

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
OF THE BEN HILL COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON **MARCH 4TH, 2025, AT 6:00 PM** IN THE
BEN HILL COUNTY COMMISSISONER MEETING ROOM LOCATED
AT 321 DEWEY MCGLARMRY ROAD.

Those present for the meeting were as follows:

Hal Wiley	Chairman
Hope Harmon	Vice-Chair
Daniel Cowan	Commissioner
John Mooney	Commissioner
Hampton Raulerson	County Manager
Pamela D. Turner	County Clerk

Call to Order

Chairman Hal Wiley called the meeting to order

Commissioner Bennie Calloway gave the invocation.

Everyone gave the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of the Agenda/Agenda Changes

Vice Hair-Hope Harmon made a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Bennie Calloway seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Beenie Calloway, Commissioner John Mooney, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, and Chairman Hal Wiley 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 4th, 2025. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Beenie Calloway, Commissioner Daniel Cowan and Chairman Hal Wiley all voting for the motion.

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to approve the Special Called Meeting minutes that was held on February 18th, 2025. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Beenie Calloway, Commissioner Daniel Cowan and Chairman Hal Wiley all voting for the motion.

Constitutional Officer: NONE

Department Head Reports: NONE

County Board Reports: NONE

County Manager's Report:

County Manager Hampton Raulerson reported as follows:

- Flint Road project is moving along, box culvert has been poured, next will be the paving and the detour route is also moving along nicely
- County barn is moving right along, they have the slab and erected the metal structures, measuring for the roll up doors as well.
- Planters First building that was purchased is being painted/floor clean and next the carpet will be replaced. Scott Spivey is working on the IT details. Hopefully to be in the building before the end of April.

Annexation Request/Notification: NONE

Rezoning Application: NONE

Alcohol Application: NONE

Appointments:

Fitzgerald Ben Hill County Solid Waste Authority

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to re-appoint Tim Kegebein to the Fitzgerald Ben Hill County Solid Waste Authority. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with, Commissioner John Mooney, Vice- Chair Harmon, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner Beenie Calloway, and Chairman Hal Wiley all voting on the motion.

Old Business: NONE

New Business:

Judicial Alternatives of Georgia Contract

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to approve Judicial Alternatives of Georgia Contract for probationary services. 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 Hal Wiley all voting for the motion.

Resolution Declaring County Property as Surplus & Authorizing the Disposal of Said Property

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon made a motion to approve Resolution Declaring County Property as Surplus and Authorizing the disposal of said property. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Commissioner John Mooney, Commissioner Bennie Calloway and Chairman Hal Wiley all voting for the motion.

SGRC Agreement for Technical Assistance for Updating Comprehensive Plan

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the SGRC agreement for Technical Assistance for Updating Comprehensive Plan. Vice -Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice- Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner John Mooney, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Hal Wiley all voting for the motion.

SRO Contract

Commissioner Daniel Cowan made a motion to approve the SRO contract for 6 officers. Vice -Chair Hope Harmon seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice- Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner John Mooney, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Hal Wiley all voting for the motion.

2025 CDBG Potential Conflict of Interest

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion that there are no conflict of interest. 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 Hal Wiley all voting for the motion.

2025 CDBG Submittal Resolution

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to approve Resolution to submit an application to Obtain FY 2025 CDBG funds for street paving and drainage improvements. 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 Hal Wiley all voting for the motion

2025 CDBG Admin Contract-Contingent Upon Funding

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to approve 2025 CDBG Admin-Contract Contingent Upon Funding. Commissioner Daniel Cowan seconded the motion; which passed with Commissioner John Mooney, Commissioner Daniel Cowan, Vice-Chair Hope Harmon, Commissioner Bennie Calloway, and Chairman Hal Wiley all voting for the motion

Proposal for Ben Hill County Opioid Prevention Program

County Manager Hampton Raulerson stated that the County has roughly \$59,000.00 in the Opioid Settlement Fund that came from the nationwide class action lawsuit. These funds are restricted on what they can be utilized for. County Manager Hampton Raulerson spoke with the Sheriff, and he does not have anything to utilize the funds on, if something comes up in the future, he will let the County Manager know.

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon stated she attended a meeting in Moultrie, where they specifically informed them about what the funds could be used for. Going forward the funds won't be given directly we would have to go through a board. Vice-Chair Hope Harmon spoke with Dave Wills at ACCG about some ideas she had, that so much focus is on the adults but not the kids who have to witness their parents dealing with Opioids.

Spoke with the Senator and his wife, who are licensed counselors, about putting together this proposal. Vice-Chair, Hope Harmon stated that she spoke with Mr. Hardin about spaces at the school, to come in and do some mental health services at the school, she will also talk with Mr. Heitzman at the Middle school about coming into the school. There will be trained staff coming in to talk about the stigma. This is a 6-month program, we will not be using all the funds that we have. There will be monthly reports, and I will be utilizing more education, and providing mental health services to the kids in person. Services will also be used this summer.

County Manager Hampton Raulerson stated that \$27,000.00 will be allocated to the Opioid Prevention Program.

Commissioner John Mooney made a motion to approve the Proposal for Ben Hill County Opioid Prevention Program. 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 Hal Wiley all voting for the motion.

Discussion: *Inclement Weather Policy*

County Manager Hampton Raulerson suggests that if we have to close the offices, we would pay those who have to stay home and the essential employees (Sheriff Office, E911 Road Department) compensate them in another way, for example the day off for a day that was worked. Also, potentially offering employees to work at a Shelter, if and when we organize these, Shelters.

Vice-Chair Hope Harmon had concerns about the liabilities of employees working at Shelters.

Chairman Hal Wiley ask the question to Attorney Nick Kinsley, what additional liability we would have if an employee worked at a Shelter instead of the office if it is closed. If they wanted to volunteer and work at a Shelter?

Attorney Nick stated that there is no additional liability.

Chairman Hal Wiley the questions is who wants to open a Shelter/what Church wants to open a Shelter? We don't know, but now is the time to figure that out. You will have the Road Department still at work, and maybe the office staff can be at work at the Shelter in some form. But if they choose not to, do you pay them to go home? We need to figure out a plan. No decision needs to be made tonight, just need to start thinking about it.

County Manager Hampton Raulerson stated that he would like some guidance from the Board on what the policy would be like, and that the employees were told at last year's Board meeting that this Board would formulate some type of policy. Whether we are going to continue to do what we do or we will have some changes.

And guidance from this Board on what you would like to see, and I will work with Attorney Nick to formulate and bring it back to get it approved for Personnel policy.

Chairman Hal Wiley asked the question, what was done now? Are employees using vacation?

County Manager Hampton Raulerson stated that employees were using vacation until Hurricane Helene, then it went to sick time.

Commissioner Daniel Cowan had concerns about when employees that are at home and get paid while employees at the Road Department are working the storm are paid as well. There should be a capped place on how many paid weather days employees should get. I think 2 or 3 weather days should be given and if it's more than that employees should use their sick or vacation time, and if an employee does not have either they will not be paid.

Commissioner John Mooney stated that he is inclined to go along with the idea if we have weather days, to allow employees to get paid. Commissioner John Mooney said he agrees with Commissioner Daniel Cowan about putting a capped on the weather days, and that Road Department, E911 and Sheriff Office to be compensated with extra time off for having to work during inclement weather while other offices are closed.

Vice -Chair Hope Harmon agrees with capping weather days.

Commissioner Bennie Calloway agrees with capping weather days.

Legislative Report:

Commissioner Hope Harmon Legislative Report: NACo & Capital Connection Conference Highlights

During my recent attendance at the National Association of Counties (NACo) Conference and the Capital Connection Conference, I engaged in key discussions with federal and state leaders on issues impacting South Georgia.

At NACo, I met with a senior staff member from Senator Warnock's office to discuss Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements, the Affordable Care Act medical reimbursements, and strategies to improve rural healthcare accessibility. We also addressed concerns about a frozen reimbursement program affecting after-school meal funding for children attending MEP. Additionally, we talked about the closure of USAID offices and the impact on our local economy, particularly MANA. I emphasized that while 130 jobs may not seem significant to a metro county like Chatham, such a loss would be devastating to a community of our size.

I also met with representatives from the United States Farm Bureau to discuss agricultural concerns in South Georgia and participated in multiple discussions with the USDA. A primary focus was advocating for the continuation of the Rural Partners Network and ensuring that rural communities can access federal and state funding opportunities.

At the Department of Treasury, I inquired about American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) compliance, the timeline for submission reviews, and the issuance of closeout letters. While we are in full compliance, I wanted to meet with them to ensure clarity. Additionally, I explored opportunities to expand a summer food program I facilitated last year in partnership with Second Harvest and the Fitzgerald Housing Authority by connecting with a potential new partner.

Another critical issue was the Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) process. Although funding for our local hospital was included in the budget, the budget has not yet been approved, leaving critical projects in limbo. In preparation for these discussions, I reached out to Paige at the hospital to gather input on specific concerns and relayed them to federal representatives. Ensuring continued funding for rural hospitals, as well as access to Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and USDA funding for rural infrastructure and healthcare services, remain a priority.

At the Capital Connection Conference, I had a productive conversation with our District Senator, Carden Summers, about tort reform. We discussed the importance of his support for the legislation, and he assured me of his strong backing. He has since voted in favor of the bills which successfully passed in the Senate. I also spoke with Representative Noel Williams about concerns regarding the bill's progression in the House and potential changes that could weaken its impact. Protecting the integrity of the tort reform bill is crucial, particularly for our local hospital and business owners across the state.

Additionally, I attended a reception where I had valuable discussions with key stakeholders and connected with Irwin County Commissioners. I look forward to building stronger partnerships with our neighboring counties. The following day, I observed committee meetings, gaining further insight into legislative priorities.

Overall, both conferences provided invaluable opportunities to advocate for South Georgia, address pressing issues, and strengthen connections with decision-makers. I am committed to continuing these conversations and ensuring that our communities' benefit from sound policies and resources. Moving forward, I plan to develop a legislative agenda that highlights the needs of Ben Hill County and outlines how we can collaborate with state and federal agencies to secure the necessary resources for our community.

Public Comments: NONE

Executive Session: NONE

Commissioner's Remarks:

Meeting adjourned.

_____ Hal Wiley, Chairman

_____ Pamela D. Turner, County Clerk