

**MINUTES
WORK SESSION
WARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2023
3:30 p.m.**

The Ware County Board of Commissioners held a Work Session, Monday, March 27, 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.

CALL TO ORDER	Chairman Elmer Thrift
COMMISSIONERS PRESENT	Commissioner Steve Barnard, Commissioner Leonard Burse, Commissioner Jerry Pope, and Commissioner Timmy Lucas
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT	None
STAFF PRESENT	County Manager Scott Moye; Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Herzog (on phone)
PRESS	Danny Bartlett
INVOCATION	The Invocation was given by Danny Bartlett
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE	The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Elmer Thrift

GUEST SPEAKER(S):

Carlos Nelson, Supervisor of Elections

At Commissioner Burse's request, Carlos Nelson, Supervisor of Elections, spoke to the Commission about what is happening with elections. Because the Legislature is still in session, he didn't speak about any change in laws. He explained that staff is still working even though this is an off year for elections. It's the time to do the background stuff to ensure the next (election) year runs smooth. Currently, they are working on street maintenance which means they are looking at every road in Ware County to make sure that voters are assigned to the correct district. Residents living on the same road are not always in the same district. They are working to have everyone ready for the 2024 elections.

The State has a new voter registration portal which he and his staff are in the process of learning to use. He said it will be a great asset to the voters. Updates are in real time and will show up within a couple of hours. Time and date of votes will show up on the same day that voting occurred. Absentee ballots will show as being sent. On election night absentee ballots will show as being counted. He admitted there are all kinds of ideas and conspiracy theories about voting because people do not really understand how the equipment works. He encourages people to come to his office and see how everything works, but he does ask that they leave their preconceived ideas at the door and come in with an open mind and give the staff an opportunity to show how the equipment functions. Another improvement is the

voter check-in process. The new system was tested in some other counties last fall, and the time it takes for a voter to check in was reduced to less than one (1) minute from almost three (3) minutes.

Commissioner Pope asked about the process for applying for and submitting an absentee ballot as that seems to be the subject of most conspiracy theories. Mr. Nelson stated that anyone can apply for an absentee ballot. Voters do not have to prove that they will be out of town or will be in the hospital, etc... Ballots will be mailed to the voter's home address or to any other address designated on the application. Commissioner Pope asked if campaign groups can pass out absentee ballots then take them back to turn in. Mr. Nelson advised that groups can give out absent ballot applications, but there will be wording stating that the form was provided by a party or a person not the official form from the Secretary of State's office. Commissioner Pope asked if that form would be accepted. Mr. Nelson responded that if the form has the voter signature and identifying information, such as a driver's license number. The application must be completed by the voter. It can't have preprinted information. He also stated that absentee ballot applications can be submitted on the portal.

Commissioner Barnard asked about rumors that people are getting votes from nursing homes. He has a brother in a nursing home who isn't capable of remembering what he had for dinner, much less know about voting. He would not want to know that someone turned in a ballot for his brother. Mr. Nelson stated that a person who isn't able to vote can have voting rights removed through probate. The activities coordinator is the registrar for nursing homes and can submit applications for absentee ballots. With the resident's permission, the registrar can assist with the completion of the ballot, but must sign a form stating that assistance was given. Relatives may assist the resident as well, but they also have to complete the same form.

Commissioner Burse thanked Mr. Nelson for coming to explain how the system works. He stated he knows that one of the issues plaguing the election board is having enough workers for the polls. He asked for an update on that situation. Mr. Nelson explained that is a nationwide issue. Many of the workers are elderly. Because the working people can't get off work, the board tends to rely on retirees or those who don't work to help. He admitted it's a struggle every election because the workers find other things to do between elections and change their minds about helping. Commissioner Burse asked about salaries. Mr. Nelson advised that reimbursements are by the hour: clerks - \$9, assistant managers - \$9.50, managers - \$10. (Roughly \$140 per day.) Commissioner Burse asked if a pay increase would attract more workers. Mr. Nelson stated that the pay was increased a little last year, but Ware County rates are on the low side for South Georgia.

Commissioner Barnard asked if the new election process will speed up the results being reported before 10 p.m. to midnight. Mr. Nelson responded that in the past three years (except for during COVID) the results have not been later than 10 p.m. He takes pride in having the results in as soon as possible, usually around 9:45 p.m. Also, board member Danny Bartlett attended training with him and feels confident that Mr. Bartlett could step up in his absence and get the same results just as quickly.

Zen Yarbrough, Drainage on Old 122 South

Mr. Yarbrough told the Commission that he has spoken to them as well as to Mr. Brooks about having culverts installed in five locations. Mr. Brooks has flagged where the culverts

would go. He said the matter seems to have died as that took place a year ago. He said the problem is dirt is being used to fill the road back in until it rains again and washes right back out. Right now the north side of Old 122, the water is up to the top of the road, and the outside is dry. All he wants to do is get it on the schedule where these five locations are. Two of them are on Old 122. A third one is on the corner of Ed Davis and 122. He said when the spot on Ed Davis was refilled that the water now washes out on 122. The fourth spot is on Ed Davis. The fifth location is where Ed Davis, Hasty, and Perch Creek all come together. It washes out every single time it rains. Right now the water on the north side is a foot higher than normal. He said he is before the Commission to find out how to get on them on the agenda to get them fixed instead of patching them all the time. Chairman Thrift told him that the County had a hard time getting the pipe for a while, so he may have had to delay that job since he couldn't get a delivery. Mr. Yarbrough state that Mr. Brooks had told him that when he put flags on the location for pipes. He also acknowledged that he was told that the County now uses metal and concrete culverts instead of plastic. County Manager Moye advised that it hasn't been very long since the first order was received, but that he could speak with Mr. Brooks and get an update. Mr. Yarbrough said the last time he spoke with him about it was about a year ago. About 6-8 weeks ago after the last hard rain, he did speak to him because the some of the culverts were two-thirds of the way blocked. He said he was shocked but they were there the next day to fix the problem. He said he just needs to know when the installation of the new culverts can be put on the schedule. Chairman Thrift asked if there were any old pipes under the road that are currently not working. Mr. Yarbrough stated that on Old 122 there are two culverts underneath; one is still open, but the other one is no longer visible. He further stated that the last time the roads were graded; the ditches were cut on both sides which has made the road too narrow to pass a car when it's wet. Instead that if you meet a car, you will have to back up half a mile to pass, and the road is very curvy.

Commissioner Barnard asked if that was the portion of the road that Rayonier has reopened. Mr. Yarbrough said that is not. Commissioner Barnard told him that the County Manager would check in with Mr. Brooks on this matter. Mr. Yarbrough asked if he could get a phone call with an update. CM Moye verified that the number on the sign in sheet is a good contact number and promised to call when he found out something. Mr. Yarbrough thanked the Commission for allowing him to speak. Chairman Thrift stated they would see what could be done.

AGENDA ITEMS:

A. Albany Avenue Overpass Design Services

Chairman Thrift read the agenda item sheet which stated the item is to seek direction from the County Commission on how staff needs to proceed on securing engineering services for the Albany Overpass Project. He asked if that meant that the Commission could go with one of the proposed firms or put the project out for more bids. County Manager Moye said those are the options. Chairman Thrift then asked how the Commission wanted to handle it. There have been proposals received from Practical Design Partners (PDP) and Atlas Engineering.

Commissioner Burse stated that this selection process has been going on for a while and time is of the essence because the overpass had been promoted on the SPLOST

referendum. He felt that is what tipped the scales in favor of the community supporting the SPLOST. PDP came in and presented a design which pleased the Commission and they discussed awarding a contract to them. However, the Commission decided to try to get another design engineer to come give a presentation which they did. He stated that everyone has had time to study these presentations, and he made side by side comparisons of them and feels Practical Design Partners would be the best option. To go out for more bids would push the project further out. He said enough valuable time has been spent on this process, so it's time to make a decision.

Commissioner Pope stated he agrees with Commissioner Burse. He addressed County Manager Moye stating there has been discussion about State and Federal funds, and he knows the County has been turned down for one Federal grant. When this project started, it was just for an overpass over the railroad track. Now other streets have been added in. He feels that we should get one engineer to design it all. CM Moye advised that the Commission could hold a workshop with whichever engineering firm is chosen and go through the design parameters. Commissioner Pope also stated involving other funding will require a higher level of engineering. CM Moye stated one thought is to ask for part of the funding in the Regional TSPLOST. That would free up money in the SPLOST account. Commissioner Pope stated that \$12 million was budgeted in SPLOST, but engineers have told Chairman Thrift and Commissioner Barnard that the price is already up to \$15-\$16 million. This project completion is a long way down the road. CM Moye suggested it may be a good idea to have a design that meets GDOT/State standards, so that if an application is submitted for Regional TSPLOST, the design would qualify. Commissioner Pope stated he is all for having the Chairman to request as much Regional TSPLOST money as possible for this project because the money has to come from somewhere, and he doesn't want to raise property taxes. CM Moye agreed by the time the design is complete, if we can get the Regional funding, we may have enough in SPLOST to put with it to pay for the overpass. Chairman Thrift mentioned that it will most likely be 2025 before the contractor will have to be paid. Commissioner Burse then pointed out that the project will move a little quicker without using federal and state funds because it would involve another set of rules and regulations. He reminded the Commission that both companies gave a 24-month timeline which is contingent on CSX's schedule. PDP already has a working relationship with CSX on the St. Augustine Road project in Valdosta. Getting the citizens across the tracks needs to be the main focus now. Extra turns or other options can be addressed at a later date. The Chairman stated the fire trucks, police cars, and citizens' automobiles should be able to flow freely without congestion.

Commissioner Barnard made a motion to accept Practical Design Partners as the design engineer. Commissioner Burse seconded the motion. CM Moye reminded them that the Commission is currently in a work session, so the vote would take place in the meeting immediately following.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

B. Resolution 2023-06: Selection of a 2023 CDBG Engineer

Chairman Thrift read the agenda item as the resolution to authorize the selection of the 2023 CDBG engineering services.

Commissioner Pope stated that at the last meeting they had gone through the grading package that was prepared on all of the engineers who applied for the project. He stated his vote was satisfied with what they were given. He feels it needs to be placed on the agenda and voted on at the meeting. He supports the grading of Statewide Engineering and said the way he understands it is, the Commissioners select an engineer or wait until next year. CM Moye explained he has checked on the current survey. So far the target area hasn't reached the 70% low and moderate income, but it's close. There are still about 12 to 15 houses left to check. If the survey comes out good, then the project can proceed.

Chairman Thrift asked how many areas would be worked on by this engineer. CM Moye responded only one (1). The Chairman asked if it could be two (2) or three (3) areas. The County Manager explained that the County can only apply for one a year. If successful, a county can apply every two (2) years. If a grant isn't awarded, then a county can apply the following year. While working on a current CDBG project, a certain amount of the grant money has to be spent before making a new application.

Commissioner Pope asked to clarify that choosing an engineer now is contingent upon a grant being rewarded. CM Moye stated that was correct. The survey requirements must be met and the grant has to be rewarded before an engineer is needed.

Commissioner Lucas asked that County Engineer Brandon Wallace give an update on the CDBG project in Emerson Park. Mr. Wallace explained that there are several dirt portions of roads that are being paved, including: Virginia Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue, New York Avenue, and New Jersey Avenue. Drainage pipes have come in and are being installed. The new power poles have been set. As soon as the telephone lines are removed from the existing poles, they will be removed. They are working through issues with bad dirt in the drain fields. Commissioner Lucas said he had ridden through and thought that everything looked good. He said the community is saying their community is getting a facelift and are proud of it. He asked if the old signage in the area will be replaced with newer ones. Mr. Wallace said he's pretty sure that is in the contract. He acknowledged that some of the signs are hard to read and in need of being replaced.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

C. Resolution 2023-07: Accept a GDOT Contract for the Airport Perimeter Fence Construction

County Manager Moye told the Commission that this item is a resolution to accept GDOT funding. The funds were turned back in to GDOT and then awarded to the County for the Airport fence project. Originally it was to be divided into three (3) phases because of funding. Now that we've been made aware that we qualify for this funding, County match is \$86,000 which can come from the old SPLOST account or ARPA funds. Mr. Moye stated that when extra funding becomes available, the County tries to take advantage of it.

Commissioner Pope asked that the airport manager, Jesse Jordan, come forward to answer questions.

Commissioner Burse asked if this project will take care of the whole airport. Mr. Jordan stated that it will include the full perimeter except for the part that is considered wetlands. This fence project is for security and animal mitigation where deer and other wildlife get on the runway. It will be tied into the fence behind the prison. This is to hopefully stop some of the contraband that is being walked across the airport during the early morning hours and dropped over the fence. Some of it is being brought in with drones.

Commissioner Barnard asked for the fence height. Mr. Jordan stated the chain link fence will be 7 feet high with 12 inches of barbed wire on top.

Chairman Thrift asked if the estimated cost is \$1.2 million. Mr. Moyer said it is. The Chairman then said if it hasn't gone for bid yet, they can't know the price. Mr. Moyer explained that the project did go out for bid, but the bid hasn't been awarded yet. The apparent low bidder is Peed Brothers of Butler, Georgia.

Commissioner Burse asked if the Commission agrees to the resolution would the project have to go back out to bid. Mr. Moyer stated that there is a timeline of two to three days to accept the funds. If not accepted, these funds will be awarded to another local government. Once the funds are secure, then the bid award can take place. In other words, the bid can't be awarded if there is no money.

Commissioner Barnard asked if a local contractor would be able to bid on this project, or was the bid process complete. Mr. Moyer stated that it has already been bid. Chairman Thrift interjected that it has already been bid out but will probably be rebid out to local contractors.

Commissioner Burse asked if the funds are approved at this meeting could the project be rebid or would the Commission have to stay with the present bid.

Commissioner Pope asked if the bidding process was handled locally or through GDOT. Mr. Moyer said that Passero Associates designed the project, put out the bid specs, and handled the entire process. He stated that even though the bid was in the newspaper, the two largest local contractors didn't send in a bid.

Mr. Jordan stated that from what he understood, that T and T Fencing did submit a bid. It was rejected because they put it under another contractor's name. He wasn't sure why it was rejected. Chairman Thrift said it may be that the company isn't bonded. Mr. Jordan said he did not know if GDOT or Passero Associates turned down the bid. Mr. Moyer said that he was not aware that T and T submitted a bid because he did not recognize the name. He will look into the matter a little further.

Commissioner Burse stated when a chain link fence is installed that weeds and shrubbery tend to start growing into the fence. He asked about the design with 15 feet on each side. Mr. Jordan stated there is enough room to mow and spray around the fence to keep the growth out of the fencerow.

Chairman Thrift reiterated that the source of the funds is: Federal - \$1 million, State - \$124,000, and local – \$86,000. Mr. Moye said yes.

Commissioner Lucas stated the upcoming weekend has two events; Swamp Fest and Fun in the Sun. Some of his constituents are asking about the shirts that were previously received from the airport. They are asking if they will be on sale this year as a fundraiser and if there will be food. Mr. Jordan said there will not be food this year. However, he is already working on plans for next year. His hopes are to bring it back how it used to be with barbecue and other foods. Commissioner Lucas said the person he spoke with mentioned that there are at least 20 planes coming in. He also stated they were highly complimentary about the shirts. Mr. Jordan said he would check on the shirts.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

D. Resolution 2023-08: Approve Work Order with Passero Associates

County Manager Moye explained that this item related to the previously discussed resolution to accept funding from GDOT. Part of that funding is for this work order for Passero and Associates in the amount of \$86,311.34.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

E. Storage Facility Lease Agreement – 378 Ossie Davis Parkway

CM Moye told the Commission that the County owns a building at the corner of Alice Street and Ossie Davis Parkway. It was leased out in 2013 for three (3) years, but the lease was never renewed. The previous company on the lease sold out to another company. The original lease from ten years ago was in the amount of \$500 per month. Current lease rates are \$6 - \$8 per square foot for dry storage. It's recommended that the price be set at \$7.15 per square foot. There is 1,260 square feet in the building that is used to store records and files.

Commissioner Pope asked if this is the building in front of the home health care company. Mr. Moye said it is and was hit by a car in recent months which knocked a hole in the exterior wall.

Commissioner Barnard asked if any of the other County owned buildings have been leased out. Mr. Moye stated they are being used for storage. Commissioner Pope said that the Development Authority has stored Christmas decorations in one. And there are benches from the courthouse in another one. Commissioner Barnard asked if any of them could be leased. Mr. Moye stated it may be possible to consolidate the items in some of the buildings to make them available. The Chairman asked if there is a separate parking area. Mr. Moye stated the tenants would have to use the parking lot here.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

COUNTY MANAGER ITEMS: None

CM Moye reminded the Commission that the volunteer firefighter recruitment meeting is being held tonight at 6:30 p.m. at Station 1. The Fire Chief is there now getting things prepared.

Commissioner Pope asked about the old Dodge building next to the DA's office. He wanted to know how things were progressing as to getting the building emptied and ready for demolition in preparation for remodeling the DA's office. Mr. Moyer said he believes that all of the old computers have just been removed by IT, but he will need to verify that with Carlos. Commissioner Burse said he spoke with Carlos about the old computers, and he told him how bad the building is. It leaks and is full of mold. Mr. Moyer said there are bad water leaks where the old building is attached to the DA's office.

COMMISSIONER ITEMS: None

Commissioner Barnard asked if the LMIG money had been approved. CM Moyer said that it has been approved, but no money has been received. Commissioner Barnard then asked if the jobs could be bid once the money has been received. Mr. Moyer said yes.

Commissioner Pope asked if they were working on the design for Astoria Road, so Mr. Moyer asked County Engineer Brandon Wallace to give an update. Mr. Wallace stated he had spoken with the surveyor about flagging the right of way, so he was working that in to his schedule. He will be looking to see where the existing right of way is. There has been an issue with the design because the shoulders of the road are high and narrow. When they try to clip the shoulders, the pavement goes down the steep ditches because they are so narrow. The design is contingent on how that is corrected. Mr. Wallace got a price on reconstruction which includes milling off the pavement and mixing in with some soil. The cost will be around \$130,000 to reclaim the shoulder.

Commissioner Pope asked if Palmetto Drive, Dasher Street, Lake Drive, and Crystal Street, which are on the LMIG list, have enough right of way. Mr. Wallace assured him that the existing right of ways were put in when that area was developed. Then Commissioner Pope asked about Phase 2 of the Jamestown Project which was to get access down ABC Avenue. He has noticed there is a right of way issue with CSX and an adjoining property owner. He wanted to know when the work would start to get that road opened up. Mr. Wallace stated that he discussed this with Commissioner Barnard and went back to Trent Long to let him know that the County is ready to work on this again knowing there was a stumbling block the first time. Originally CSX was requiring a \$350,000 construction agreement for the County to be on the right of way. At that time, the Commission felt that was too much money. Current thoughts are to get off of the CSX right of way as much as possible, get across the creek, and tie it in to Ternest Road. That way the only work on the railroad property would be on the north side tying that existing road in with whatever new road is put in to get across that creek bottom. Commissioner Pope stated he didn't see how a new road could be put on the CSX right of way. Mr. Wallace stated that they would limit the impact to the right of way to just tying in that existing road. There would be no improvements to the CSX right of way other than connecting the road. The idea is for Engineer Long to get something together to present to the Commission.

Commissioner Burse thanked County Manager Moyer for putting pictures in the paper to show that progress is being made on the bridge. He also mentioned the tornado in Mississippi and the school shooting in Tennessee and ask that they be remembered.

Commissioner Pope told the Commission that he would like the meeting agenda to be amended to add the appointment of Melinda Brooks to the position of County Clerk. He stated that she is currently getting her training, and this would allow her to officially take on the duties and give standing with the clerk's association. Commissioner Lucas said he agreed. Commissioner Burse

verified that this would move her title from administrative assistant to the County Clerk. Salary and everything else would remain the same. Commissioner Burse stated that he has encouraged her to get all of the training that she can. He stated that whether serving on a board or in public office, elected officials need to get all of the training that they can. It makes a person more effective and better informed official.

Commissioner Barnard asked for an update on Bickley Fire Department (Bickley recreation area). CM Moyer stated that he is waiting on a proposal to renovate the tennis courts. The man who was working on it got sick, so he hasn't received it yet. Mr. Moyer said he would check on it tomorrow and see if the guy can send that to him. The ballpark price that Mr. Moyer had received from him was between \$25,000 and \$30,000 for a total renovation. Mr. Moyer explained that there are cracks in the tennis court. The price included new paint, new nets, new fencing, the whole works. He then asked Jesse Jordan, Public Safety Training Center Director, if he had anything to add. Mr. Jordan stated that April 15 is the Black Pilots Association Fly In. This is the second year for this event. Food and drinks will be available, and there will be airplane rides for the kids. He also thanked the Commission for paving the road where he lives.

Chairman Thrift stated that Mrs. Davis called and wants the roads in Burseville mowed because the debris is growing over the road. She wants someone to move all the furniture that has been dumped out because it is in the way of the road. Commissioner Burse commented that it seems to be the unofficial dumping site. The Chairman said he has received two or three calls about places that aren't being mowed around the curves where it used to be kept clean. Another citizen called and said a train can't be seen at the railroad crossing out Knight Avenue near Griffin's store. The Chairman stated that he thinks that another mower should be added to the closed areas because there are several with bushes hanging over the road.

Commissioner Barnard said that he has had several calls from people who appreciate the work that has been done by the road department on the Old Nicholls Highway, Bickley Highway, and Telmore-Dixie Union Road. He encouraged everyone to go look at where the mulcher has cleaned the side of the road. The Chairman interrupted him to mention looking at the ones that haven't been done. Commissioner Barnard responded that he understands but they are working on them. He said if it was up to him, he would buy a mulcher head for the excavator that the County already owns and keep it running 7 or 8 months out of the year to keep some of the roads clean.

Commissioner Burse added that the aviation event on the 15th is open to everyone. Its purpose is to get young people motivated about aviation. The sponsor, John Radcliffe, was a pilot for Ford Motor Company and had high praises for the Waycross-Ware County Airport. He dedicated his personal plane for this event. Last year it was held the same weekend as Swampfest, but they made sure to have it on a separate weekend this year. People really enjoyed it last year. There was music, t-shirts, and things for the kids. He thanked those who have helped put it together: Jesse (Airport), the fire department, the sheriff's department, and Michael Brooks (Public Works). He said it is all greatly appreciated.

Commissioner Lucas wanted to give a thank you to the first responders from other counties who responded to Ware County's need for assistance this past weekend. He also mentioned things going on with Russia that could affect the United States armed forces of which his brother is a member. He asked that everyone be in prayer for our country and our military.

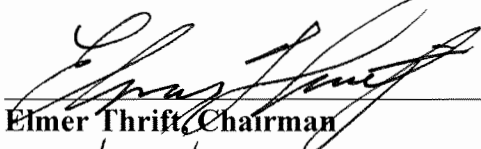
ADJOURN:

A motion was made by Commissioner Steve Barnard to adjourn the Work Session, with Commissioner Jerry Pope seconding the motion at 4:50 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Date proposed to be approved: April 24, 2023



Melinda L. Brooks, County Clerk



Elmer Thrift, Chairman
4/25/2023

Date