

**MINUTES  
WORK SESSION  
WARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
MONDAY, AUGUST 14, 2023  
3:30 p.m.**

**The Ware County Board of Commissioners held a Work Session, Monday, August 14, 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 Steve Barnard, Commissioner Leonard Burse, Commissioner Jerry Pope, and Commissioner Timmy Lucas
<b>COMMISSIONERS ABSENT</b>	None
<b>STAFF PRESENT</b>	County Manager Scott Moye; Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Herzog; County Clerk Melinda Brooks
<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

**GUEST SPEAKER(S):**

**Laura Music - Highway 158**

Ms. Music addressed her concerns with the public boat ramp being installed next to her property on Highway 158. She stated that she already has problems with trespassers, and this bridge will cause that number to increase. She is asking for the County's help with patrolling the area to protect her property. She has spoken with Sheriff's deputies and said there is a process in place which allows a person to be warned of trespassing once. The second time the same person is caught an arrest will be made. Chairman Thrift told Ms. Music that the Commission will speak with the Sheriff's Office about providing more frequent patrols.

**Carlos Nelson - Superintendent of Elections**

Mr. Nelson wanted to let the voters of Ware County know that there are about 1300 notices that have been sent out to inactive voters. 750 notices were sent to those who haven't voted in the last two general elections or about five years. 550 notices were sent to those who have had no contact (550 notices). These people have 40 days to respond to these notices and update their information. If the voters on the no contact list fail to respond in 40 days, they will be inactivated. If the voters on the other list do not respond, they will be canceled.

Commissioner Pope stated he receives emails from political parties urging a return to paper ballots. He asked Mr. Nelson about the costs and time frames associated with this type of voting. Mr. Nelson stated it would take a minimum of \$70,000 to cover the cost of the ballots and manpower to tally the votes. As far as time, it could take up to two weeks to get a final count on the votes.

**PRESENTATION(S):**

**Billy Carter, Ware County Board of Assessors – 2022 Sales Ratio Study**

Billy Carter explained to the Commission that the Assessors' office is audited by two different entities every year. Public utility money is based upon the score received on this analysis. Out of 159 counties, 117 did not meet the requirement for full public utility collection. Ware County did meet the requirement. Based upon this information and last years' collection, Mr. Carter and Tax Commissioner Collins estimate that the increase will be about \$375,000 for this year. The office worked hard to get good sales in and the bad sales out.

Commissioner Barnard asked if the ratio is higher would the County receive more public utility money. Carter responded that ideally the ration number needs to be above 38% and below 42%. He said you can still collect on the other numbers, but if the ratio is less than 38%, then you lose the full percentage of collection. Commissioner Barnard asked at what point would be the County be fined for not meeting the ratio. He knows it has happened in the past. Mr. Carter explained that is with the Department of Revenue which is the other entity that audits the assessors' office. He pointed out the report that is in the Commissioners' notebooks. He said they are good in all classes of property except residential which they are currently working on fixing. There is an outside company helping with that. This report is from the audit department. The next one will be from the revenue department.

Commissioner Pope asked if the contractors have completed all of the work. Mr. Carter said they have a plan and should be finished in May of next year. They should have four industrial/commercial appraisers on the ground in the next couple of weeks.

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

City Manager Ulysses Rayford requested permission to present Item B regarding the Midnight Basketball League first as it would not take very long. The Commission agreed to this request.

**A. Right of Way Encroachment Request – City of Waycross Water Line Interconnection**

City Manager Ulysses Rayford advised he was making a request for assistance to increase the capacity for the City's waterworks and gave a handout to the Commission. *(Handout is included behind minutes.)* He introduced Engineer Trey Gavin to the Commission to make the presentation. Mr. Gavin works for ESG Operations, Inc., the company that handles the waterworks for the City of Waycross. He said the City is looking to protect the water systems on both sides. The solution is to run a transmission main, not a distribution main, from the city side to the industrial park side. He proposes putting in a pumping system and pipeline to be able to quickly deliver water between systems. Currently the systems are not connected and are divided by the City limits. The

industrial system is using about half a million gallons daily. The Downtown area uses between 2 and 2.5 million gallons per day. The proposed system would be capable of moving three million gallons daily from industrial park to the City. It would also be able to move one million gallons from the City back to the industrial area for emergency purposes, such as fighting a fire or to supplement a non-functioning well or tank. He said to make this happen, the City will need permission to use the County Right of Way.

Chairman Thrift asked Mr. Gavin if all of the wells are on a telemetry system. He said the wells are on a telemetry system, but they are currently only watching the tanks that are local to them. He said the new interconnection will tie all of that together. He said they don't see an immediate use other than exercising. Most likely the water would be run for an hour per day in each direction to keep the water fresh. He also noted that the City holds a permit allowing withdrawal of three million gallons of water per day in the industrial park.

Commissioner Pope asked if there are two well and two tanks in industrial park. Mr. Gavin said that was correct. Commissioner Pope then asked if both of them work. Mr. Gavin said he thought one of the tanks was out of service because the City cannot keep that amount of water in the air without it getting old. Adding this interconnection gives the opportunity to bring another tank in service because water can be moved.

Chairman Thrift asked Mr. Gavin if he had seen the alternate route proposed by the County. He responded that he had not.

*There were multiple comments going on at the same time between the Commissioners. During this time, Mr. Gavin spoke up and said they would not be able to connect to an 8-inch water line as they are barely getting by on a 12-inch line.*

Commissioner Barnard said the area around the college is probably going to bust wide open in regards to retail growth. He asked Mr. Gavin if the cost to add a well and tank would be comparable to adding the water lines. He responded that a tank and well would not alleviate the supply problem and would not tie the systems together. He did say that he believes the City is looking at drilling more wells in the future. He feels the redundancy project (interconnecting water main) is more critical need at this time. Commissioner Barnard pointed out that this proposed route goes right through a residential area.

Ware County Engineering Assistant Gene Thomas came forward and mentioned that there is an 8-inch and 10-inch water main at Carswell Avenue. Although it may not be ideal for how much water is to be moved, he asked if Mr. Gavin had run a water model to see how much the City's ability to move water would be decreased by swapping sides. He also asked if they could run a model all the way to the 12-inch line on Carswell Avenue at Clinton Street. Mr. Thomas explained that he worked for the City of Waycross for a long time in the water department, so he understands the need for redundancy of the water supply. The city has struggled with this for the past 20 years.

He continued by stating if the Commission were to approve laying a water main and the County had to pick a route, there are many things to be hammered out. In the proposed plan, there are a lot of road cuts that would not benefit the average County taxpayer. He noted that there are several businesses and a school that are in the proposed path. Another

concern is a new water main laying adjacent to an existing Satilla Water & Sewer Authority main and the operational problems.

Commissioner Barnard asked if a pipe sprung a leak how would anyone know which main was leaking? Mr. Thomas said problems like that could arise. For example, the City could have leak, and the County could be getting calls from residents about a County road being washed out. These are some of the concerns the County Engineering Department has and are trying to determine how to best manage.

Commissioner Burse asked Engineering Assistant Thomas if the well and tank on Alice Street are operational. Mr. Thomas said the well had to be abandoned; however, the tank is hooked to the system and operates like it is supposed to do.

Chairman Thrift stated that Satilla Water and Sewer Authority handles the County water and asked Mr. Thomas if he had spoken to anyone there. Mr. Thomas said he had spoken with someone a little bit, and they have some concerns about the mains running parallel. There are some places where the places would be 5 to 10 feet apart and even being on the same shoulder of the road can be confusing. The Chairman then asked Mr. Gavin if he has spoken with anyone at Satilla Water and Sewer Authority about it. He said he had not. City Manager Rayford spoke up and said he had spoken with them a few times. He just wants to keep this conversation going.

The Chairman then asked if the County could get with the County Water Dept. (Satilla) and then get back to the City. City Manager Rayford was fine with that.

Commissioner Barnard asked Engineer Gavin if the City Water Department has a work agreement with Satilla Water and Sewer Authority to get water from the County when needed. Mr. Gavin said he wasn't sure that it would provide as much water and as rapidly as this project would.

The Chairman told Engineer Gavin and City Manager Rayford that Engineering Assistant Gene Thomas would get Satilla Water and Sewer Authority, and if everything is okay, the Commission will do a re-route or a proposed area. Once Mr. Thomas comes up with something, he would let the Commission know.

**B. City of Waycross – Facility Request for Midnight Basketball League at Trembling Earth Gym**

City Manager Ulysses Rayford spoke to the Commission to request the use of the County Recreation Department gym for a pilot program for a Midnight Basketball League based on several factors. He referenced the recent rise in shootings of teenagers and said that he visits the County juvenile system weekly. He talks to parents and asks for feedback on preventing this type of behavior. The main response he gets is sports. Columbus, which is the sister city of Waycross, runs a basketball program in the evenings after work. He gathered data from there and from the after-hours program he ran for 10 years while in the United States Army. Crime rate fell 32%. He said that is a result of giving citizens an alternative to running the streets. He is asking to use the sports complex and said the City would take full liability and have police presence. The participants will not just be there to play basketball. They will have class requirements; such as resume building. City

Manager Rayford acknowledged that it is too late for a full basketball season, but there is an opportunity for a two weekend pilot program starting in late August or early September. He stated he was before the Commission seeking authorization to use the facility and reiterated that the City would assume all responsibility; providing police force presence and manpower to run the program for City and County residents. It would be for only two nights as time permits to see how the participants would respond.

Commissioner Burse asked City Manager Rayford what age group would be participating in the league. He responded ages 18 to 36. Commissioner Burse said his understanding was the league was geared towards 15-18 year olds, but this will be an adult league. Mr. Rayford said he addressed shootings, and the last seven shootings have involved young people. There is a sport program for teenagers. He is trying to cover the 18-36 age group that needs an after-hours diversion as a crime deterrent. Currently nothing is being offered, and he wants to try this program to see if it will be successful like it has been in other cities.

Commissioner Barnard reminded the manager that when the County asked for funds to help with security at the Bailey Street pool, the City responded that there was no money in the budget for that. He wanted to know how there was money for this activity at the Recreation Department. City Manager Rayford responded that the City does not have a Recreation budget. He has a budget like the County has a budget. He is using his budget and locating surplus money for this project. He said to discuss who maintains the swimming pool would an entirely different conversation.

Commissioner Barnard then stated because the Recreation Department is inside the County, the City Police Department would not have arrest powers there. Commissioner Lucas concurred. City Manager Rayford said he felt that the presence of police officers would be enough to deter any behavior as the department has a good relationship with the citizens

Commissioner Pope asked County Manager Moye if the Recreation Department currently has adult basketball leagues. He said they do, but the issue is the AC units are needing to be replaced. The units are working, but intermittently. He did say that there have been adult basketball leagues for around 20 years.

Chairman Thrift asked how often this would occur, as in twice per week, etc. City Manager Rayford said that it would just be for two weekends right now. Then the Chairman asked how many hours the facility would be in use at night. City Manager Rayford stated that number of hours is dependent upon the number of teams that he has. If there are only four teams, they would only be there from 8 – 10 p. m. It could be from 8 – 12 if there are six teams, so it really depends on the number of participants.

Commissioner Lucas asked to verify that this request is for 2 weekends this year as a pilot program with hopes to start a full season in 2024. Mr. Rayford said that was correct. Commissioner Lucas then stated that he agreed that children, especially those who have just graduated, need to keep their minds focused and have something to do, so they can avoid doing other things that they should not.

Commissioner Burse asked County Manager Moye about the existing adult leagues. Mr. Moye explained those are held only during the summer. Commissioner Pope added that if the demand for the leagues is there, the season can be held whenever. If the AC units aren't working properly for the regular league, they won't start working for this one. He also stated that memories of past attempts at a Midnight Basketball League in the City Auditorium make him hesitant to start another one, especially when the Recreation Department already offers adult basketball leagues. City Manager Rayford said he had wanted to ask why they were not playing in the adult leagues, but now he understands that the air conditioning is the issue. He did mention that there is only one gym in the County. A lot of people play basketball which makes it an easy way to reach people are making the wrong choices. Right after graduation in June there was a severe spike in crime, so he is trying to come up with a way to deter that.

Commissioner Burse agreed that testing the waters with a pilot program could be a good thing, but there are logistics to be worked out including costs of staffing and security.

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

#### **C. Purchase Request – Life-Pak 15 Ambulance**

Dr. Bill Parham explained to the Commission the need for the replacement for a new ambulance. It would take 2 years or so to get it if ordered now. Wouldn't have to be paid yet. Prices have really increased.

CM Moye asked about using existing equipment on the new ambulance. Dr. Parham explained that everything is currently being used. At this point, the current Life-Paks are becoming outdated.

CM Moye asked how many calls EMS is receiving each month. Dr. Parham said the calls have reached the mid-800s. He said EMS must respond to every call, but all calls do not require transport.

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

#### **D. Purchase Request – Planning and Codes Pickup Truck**

Planning and Codes Director James Shubert told the Commission that one of the employees wrecked a truck, so this request is to replace the wrecked vehicle.

Commissioner Lucas asked who would drive the new truck. Director Shubert stated his current truck will go to the building inspector, and he will take the new truck.

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

#### **E. Paschall Road Right of Way Acquisition & Road Improvement**

County Manager Moye proposed to the Commission that this item needed to be moved to the Executive Session considering the subject matter. The Commission agreed, and this agenda item was not discussed during the work session.

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

#### **F. Lien Cancellation – CHIP Grant Property**

County Attorney Jennifer Dorminey-Herzog explained that this lien was put in place for a low income home improvement loan and signed by a former County Manager. The homeowner has since passed away, the structure has burned, and the property has been

sold. She said the 20-year time frame has been met, so the County is able to release the lien.

**Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

**G. CSRA Probation Services Contract Renewals**

County Manager Moyer stated there are three contracts. One each for Magistrate Court, State Court, and Superior Court. This is for probation services. Everything is paid for by the offender. It doesn't come from the County, so this is just a formality.

Commissioner Burse stated he noticed everything is the same except one item on the Superior Court contract is \$5 more. He wanted to know if that was a typographical error. County Manager Moyer stated he was told that amount was higher because it is for Superior Court. Commissioner Burse then asked if CSRA Probation Services is a private company. CM Moyer said it is and has been in business for many years.

**Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

**H. Appointment – Waycross-Ware County Planning Commission – Post 3**

Chairman Thrift read the agenda summary. Post 3 of the Waycross-Ware County Planning Commission expired on June 30, 2023. Kristy King Foreman was appointed to Post 3, and she has stated she would like to remain on the Planning Commission. The term for Post 3 will be July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2023.

The Chairman asked if there were any questions. Commissioner Barnard stated she was a good person to have on that Committee. Commissioner Lucas agreed. The other Commissioners said they were good with reappointing her.

**Added to Regular Meeting Agenda**

**COUNTY MANAGER REPORT:**

County Manager Moyer gave an update from the right of way (ROW) meeting stating funding has been approved. Appraisals will be forthcoming. The MSE walls have encroached on CSX property and could push the project out a few months meaning the contract could be dated June 2025 instead of June 2024.

In relation to the Albany Avenue Overpass Project, the surveys have been done. The County is checking with the design the engineer has. Practical Design Partners will be in touch with CSX to see what is required and hope to have something for the City and County to look at within a few months (by the end of the year).

Commissioner Barnard asked when would the County start looking at plans for the roads that will go up under the overpass. He said that should be included in the Phase 2 design which is an updated revision of the preliminary design for the County and City to review. Commissioner Barnard then asked about getting a rough estimate of cost. CM Moyer said a cost estimate should be ready with the design. However, that will fluctuate with the economy. He's hoping to have to have something to look at by late fall.

Commissioner Lucas said he was under the impression that Garlington would not go under the

bridge, but have the sides run east and west. CM Moye said there was discussion about making the bridge long enough to put through streets under the bridge in order to have connectivity and avoid dead ends and cul-de-sacs. The cost will be broken down for everything like that. Commissioner Lucas said he is in favor of keeping the traffic flowing.

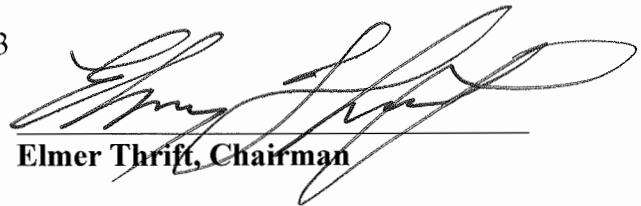
**COMMISSION COMMENTS:**

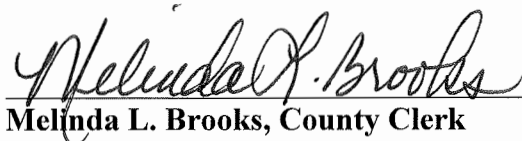
Commissioner Burse congratulated longtime newspaper reporter Myra Thrift on coming out of retirement. The other Commissioners welcomed her as well.

**ADJOURN:**

A motion was made by Commissioner Burse to adjourn the Work Session, with Commissioner Pope seconding the motion at 4:56 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Date proposed to be approved: September 11, 2023

  
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Elmer Thrift, Chairman

  
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Melinda L. Brooks, County Clerk

9-13-2023  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

