

**MINUTES
WORK SESSION
WARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MONDAY, JUNE 12, 2023
3:30 p.m.**

The Ware County Board of Commissioners held a Work Session, Monday, June 12, 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; County Clerk Melinda Brooks
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):

Tawanna Harris – Waycross-Ware County /OKRLS Library

Tawanna Harris addressed the Commission and thanked them for allowing her to serve as a Trustee of the Waycross Library Board. She stated that she works to uphold the required code of ethics which are based on Georgia's library system and the American Library Association and address diversity, inclusion, and access to materials whether her personal beliefs align with the practice or not. Ms. Harris stated she chaired a recent meeting of the Library's Board of Trustees. She stated Commissioner Lucas was at the meeting as well and was not given a chance to speak when he raised his hand. She apologized to the Commission and Commissioner Lucas for how the situation was handled.

Thomas & Rachel Littlejohn – Paschall Road

Mr. Littlejohn told the Commission that he and his fellow Paschall Road residents were there seeking clarification what has been going on with upgrades to Paschall Road. He said Smith Road has been paved and several roads in the Emerson Park area are being paved and upgraded as well. He noted that photos in a recent newspaper article showed that R. C. Davis Rd and Osburn Lane had been paved due to standing water after heavy rainfall. He provided photos of Paschall road from 2013 showing water covering the entire road and said the water will remain for weeks at a time because there is no drainage. He further stated

after 10 to 15 years of complaints about flooding, poor drainage, dangerous blind curves there has been no upgrades. His (and his fellow residents') question to the Commission is "*why can't something be done to Paschall Road?*".

Chairman Thrift told Mr. Littlejohn that he wished the Commission could pave all the roads. He said he lives about five miles down Griffin Road which is an old road. Sometimes it will be about a foot-and-a-half under water, and the curves are hard to see around.

Commissioner Barnard asked County Engineer Brandon Wallace if the County has enough right of way to put stop signs at the 90-degree curve in front of Mr. Littlejohn's house. Mr. Wallace said the property was originally platted as a 90-degree curve, but over the years it has become more rounded and is encroaching on the neighbor's property across the road. To fit the platted condition, it would be more of a 90-degree stop condition like we talked about in the last Commission (June 6) meeting. To get to that inside radius where the limbs are hanging over the ditch would require going farther onto the private property. Mr. Harris asked why the ditch couldn't go on the other side instead of on his side. Mr. Wallace explained that the County would have to purchase the right of way to go where the property pins are. A surveyor has checked that out. Mr. Harris stated the survey line is in the ditch. Mr. Wallace agreed. He said the back of the ditch is on private property and to go past the back of the ditch would be to go farther onto the private property. He explained that the existing right of way has been cleared. The dirt that has been added is on private property. The County would have to have permission from the property owner to go farther onto his land. There has to be a right of way or easement from the property owner before you encroach on his property. Mr. Wallace pointed out that installing stop signs should slow the traffic. Commissioner Barnard pointed out that there would be a stop sign in both directions.

Commissioner Burse clarified with the County Manager that Paschall Road is a County road up to the cattle gap. The portion of the road between the two cattle gaps is private. He further stated that although the road cannot be paved right now, he hopes that the Commission can help alleviate some of the problems with the blind curve and drainage.

CM Moye explained there are two things impacting these issues: 1) The County only has a prescriptive easement. No land has ever been deeded to the County. 2) The easement is only 30 feet. According to the survey, the right of way line is in the ditch. Even though Public Works has cut behind the ditch in the past, anything on the back side of that ditch is private property. The County would have to get enough right of way to take out the blind curve or square up the corner.

Commissioner Burse asked if the property owner has been approached about purchasing a right of way. CM Moye said a survey has been done, but the owner has not been contacted yet. However, he said it is a possibility if the corner doesn't get squared up. Chairman Thrift said County Engineer Wallace can contact the property owner to see if a solution can be reached in obtaining a right of way. All Commissioners were in agreement.

Michael Hargrove –

Mr. Hargrove addressed the Commission regarding his opinion about the controversy surrounding the Library. He doesn't think there is a religious overreach, but he feels the Library staff and management seems to favor certain groups. He feels that special interest groups shouldn't be pushing their agendas at a venue funded with taxpayer money.

AGENDA ITEMS:

A. **Resolution 2023-17: Accept GDOT Contract for Airport Terminal Apron Rehabilitation**

County Manager Moye advised the Commission that Jeffrey Griffith of Georgia DOT is in the audience and can answer questions about the contract. Mr. Griffith came and explained to the Commission that GDOT worked out a contract to rehabilitate terminal apron. It was originally designed for one project, but after reviewing it again, it was broken into Phase I and Phase II. Scruggs, a local company, was the low bidder. The base bid is Phase I and runs from the center line of the taxiway ramp to the south end which is where the majority of the larger commercial jet traffic is. The problem with the structure and age of the apron is the heavier jets come in and park on the hot asphalt. The asphalt begins to loosen and causes bell-shaped depressions where the wheels sit. It takes extra effort from the pilots and additional jet fuel just to move the aircraft out of the ruts. The engineers' design has concrete areas set up where the jets will be parking to prevent depression marks.

The Chairman asked if there would be milling. Mr. Griffith said milling would be inlaid in both sections. Phase I will be almost full depth. Reclamation and rehabilitation will correct the strength deficiency. Phase II will be basically just milling and overlay of the existing asphalt.

The bid for Phase 1 was \$755,240.19. The bid for Phase II was \$442,931. He said when accounting for engineering fees that will come in, that will add another \$145,000. The total project will be a little less than \$1.35 million. The state will contribute 75% with a local match of 25%. The recent perimeter fence project at the airport used all of the available federal funds. The state will contribute a little over \$1 million and is seeking a local match of \$335,000 to cover Phase I and II. He further stated that Ware County has an airport to be proud of as it is an economic engine for the community and generates a tremendous amount of revenue. The folks using the airport will really appreciate the improvements.

Commissioner Barnard asked if Phase I is done now, would there be a chance that some Federal money may become available in a couple of years to pay for Phase II. Mr. Griffith said Ware County receives \$150,000 each year for non-primary endowment. When Commissioner Barnard asked again about using the \$150,000 next year for Phase II, Mr. Griffith explained that the project is currently \$442,000. It would have to be rebid at that point and could go up to \$500,000 or \$600,000. He said he has never seen a bid go down. Commissioner Barnard asked County Manger Moye if there are any plan to spend next year's federal money on the airport. Mr. Moye responded there are not.

Commissioner Pope asked whether State funds would be available for Phase II if Phase I is completed now. Mr. Griffith responded that they would. Commissioner Pope asked if the same amount would be available. Mr. Griffith replied that it would depend on the amount of the bid. Commissioner Pope then asked if Phase I would take care of the problem with the wheels of the commercial jets sinking in the asphalt. Mr. Griffith said it would take care of the problems with weight of the incoming jets. Phase II would be for general aviation.

Chairman Thrift asked County Manager Moye where the County's 25% would come from. CM Moye said he would recommend using ARPA funds because they have to be spend by the end of next year. Commissioner Burse asked about how often the ARPA funds have been used lately. The County Manager told him that Ware County received \$6.9 million and there was still about \$5million left a few weeks ago. These funds have been used for capital items. He said that SPLOST money could be used instead. Commissioner Barnard asked about using the airport fund. CM Moye said he could find out the balance of that fund and let him know if there is enough. He said he thought some of that was used on the perimeter fence. He then said he just received a text that the current balance of the airport fund is a little over \$400,000. Commissioner Barnard asked what that money is spent on. CM Moye said it is spent on capital item and capital improvements. Commissioner Barnard suggested doing Phase I and taking the local match of \$188,810 from ARPA and pull the \$110,728 local match from the airport fund for Phase II. That would take care of Phase I and II now.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

B. Resolution 2023-18: Award Bid for Airport Terminal Apron Rehabilitation, Phase 1 & 2

CM Moye explained that this is the bid award for the previous agenda item. Commissioner Barnard asked if it just needed to be carried over, and CM Moye advised that it did.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

C. Resolution 2023-19: Award Bid for the Bickley Community Tennis Court Rehabilitation

CM Moye told the Commission that only one bid was received, and it was from Southeastern Tennis Courts in the amount of \$31,994. He said County Engineer Wallace checked the references and the company was given only good reviews. Commissioner Barnard and Chairman Thrift asked County Engineer Wallace to tell the Commission what the company would be doing. Mr. Wallace said the specs call for surface crack repair and to resurface the tennis courts. He said they redid the courts at Brantley County High School and also did a lot of work in East Point, GA. Commissioner Barnard asked if the courts would be painted for pickleball. Mr. Wallace said the courts would be striped for tennis and pickleball.

Commissioner Pope asked if this would come from the Recreation budget. County Manager Moye said it could come from Recreation, but it wasn't included in that budget. He recommended that it come out of SPLOST. Commissioner Barnard asked if there is enough money in the 2014 SPLOST fund for this project. Mr. Moye said the balance was sufficient to cover this expense.

Commissioner Barnard asked County Engineer Wallace if he had received a price on the walking track. Mr. Wallace stated they had met with the contractor, but he told them it would take a while to get a price put together. He expects to hear back soon.

Commissioner Barnard then asked Public Works Director Michael Brooks if his department could grade the dirt and prep it for the asphalt. Mr. Brooks said they could.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

D. Resolution 2023-20: Approve Regional TSPLOST Project List

County Manager Moye advised the Commission that this list was created by staff based on what the Commissioners discussed and agreed upon during the called meeting on June 6, 2023. Chairman Thrift asked to clarify that this list is for the TSPLOST if it is voted in again by the region. CM Moye said that it is. He also pointed out that Ware County was to budget for \$25 million, but the list actually totals almost \$28 million. The current regional TSPLOST will end somewhere in middle to late 2026. This one would pick up the next month. Commissioner Barnard pointed out that if this does pass that the sales tax will remain at 8% and not go back up to 9%. Commissioner Burse mentioned that even if Ware County votes against the Regional TSPLOST, there are 18 counties in the region, and a majority yes vote will pass the TSPLOST. This tax is already in effect. so if it passes, it will be collected another 10 years. To clarify, Commissioner Pope asked if Ware County citizens voted against the Regional TSPLOST would they (Ware County) would be charged the extra one per cent (1%) if it passed overall in the other 18 counties. CM Moye said yes that if it passes overall then all counties would be obligated to collect the tax which is what happened last time.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

E. Resolution 2023-21: Approve Unison Behavioral Health Contract

CM Moye told the Commission that this is an annual contract that Ware County has with Unison Behavioral Health. It's for \$50,026 which is the same as 2022. It's for providing mental health care, substance abuse services, and developmental disability services. Ware is one of eight counties involved in this program. Commissioner Pope asked if \$50,000 is Ware County's share, and CM Moye said yes. Commissioner Burse asked if this supplement wasn't provided, if the County would incur additional costs. CM Moye stated that the supplements from each county helps to fund personnel, operational, and travel costs.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

F. Ordinance 2023-03: Amend Chapter 6: Alcoholic Beverage License Requirements

Chairman Thrift asked Planning and Codes Director Shubert to explain this to the Commission. Mr. Shubert stated this is a request from his office to add section 6.2 to the County Ordinance. He said there is an oversight in the County Ordinance which only allows the County to charge the licensee for selling alcohol to a person under the age of 21. He took out the immunity section because it is covered by State law. He did point out that the County attorneys drafted this ordinance. It will allow the County to charge someone for selling or furnishing alcohol to persons under the age of 21 in Magistrate Court rather than having to go to State Court. Commissioner Barnard asked if this meant that the store clerk could be charged for selling instead of just the owner. Mr. Shubert said this was correct. The Chairman asked if the clerk selling the alcohol has to be 21. Mr. Shubert said the clerk has to be at least 18 to sell and at least 21 to buy.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

G. Alcohol License Application – 1984 South Georgia Parkway

Planning and Codes Director Shubert told the Commission that this location is the old Save and Stop store. It has been shut down for a while, but it has sold. The new owner is getting it operational and needs a new license. Chairman Thrift asked if it located across from the college (South Georgia State). Director Shubert said it is. Commissioner

Barnard asked if it is 600 feet from the school's property line. Mr. Shubert explained that it only has to be 300 feet from the building to the property line. Commissioner Lucas pointed out that it is for beer and wine only which is why the lesser requirement of 300 feet. Distilled spirits require the distance of 600 feet. Mr. Shubert said there are some changes coming to the current requirements.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

H. Alcohol License Application – 2476 Minnesota Avenue

Chairman Thrift asked if this is the Circle K store. Planning & Codes Director Shubert said it has been sold, and the new owner has applied for an alcohol license. The Chairman then asked if there was any discussion. When there was none, he stated it would be carried over to the meeting.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

I. Appointment – Ware County Board of Elections, Post 3

Chairman Thrift stated that the Commission has a Democratic Party Nomination letter and a Republican Party Nomination letter. The Chairman asked if the Commissioners had any questions before the item was carried over. Commissioner Pope and Burse stated they were ready to carry it over. Commissioner Barnard asked how the names would be chosen since there were about 7 or 8 people who had been recommended. Commissioner Burse stated this is a result of House Bill 422. Danny Bartlett has been appointed Chairman of the Board of Elections which created a vacancy in Post 3. He feels in order to balance the board that a Democrat needs to be appointed. There were six Democrats recommended. He said the Mrs. Marian Solomon-Gaines, who has worked with the elections board, seems to be the person who would be the best fit.

Chairman Thrift and Commissioner Barnard asked Elections Supervisor Carlos Nelson to explain the responsibility of the Election Board members. Mr. Nelson said the Board is appointed to ensure that the elections are run in an open, honest, fair, and transparent manner. The members make decisions such as what hours and days to be open for early voting. Also, they certify elections and must ensure that the numbers are accurate which means the numbers of votes has to be in line with the number of names on the registration list. In the past, Board Members have run supplies out to precincts to keep the staff members from having to do it.

Commissioner Pope asked if the Board Members can participate in partisan politics. Mr. Nelson said that although Member may put a campaign sign in their yards, they should not be actively campaigning for one candidate over another one. If there was a question regarding this candidate being qualified to run or a challenge to voting status, this could compromise the integrity of the Board. He said the Board has to put the community and the process and system ahead of any personal or political beliefs. Commissioner Pope said he would like to see the Board continue to be run in that manner and has full confidence in the new Chairman. He feels that the citizens would lose confidence if the Board Members were to be actively campaigning as has been seen on nationwide TV. He would like to see a common sense approach to getting the job done as Mr. Nelson has always done. He further stated he has full confidence in Chairman Bartlett to lead the Board in that direction. Mr. Nelson said his goal is to get more citizens voting and to get

the totals reported as quickly as possible. He thanked the Commission for their continued support.

(At this time, Debra Giddens of the Ware County Republican Party was recognized by Chairman Thrift and given five minutes to speak. She stated there are more registered Republicans than Democrats in Ware County and gave her thoughts on why the appointee should be a member of the Republican party.)

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

J. Discussion Item – Georgia State Patrol Post 22

Commissioner Lucas told the Commission that he and the Chairman visited the County owned Georgia State Patrol Post and reported on their findings. This building was constructed in the 1960s. After a heavy rain, the water stays in the ditch. This is the last County-owned building that's on the water main and sewage line. After a heavy rain, the water backs up in the building. He is in favor of building a new building or moving them to the old Concerted Services building. Other counties are lobbying to move the Post out of Ware, but he would like for the State Troopers to continue to be housed in Ware County.

Commissioner Pope stated the previous sales tax that didn't pass had provision to construct a new building, but he is in favor of finding the State Patrol a new or better building. He asked the Chairman to appoint a couple of Commissioners to work with the County Engineer and Manager to review the situation and come back with some recommendations. Chairman Thrift agreed that the current building is run down. He asked if the County owns the Concerted Services building, but CM Moye told him it is owned by a non-profit organization. Chairman Thrift commented that the County would have to buy the building if it would be used for the Post.

Commissioner Barnard asked if the County or the State pays for the upkeep on the building. CM Moye said the County hasn't paid for any upkeep since he has been here. He said the County had some work done on the roof in the 1990s through the prison construction crew.

Because of their law enforcement background, Commissioner Burse recommended that Commissioner Lucas and Commissioner Barnard be the two working with management to procure a new location for the Georgia State Patrol Post 22.

COUNTY MANAGER ITEMS: None


COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

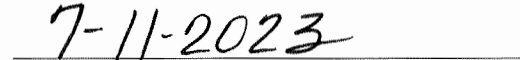
ADJOURN:

A motion was made by Commissioner Lucas to adjourn the Work Session, with Commissioner Pope seconding the motion at 4:59 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Date proposed to be approved: July 10, 2023


Elmer Thrift, Chairman


Melinda L. Brooks, County Clerk


Date