.

## **Public Hearing**

*Variance/Stephen Foster*

County Manager Michael Dinnerman stated Steven Foster has requested a Variance to erect a 60-foot flagpole at 130 Ocilla Highway. An application has been submitted, the joint owners have been notified, and the public notice has been advertised in the Herald Leader. The Variance does not affect the zoning property. The staff recommends approval of the request.

There were no public comments.

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

## **The Gateway Center**

Executive Director Katie Rumsey, of The Gateway Center Inc., stated they are a child advocacy center and a sexual assault center serving the Cordele Judicial Circuit. Ms. Rumsey stated their office is in Cordele, GA; therefore, victims must travel with officers to Cordele to receive services. She stated they wanted to provide services closer to home because 50% of their cases are from Ben Hill County. Dorminy Medical Center has given the Gateway Center a room to provide services to the community.

The start-up cost will be approximately \$15,000. This amount will provide camera equipment, security system, furniture, and office equipment. To sustain services annually, that cost will be approximately \$5,000. Ms. Rumsey is asking the County if they could contribute to the cost to bring the services to Ben Hill County.

County Manager Michael Dinnerman stated he will get with Ms. Rumsey to discuss their need.

**Appointments: NONE**

**Constitutional Officer: NONE**

## **Department Head Reports:**

DLS Director Keith Morris gave an update on basketball and baseball.

Ag Extension Agent Holly Anderson thanked the Commissioners for the new facility. She also gave an update on the Ag Extension activity.

4H Director Laura Lee Williams thanked the Commissioners for the new facility. She introduced Georgia 4-H State President and Ben Hill County 4-H'er Thomas Holt. Mr. Holt thanked the Commissioners for the facility. He stated they have already put the new space to great use. He introduced Southwest District Board of Director and Ben Hill County 4-H'er Nandini Patel. Ms. Patel read the Ben Hill County Extension annual report. She introduced Southwest District Board of Director and Ben Hill County 4-H'er Landon Sinyard. Mr. Sinyard announced that March 17th – 23rd is Georgia Ag Week.

**County Board Reports: NONE**

## **County Manager's Report:**

County Manager Michael Dinnerman reported:

- A big thanks to School Superintendent Dawn Clements and the Board of Education for leasing the building that now house the Ag Extension and 4H.
- Working with the architect on the Monitor Community Building on Kimble Road.
- Continuing to work on the Ed Ward Road project.
- He stated he has a lot going on, but he wants to see all the project through.

**Annexation Request/Notification: NONE**

**Rezoning Application: NONE**

**Alcohol Application: NONE**

**Appointments: NONE**

**Old Business: NONE**

## **New Business:**

*Variance/ Stephen Foster*

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the Variance to erect a 60-foot flagpole at 130 Ocilla Highway. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Commissioner John Mooney, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

*Ben Hill Board of Health Environmental Health Fees*

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to adopt the updated environmental fee schedule for the Ben Hill Board of Health. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Commissioner John Mooney, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

## **2023-03 Budget Amendment**

CFO Darlow Maxwell submitted this budget amendment that applies to Fund 100 – General Fund, Fund 2013- Special Investigations, Fund 327- 2023 SPLOST, Fund 335- TSPLOST, and Fund 340- Perry House -Ed Ward Road Project.

The Official Code of Georgia Annotated section 36-81-3(b) requires an annual balanced budget for the General Fund, each Special Revenue Fund, and each Debt Service Fund and requires a project-length budget for each capital project fund.

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon made a motion to approve the 2023-03 Budget Amendment. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner John Mooney, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

County Manager Michael Dinnerman announced that this is CFO Darlow Maxwell last

meeting He will be retiring March 16<sup>th</sup>. The Commissioners thanked Mr. Maxwell for his hard work and years of service. Mr. Maxwell thanked everyone for giving him a chance. He also stated this is the best Board he has ever worked for.

*South Georgia Community Service Board Reappointment/Connie Graham*

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to reappoint Connie Graham to the South Georgia Community Service Board. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

*Mileage Rate Increase*

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the mileage rate increase to .67 cents. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Commissioner John Mooney, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

*Regional Voting Delegate/Opioid Settlement*

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to nominate Vice-Chair Hope Harmon as the voting delegate for the Georgia Opioid Settlement Advisory Commission (GOSAC) and Regional Advisory Councils (RACs). Commissioner John Mooney seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner John Mooney, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

*Statewide Mutual Aid & Assistant Agreement*

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon made a motion to approve the Statewide Mutual Aid and Assistant Agreement with GEMA. Commissioner John Mooney seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner John Mooney, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

*County Management Position*

Chairman Steve Taylor shared with everyone County Manager Michael Dinnerman is retiring at the end of this year. They are officially opening the position for hire, to start receiving resumes, and advertising.

**Agenda Changes and/or add on: NONE**

**Legislative Report:**

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon reported she met with Tyler Hofmann- Reardon Legislative Assistant for Senator Warnock's Office on February 13, 2024. We discussed the communication system needed for Ben Hill County. The P25 communication system is a public safety issue. As of right now in the county, we have issues with communication in our local school system and we have dead spots in the county where emergency vehicles do not have ways to communicate with each other. As of right now, we believe this project will be roughly 3-5 million dollars. We also discussed concerns with funding for rural hospitals and ensuring our local hospital has the funding it needs to remain open.

**Public Comments:**

Alaine Cook, 1241 Bowens Mill Road, stated at last month's meeting she and another neighbor expressed their concerns regarding the approval of the Special Exception for Irma Rodrigues Rivera to build or customize cargo trailers. She stated she opposes the Special Exception and wishes to know the appeals process. Ms. Cook also presented the Commissioners with a letter requesting an appeal.

County Manager Michael Dinnerman stated that in agriculture zoning this business is permissible with a Special Exception. Mr. Dinnerman explained that everything final and there is not an appeals process for the Commissioners decision to approve the Special Exception. He advised Ms. Cook she will need to appeal the decision with Superior Court.

Ms. Cook stated she and the other neighbor will be monitoring the business to make sure they are doing what they said they would be doing.

**Executive Session**

**Commissioners Remarks**

Chairman Steve Taylor congratulated Malik Burris on winning the State Championship in High School wrestling.

**Meeting adjourned.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Steve Taylor, Chairman

\_\_\_\_\_ Donna R. Prather, County Clerk