

**MINUTES  
WORK SESSION  
WARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
MONDAY, MARCH 13, 2023  
3:30 p.m.**

The Ware County Board of Commissioners held a Work Session, Monday, March 13, 2023 at 3:30 p.m. in the Ware County Commission Chambers, 305 Oak Street, Suite 201 Waycross, Georgia 31501 with Chairman Elmer Thrift presiding.

<b>CALL TO ORDER</b>	Chairman Elmer Thrift
<b>COMMISSIONERS PRESENT</b>	Commissioner Leonard Burse, Commissioner Jerry Pope, and Commissioner Timmy Lucas
<b>COMMISSIONERS ABSENT</b>	Commissioner Steve Barnard
<b>STAFF PRESENT</b>	County Manager Scott Moye; Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Herzog
<b>PRESS</b>	Danny Bartlett
<b>INVOCATION</b>	The Invocation was given by Danny Bartlett
<b>PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE</b>	The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Elmer Thrift
<b>GUEST SPEAKER(S):</b>	

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

- A. Atlas Engineering – Albany Avenue Overpass Design Presentation**  
Chairman Thrift asked the County Manager to introduce the engineering firm. CM Moye stated that at the request of the Commission he asked representatives of Atlas Engineering and Hofstadter & Associates, who have partnered together, to present their company background and ideas for the project. Bill DuVall went over the presentation booklet giving information on the key players who include: Todd Long (retired GDOT Deputy Commissioner), Sammy Powell, David Bearse (former CSX District Engineer), Carl Hofstadter (surveyor), and Will Murphy (Field Operations Manager, formerly with GDOT). He stated that Atlas, formerly known as Moreland Altobelli Associates, Inc., is now a nationwide company and has been around since the 1980s.

Mr. DuVall briefly noted some former projects with other local counties and municipalities. He provided a picture of the SR 169 Bridge over CSX in Jesup that was completed a few years ago. He stated that Atlas has GI experience as well, and told of building the I-16/I-75 interchange design project which was the largest bid build ever under GDOT. He reiterated some reasons why to choose Atlas. The company has

extensive CSX experience, and he personally has built thousands of bridges while working with GDOT. There will be a specific point of contact for frequent communication and public updates. He then said he would have Carl Hofstadter come forward and explain his role in this project. At this time, Commissioner Pope noted that the City of Waycross is a partner in this project and had sent representatives to this meeting. He asked that they be furnished with the same presentation package as was given to the Commission.

Carl Hofstadter of Hofstadter & Associates introduced himself and stated that although he surveys projects, but doesn't build bridges which this project requires. He said he has an office in Baxley and has a couple of employees who live in Ware County. He also noted that "*Elmer (Chairman Thrift) and I have known each other 30 years.*" He said he started his company in 1982 and has worked with over 40 cities and counties in this area and is very familiar with the area.

Bill DuVall also reported Todd Long (the Principal Engineer for Georgia Division of Atlas) was the first planning director chosen by former Governor Deal to sit on the transportation board and report directly back to the Governor on projects around the State. He also worked on TSPLOST. He recapped that there is a design schedule and cost section in the presentation package. Based on the company's connections, he stated they should get a final design approval from CSX within a 24-month period. He then offered to answer questions.

Commissioner Burse thanked them for the presentation and asked how many employees were with the company. Mr. DuVall said across the country there are about 3500. Commissioner Burse then asked for the number of employees in Georgia. Mr. DuVall said there were around 800. Commissioner Burse then asked about the makeup of the company. Mr. DuVall explained that Atlas has an engineering function, horizontal and vertical work, but the bulk is materials testing and construction inspection. Commissioner Burse clarified that what he was curious to know was the racial and gender makeup of the company. Mr. DuVall said he doesn't have exact percentages but noted that Atlas is a very diverse company and he could look up the numbers. Commissioner Burse noted that he liked that David Barse is the CSX expert. He stated he worked with CSX 42 years and has been "on the other side". He was an engineer and has been fussed at for blocking intersections. He noted that CSX would be a determining factor with this project and the timeline is important. Mr. DuVall stated Atlas would determine the right of way and find out how many lines CSX needs. Mr. Hofstadter spoke up to say that "*this is a gray crossing they are closing, so every time I've dealt with the railroad when we're closing a gray crossing. They (CSX) are all for it. So I think they are in favor of this.*"

Chairman Thrift asked if there was an anticipated date for approval from CSX. Mr. DuVall said the project will be in three phases. First would be to figure out what is needed. Second would be to come up with a layout/footprint. Third would be for CSX to review and give approval.

Commissioner Pope stated that according to the chart, Atlas shows final construction plans would be available January 2025. It also shows continuation with CSX on into 2025. He asked if Atlas expected to have everything settled with CSX, or if there would be more changes and coordination after January 2025. Mr. DuVall said that small

changes always anticipated, but he would expect to already be in the bidding process at that time. Commissioner Pope asked to clarify if no major hold ups would be expected. Mr. DuVall said any major issues should be addressed during the preliminary stage, so there are no unexpected hold ups. Mr. Will Murphy stepped up to the podium at this point to explain the reason for some of the coordination still happening after final construction plans is final CSX approval will be based on the County's final design plan. *"You should have your final approval prior to the final plans because we won't finalize them until we do have your final approval. We gotta get their final public works manual, their flagging requirements, just Norfolk Southern is in the middle of changing all of their flagging requirements. So there may be some changes with CSX coming down the road, and they don't ever give any of those specifics until right before the project is advertised relating to the public."*

Chairman Thrift asked if it was possible to have a bid opening in January 2025 or within that time frame. Mr. DuVall stated it would probably be in April because it takes a little time to get the bid package together.

Commissioner Lucas asked for a tentative completion date for the entire project. Mr. Murphy stated depending on the start date, it's about a 24-month construction time. Commissioner Lucas verified that with the preliminary stages going through 2025, then adding a 24-month construction phase that it would be probably be 2027 before the overpass would be ready to use. Mr. Murphy and Mr. DuVall agreed that was a reasonable date. Mr. Murphy spoke up and said that if GDOT or federal funding were being used that it would take about six years to get a final plan.

Commissioner Burse mentioned there had been a discussion about speeding up the process if the roads wouldn't be under the overpass. CM Moye spoke up and said Commissioner Burse was referring to Garlington Avenue crossing Albany Avenue. He said there had been earlier discussion about making the span a little longer so the two through streets could be run up under the overpass. He noted it depends on what the Commission wants to do, but the longer span would increase construction costs. He also said that it could be designed so that the streets could be added at a later date. Mr. DuVall stated what be a part of the initial concept survey and determine where to make adjustments to the original proposed concept.

#### **Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

#### **B. Resolution 2023-03: Pledging Support for the Albany Overpass**

County Manager Moye explained to the Commission that the County gets invited to apply for congressional appropriation in the federal budget. One of the requirements of the application is to provide documentation that the County Commission and City Commission are in full support of the project. This resolution along with letters of support will fulfill that requirement. Mr. Moye also said that he would have to check, but felt that federal regulations would have to be met on the project if federal funds were used. Chairman Thrift wanted to verify that the County had already discussed this with the City, and Mr. Moye assured him they had. He stated this is a joint resolution and was drawn up by the County Attorney. Once it is approved by the County, it will be forwarded over to the City for further approval.

Commissioner Burse asked to clarify that by accepting the appropriation funds, the project would be extended time wise; however, the County is under no obligation to accept the funds. CM Moye said he was checking into that but felt that would be the case. However, that could be a moot point now, but he would hold onto the resolution for future use.

Commissioner Pope asked if applying for funds was made a part of this resolution. Mr. Moye assured him it was not. Asst. County Attorney advised the resolution is worded very broadly just to show support by the City and the County. It is not specific to seeking funds.

**Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

**C. Resolution 2023-04: Adoption of the Ware County Hazardous Mitigation Plan**

CM Moye stated he would have EMA Director Jonathan Daniell to present the plan. Mr. Daniell explained this resolution is to adopt a five-year plan for hazardous mitigation. This plan details the hazards that Ware County is subject to such as, thunderstorms, wildfires, drought, hurricanes, and tornadoes. This is a five-year plan that must be in place to qualify for FEMA dollars. It also allows Waycross and Ware County governments to apply for funding during disasters. The City of Waycross will be approving this plan at the next meeting. Once this plan is approved, it is good for five years.

Commissioner Pope asked if the City of Waycross would be adopting this same plan. Mr. Daniell said yes.

Commissioner Burse asked about the cost of the plan. Mr. Daniell responded that the cost is around \$19,000. The money was awarded in a grant from GEMA. Ware County contracted with Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) to write the plan. FEMA has approved the plan. Once the resolution is complete, GEMA will reimburse the \$19,000 to Ware County.

Commissioner Pope clarified that Ware County could not get reimbursement of cost incurred during a disaster without this plan. Mr. Daniell stated that was correct. He said the plan has been around a long time, but it has to be updated every five years.

Commissioner Burse stated he read in the plan that the EMA director is to have a meeting once a year for the public. He asked how many people attended the last meeting. Mr. Daniell said that he and a representative from SGRC were the only two in attendance. He stated that he is required to hold a public hearing every year which he advertises in the newspaper, but unfortunately no one shows up.

**Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

**D. Resolution 2023-05: Selection of the 2023 CDBG Engineer**

Chairman Thrift asked if a list of the engineers was available. CM Moye advised that the County advertised and received six proposals from engineering companies: Carter and Sloop from Macon, GA; JMJ from Jacksonville, FL; Statewide Engineering from Douglas, GA; Roberts Engineering from St Simons Island, GA; T. R. Long from Hinesville, GA; and Hofstadter and Associates from Macon and Baxley, GA. There was a

committee consisting of Scott Moyer, Brandon Wallace, and Gene Thomas that reviewed and ranked each firm. The results were fairly close. Statewide Engineering out of Douglas, GA received the most points, primarily because of their experience doing CDBG work in Ware County. He said a representative at the regional commission office said the firm that is chosen has to be able to provide a community meeting in the CDBG target area to meet with residents and answer questions about the project. Commissioner Lucas asked if all the firms that submitted applications would be willing to do that. CM Moyer stated that is a requirement. Commissioner Pope asked if Statewide Engineering is working on the present CDBG project. CM Moyer stated the current project in Emerson Park is being done by T. R. Long. Commissioner Pope asked if this was the recommendation. CM Moyer explained this was the ranking by the committee. Commissioner Burse asked if this is the normal way of choosing the engineer for a CDBG project. CM Moyer explained that the County has to go through a procurement process because federal funding is involved which includes advertising for an engineer, then ranking the ones who submit an application.

Chairman Thrift asked to verify who was on the committee. CM Moyer responded that he, Brandon, and Gene were the committee. Commissioner Lucas asked if Statewide was the pick of the committee. Mr. Moyer stated Statewide is the recommendation.

Commissioner Burse asked if Ware County had ever dealt with Statewide. Mr. Moyer explained that Statewide did the paving project Palmetto Place which was the CDBG project before the current one in Emerson Park. Commissioner Burse asked if there had been any problems. Mr. Moyer said there was not. Chairman Thrift asked if anyone had been in Bennett subdivision. Mr. Moyer advised that is the area being surveyed now for a CDBG project. The Chairman then asked if the Gilchrist Park area would be included, but Mr. Moyer told him that would be next after Bennett Subdivision. The survey has to show that 70% of the recipients have to be in the low to moderate income range. If 70% is not the result of the survey, another area will have to be targeted.

#### **Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

- E. Ordinance 2023-02: Establish Maximum Speed Limit on Johnny Minchew Road**  
County Manager Moyer stated the current speed limit is set at 35 miles per hour. This ordinance would increase it to 45 miles per hour. The Sheriff's Office agreed to the change to bring it in line with similar roads. Chairman Thrift asked if anyone had opposed the increase. Mr. Moyer said he had not heard of any opposition. The Chairman asked the audience and the Commission if anyone was opposed. Commissioner Burse stated he had been approached by a constituent to have the speed limit increased. He said there are only about 8 houses on the road which is almost four miles long, and there is a school bus that travels that road. He stated other roads in close proximity to Johnny Minchew Road already have a speed limit of 45 miles per hour.

#### **Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

- F. Transportation Plan Update Proposal**  
County Manager Moyer stated this is a proposal that was sent out earlier. He hasn't received the follow up information that he needs from this company regarding the cost to have this transportation plan updated. The company representative should have the

information returned within the next couple of days. For that reason, CM Moye would like to have this item moved to the March 27 meeting, if possible. Chairman Thrift asked the other Commissioners were okay with moving the meeting. All responded favorably. Chairman Thrift asked if this was needed for the regional meeting. CM Moye stated it would help to have it, but he does not think it would be ready in time to use the data from it. There are enough items in the current plan that could be submitted along with other suggestions. He said this is a six to eight-month process. Chairman Thrift asked if it would be that much longer before the plan would be available. CM Moye explained that there have to be public hearings. It is not a cut and dried plan but fairly elaborate. It requires community input and has to be coordinated with the City of Waycross.

Commissioner Pope said it is an update of the present plan, and the present plan will be used for the Regional TSPLOST program. CM Moye stated that was correct. He also said that the Commission can hold a Public Hearing for transportation ideas as a basis for developing projects. Commissioner Pope asked if updating the transportation plan would affect the TSPLOST program. CM Moye said it would not.

#### **Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

#### **G. Alcohol License Application Request**

Planning and Codes Director James Shubert advised the Commission that Rouse's Grocery sold out to Ketan Kumar M. Patel, and Mr. Patel is applying for an alcohol license for that location. The license is for off-premises consumption of beer and wine and is what was issued to Rouse's Grocery. Chairman Thrift asked if they already had a license. Mr. Shubert advised that the license was for Rouse's Grocery, and Mr. Patel is applying for the license to be in his company's name.

Commissioner Pope asked to verify that this would not be a license for a distilled spirits license as he had been told it was. Mr. Shubert said no that the license is strictly for consumption off-premises of beer and wine, typically what a convenience store has. Mr. Shubert stated there are two buildings or store fronts on the site. He has heard talk that the second building, which was formerly a gun shop, might be turned into a shop for selling distilled spirits. This current license would not cover that. The current buildings would have to be modified so that there is no door which allows access from one to the other. He did clarify that he has not had a discussion with the current owners about plans for the second building. He clarified that this license application is for the sale of beer and wine only, not distilled spirits.

#### **Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

### **Appointments**

#### **A. Appointment - Waycross-Ware County Land Bank Board**

Chairman Thrift asked if there were any nominees for the Land Bank Board.

Commissioner Pope said he thought Commissioner Lucas would be a good member for that board. Chairman Thrift asked Commissioner Lucas if he would accept that position.

Commissioner Lucas said that he would.

**B. Appointment – Ware County Board of Assessors**

Chairman Thrift said he understood there was a person for this position. County Manager Moye stated Sandra Tiner resigned from the Ware County Board of Assessors. Mrs. Cathy Mixon said she is willing to serve in Mrs. Tiner's place.

**COUNTY MANAGER ITEMS:**

CM Moye stated Mr. Billy Carter of the Tax Assessors office wanted to address the Commission. Mr. Carter said that recently the Tax Commissioner mailed letters to homeowners regarding homestead exemption. He explained that the letter did not mention the income and age based exemptions. He would like for homeowners to be aware that there are several age based and income based exemptions. He said citizens are coming in to sign up for exemptions without realizing they need to bring in paperwork to prove they qualify for them. Because some citizens live so far out in the county, he would like for them to be aware that they need to bring proof of income with them. This would help in making sure everything gets handled in one visit and prevent return trips. Commissioner Lucas asked how things were going with the property valuation audit. Mr. Carter said GMASS came in and did a number of properties. His staff has reviewed about 900 properties in the last three months, even with three staff openings. Commissioner Lucas asked if the deadline would be met. Mr. Carter advised he and his staff would do what had to be done.

**COMMISSIONER ITEMS:**

Commissioner Lucas stated he would like to remember Commissioner Barnard and his family regarding an unspoken situation.

Commissioner Burse asked for a brief update from Fire Chief Dee Meadows regarding repair at the Waresboro Fire Station. Chief Meadows advised the company would be at the fire station Thursday morning at 7:30 a. m. to lift the building. Chairman Thrift asked if he was confident that everything will work and be okay. Chief Meadows said he feels confident in the repair and that it would work. The Chairman added that some grade work needs to be done around the stations because the dirt is higher than the slab at some locations. CM Moye spoke up that someone is coming to look at the Boggy Bay station to give an estimate on having the woodwork replaced. The Chairman asked the Fire Chief to come back to give an update on that work. Chief Meadows said that there will be a meeting to recruit citizens interested in becoming volunteer firefighters. Advertisements have been on the radio and in the newspaper for the meeting which will be held on Monday, March 26 at 6:30 p.m. at Station 1.

Chairman Thrift asked Elections Superintendent Carlos Nelson if he would like to address the Commission, but he declined.

The Chairman asked Mr. Spence Davis if he would like to address the Commission. Mr. Davis thanked the Commission for the repair work that is being done. He feels that it will be cheaper than building a completely new one. He also thanked the Fire Chief for the effort he has put into getting the work done.

Planning and Codes Director James Shubert addressed the Commission to advise the public there is now a link on the website to apply for permits online instead of coming to the office. Payments will still be made in person or over the phone. He said this is a trial run. If everything goes well, he may have the business license applications added to the website. Commissioner Pope and Chairman Thrift asked which permits could be applied for online. Mr. Shubert explained that residential and commercial building permits, storage permits, mobile home moving permits, electrical permits, plumbing permits, and mechanical permits. All Commissioners commented that was a good move. Mr. Shubert said another goal is to have a computer kiosk in the office lobby where citizens can submit online applications. These are then forwarded electronically to staff to process.

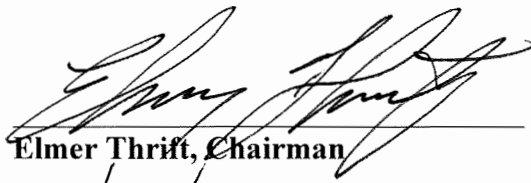
**ADJOURN:**

A motion was made by Commissioner Burse to adjourn the Work Session, with Commissioner Pope seconding the motion at 4:30 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Date proposed to be approved: April 24, 2023



**Melinda L. Brooks, County Clerk**  
[SEAL]



**Elmer Thrift, Chairman**

4/25/2023

**Date**