

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING  
OF THE BEN HILL COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
HELD ON MAY 07, 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**

Commissioner John Mooney added agenda item Workshop Meeting to New Business.

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon made a motion to approve the agenda that includes agenda item Workshop Meeting under New Business. 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.

**Acceptance of Prior Minutes**

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to approve the Regular Monthly Meeting minutes that was held on April 02, 2024. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

**Constitutional Officer:**

Tax Commissioner Barry Foster gave an update on a tax sale held on property due to unpaid taxes. He stated 47 out of 51 properties were sold. A mobile home sale is scheduled for the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday in June. He also stated Pine Street is getting scary. His staff is fearful after the prom incident. He is also praying for our community.

Sheriff Lee Cone gave an update on recent crime in the area:

- There have been over 40 arrests made in connection with gang charges to date.
- There have been over 45 arrests when you combine those incidents with drug charges as well.
- Over 25 guns were seized and removed from the streets, most of which were stolen.
- 12 search warrants have been issued and served with more expected.
- We have identified over 100 people who have been verified to be gang members in our community.

- Investigators have received training in gang investigations, identification, and recognition.
- Investigators have joined the national gang investigations organization and became members of it. This leads to training opportunities with the FBI and other national organizations and creates a network of information becoming available to our area along with resources.
- Actively there are several ongoing investigations into gang activity being conducted at this time.

After meeting with several groups, our citizens continue coming forward with information and concerns. That information has led to the arrest of gang members controlling or attempting to control our neighborhoods.

- We are currently creating training programs for our schools, specifically for the teachers and staff.
- Creating handouts to give to the public teaching them what to look for and who to contact with concerns or if they need information.
- Three of the five S.R.O's are signed up for the gang recognition certification class that's given at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center. This is in addition to the gang training they are required to take.
- In conjunction with the C.H.A.M.P. S. Course (Choosing Healthy Activities and Methods Promoting Safety), we present to our 5th graders which has the Gang awareness with it, Chief Smallwood is adding the G.R.E.A.T. program (Gang Resistance Education and Training) for the 7th graders.

Regarding informing the Public, Sheriff Cone stated he feel we can do better in keeping our community informed about the issues we are facing. I would encourage those of you who haven't already to download our joint app with Fitzgerald PD. We will be posting information as it becomes available to this site as well as the Ben Hill Sheriff's Office Facebook page.

**Department Head Reports: NONE**

**County Board Reports: NONE**

**County Manager's Report:**

Mr. Dinnerman stated:

- Working with architects regarding the Monitor project.
- Engineer on Flint Road is approximately 35% complete.
- Continuing to work with EDA on Ed Ward Road.
- In the process of designing a shop for the Road Department. 2017 SPLOST funds have been set aside to fund the project.

**Annexation Request/Notification: NONE**

**Rezoning Application: NONE**

**Alcohol Application: NONE**

**Appointments**

**Old Business: NONE**

## **New Business:**

### *National Donate Life Month Proclamation*

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to approve the National Donate Life Month Proclamation. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, and Chairman Steve Taylor all voting for the motion.

### *Government Consolidation Study*

Chairman Steve Taylor stated he would like to revisit the idea of a consolidation study being done for County and City government. He would like the Board to authorize him to draft a letter to send to the Mayor asking for their engagement with Carl Vinson Institute to conduct the study, to pay half of the cost, and prepare an IGA between the Governments.

After further discussion, Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to authorize the Chairman to draft a letter to send to the Mayor asking the City of Fitzgerald to engage with Carl Vinson Institute in a Government Consolidation Study and pay half the cost. Commissioner John Mooney second the motion; which the motion did not pass with Chairman Steve Taylor and Commissioner Daniel Cowan voting for the motion and Commissioner Bennie Calloway, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, and Commissioner John Mooney voted against the motion.

### *Workshop Meeting*

The Commissioners set a date for a Workshop meeting on May 21<sup>st</sup> at 12:00 noon to discuss the County Manager's position and unfinished projects.

## **Agenda Changes and/or add on:**

### **Legislative Report: NONE**

### **Public Comments: NONE**

### **Executive Session**

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

Commissioner John Mooney left the meeting.

The Commissioners returned to the meeting room after 10 minutes in Executive Session.

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

## **Commissioners Remarks**

Chairman Taylor read thank you cards addressed to the Commissioners from the Gateway

Center for supplying them with furniture and equipment and the Health Department for the improvements to their building.

County Manager Michael Dinnerman and Vice-Chair Hope Harmon thanked Chief Finance Officer Deanna Griffin, Payroll & HR Director Pamela Turner, and County Clerk Donna Prather for their excellent work.

**Meeting adjourned.**

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

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