

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
WARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2024
5:00 p.m.**

The Ware County Board of Commissioners held a Regular Meeting, Monday, February 12, 2024, at 5:00 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 Timmy Lucas, Commissioner Jerry Pope
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT	None
STAFF PRESENT	County Manager Scott Moye; Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Herzog; County Clerk Melinda Brooks
PRESS	Danny Bartlett, WJH
INVOCATION	The invocation was waived from the Work Session
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE	The Pledge of Allegiance was waived from the Work Session

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion was made by Commissioner Burse to approve the agenda as presented, with Commissioner Barnard seconding the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Leonard Burse-aye; Commissioner Jerry Pope-aye; Commissioner Steve Barnard-aye, Commissioner Timmy Lucas-aye; and Chairman Elmer Thrift-aye.

GUEST SPEAKER: Teresa Morgan, Buck Griffin Rd, Waycross, GA

Teresa Morgan noted that she was speaking on behalf of the supporters who were in the room with her in regards to equipment needs for the Fire Department. First she scolded the Commission for rudely cutting off Commissioner Lucas at the last meeting when he brought up the need for a new fire truck and ignoring his comments. She stated that she was of the opinion that they all owed him an apology.

She visited the stations and said they don't have enough gear and what they have is out of date. They also need new fire trucks. She said the County has ARPA funds available to make these purchases.

She said all volunteers have to wear turnout gear to help firefighters, per law, or Ware County is at fault. She knows there is ARPA money available, and the gear should be there for her all those who

want to be volunteer firefighters. Mrs. Morgan then gave some of the older truck models (1986, 1998) and the stations where they are located. She supports Commissioner Lucas's quest to get a new firetruck. She said the truck at Emerson Park station has to be jumped off to get it to start. She thinks it costs probably around \$1200-\$1500 to outfit a volunteer with turnout gear. Mrs. Morgan said that Ware County works hard to support each other and feels the ARPA funds should be spent on items needed for the Fire Department to keep the communities safe.

Commissioner Burse stated that he doesn't recall the incident she referenced from the previous meeting. He said if the Commission cut Commissioner Lucas off, he apologized for himself although he doesn't recall the incident. He then asked Mrs. Morgan if she had conferred with the Chief about the equipment that is needed at the fire stations. She replied that she had not because she thought she would come before the Commission first before getting with him. She noted that she had spoken with others and visited several stations and she knows the equipment is not there. Commissioner Burse said the County has been updating the volunteer stations aesthetically, especially at Waresboro and Boggy Bay. He asked Fire Chief Dee Meadows if this need for equipment had been brought to his attention. Chief Meadows said he has provided a list of all the trucks with year model, hours, and mileage to the Commissioners. Within this year's budget, there are three things they have talked about getting: hoses, turnout gear, and SCBA equipment (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus) and wanted to present to the Commission at a later date. He said he had met with the County Manager about it, but they had not started on the budget yet. Turnout gear would be added because some of what they have is outdated. Some of the hoses and SCBA are past the life expectancy. He noted that he would be back before the Commission with that list. The Commission has spent around \$30,000 has been spent on repairing the fire stations at Boggy Bay and Waresboro. All of the stations have new signs. There are a couple more stations requiring minor work, but the person handling that work is currently on another project. Once that project is complete, he will finish up the fire stations. He gave the estimated cost to outfit one person in turnout gear at \$4,049, and the SCBA at \$1,200. Commissioner Barnard asked about using the annual budget for these supplies. Chief Meadows said some of it could be replaced, but not all could be replaced out of the annual budget. This is the 10-year replacement year

Commissioner Pope asked about the requirements for a volunteer to be issued turnout gear. Battalion Chief Grantham (training officer) told the Commission that they have to be certified by state (test) and test at least up to suppression level. Below that is a support category that doesn't have to have in-date turnout gear. He explained that the volunteers in the support category can be issued out-of-date gear that is in good shape as long as they are not in the hot zone (where the fire is). Commissioner Pope then asked Mrs. Morgan if she meant that volunteers need turnout gear and couldn't get it or was she meaning something else? Mrs. Morgan said they don't necessarily need a whole suit. She said if there is a woods fire a volunteer could help man the hose, but would need some protection. After more discussion it was pointed out that even if turnout gear is readily available, it can only be used by certified volunteers.

Chief Meadows asked Battalion Chief Grantham if any volunteers who do not have gear. He said no one was without turnout gear. However, one size gear does not fit everyone, so they sometimes have to piecemeal the gear to make it work. At this time, he has 9 sets that are still in service that can be given out. The majority of their volunteers got their gear in 2016 through a grant. In 2026, there will be about 30 sets needing to be replaced. Commissioner Pope asked how many volunteers were without gear at this time. Bat. Chief Grantham told him that every volunteer in the suppression category has in-date gear. Commissioner Pope then asked about the support category. He said the support does have some out-of-date gear. Commissioner Pope asked how many support volunteers

do not have gear. Bat. Chief Grantham said that is not aware of anyone not having gear. Commissioner Lucas verified that they might have it, but it might be out of date. Grantham said the State requires them to have some form of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), but it doesn't have to be in date as long as they are not actively engaged in fighting fire.

Commissioner Pope asked Mrs. Morgan what other equipment she was saying is needed by the Fire Department. She said they need more trucks because the trucks they have are old. Commissioner Lucas asked about a new list of volunteers. Bat. Chief Grantham said the training should start next month. Commissioner Lucas asked how many volunteers are on the list. Bat. Chief Grantham said there are 9 at this time, but more will trickle in as the class gets ready to start. Fire Chief Meadows said they are trying to run the volunteer classes more often.

Chairman Thrift asked what station needs a new truck. Chief Meadows said Station 1 has the newest truck. The other stations have 2009 trucks. He hasn't called for prices yet because the price is only good for about 30 days then an adjustment has to be made since they currently are working on 2025 emission laws. He would be afraid to even speculate on pricing at this point because he doesn't want to put the cart before the horse. Commissioner Pope asked which station would get the new truck. Chief Meadows said it would go to Station 3 which is the other full time manned station. Truck 1113 (2009) is currently at Station 3. The Commission looked over the list of trucks. Commissioner Barnard asked about the truck at Emerson Park that Mrs. Morgan said wouldn't crank. Chief Meadows said he has written it on his list to have it checked out. Commissioner Barnard said if the truck won't crank, it needs to be fixed.

Chief Meadows said if there is a volunteer in need of gear, Chief Grantham will take care of it. He will come back to the Commission after he meets with the County Manager and get the actual price of the gear. A full set includes helmet, hood, coat, boots, gloves, jacket, pants, everything and the \$4,000 price range is for mid-grade, not the premium level gear. Commissioner Barnard asked how many sets would be needed. Chief Meadows thought maybe around 10-15, but Chief Grantham said it would really depend on how many people finish the upcoming class. He said they can train in the out-of-date gear, until they get to the point of fighting live fire. Chief Grantham mentioned that some gear was bought in 2021. The Commission approved the purchase of 14 sets, and another 10 sets were bought with a grant. The gear that is in stock (9 sets) will not fit everyone in the new class that starts next month. Commissioner Barnard told Chief Meadows to bring a list of what is needed, and the Commission will supply it. The Chairman said the Commission needs to know what the Fire Department is required to have. He did ask if a volunteer turns gear back in after deciding to stop volunteering. He was told they do, but not everyone can fit in the same gear.

Porter Johns of Driggers Road Waycross told to the Commission he moved to Ware County in 1988 and became a volunteer firefighter under Chief Jimmy Brown. He said he has come to the meeting over the years and heard the Fire Department ask for things and there was always grumbling. He said he's been hearing the same thing for 30 years. He said he had information from a reliable source that the County was sitting on over \$4 million dollars of Federal money from COVID that could be spent for equipment and trucks. He asked if they were going to sit on the money and let it leave the County because they didn't want to support the Fire Department. He then began to attack a single Commissioner. Assistant County Attorney Herzog had to stop Mr. Johns' tirade and advise him and remind the Chairman all comments must be addressed to the Commission as a whole. Mr. Johns continued on saying the Fire Department doesn't get the support it needs from the Commission. Chairman Thrift told Mr. Johns that he felt the Fire Department "*spends too dadgum much money in this County*". Mr. Johns asked him "*why ... how ... for the protection of this*

County?” Chairman Thrift asked Mr. Johns if he knew how much money it took to run a Fire Department. He stated the department is highly needed, but he felt the expenses need to be better controlled. Mr. Johns said he has always supported SPLOST every time it comes up. When the Fire Chief asks for equipment, he keeps being told to come back. He said he has been hearing the same thing for years. He admitted that he has a short fuse and should probably sit down before he says something he shouldn't.

Commissioner Lucas recognized Fire Chief Meadows for being reappointed to the Georgia Board of Public Safety by Governor Kemp. He also noted that Ware County got a Class 5 ISO rating for the first time ever.

Michael Drawdy, Ware County EMS and volunteer firefighter, pointed out to the Commission that the requested new truck would not replace the 2009 firetruck. It would actually replace the 1986 truck. The new truck would go to the station where the 2009 currently is. The 2009 would go to the station where the 1986 currently is. The 1986 which still pumps really well would be used at the training center.

The Chairman told the Chief to bring a list of what is needed to the Commission, and they would see what they could afford to get.

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH:

Human Resources Director Theresa Bailey and County Manager Scott Moye presented Firefighter Carter Malone as Employee of the Month. Mr. Malone was given a \$100 check in appreciation of his dedication.

AGENDA ITEMS

A. Street Right of Way Deed Acceptance – LeJuene Road & Alton Circle

Chairman Thrift asked if there was a motion on this item.

Commissioner Barnard made a motion to accept the Right of Way Deed Acceptance on LeJuene Road and Alton Circle. Commissioner Pope seconded the motion.

Chairman Thrift asked if there is any discussion.

Commissioner Burse said he feels that the Commission is setting a precedent by accepting the deed to a private road and would be hard pressed to deny the next person that comes along wanting the County to take over. This road has been in existence for several years and wasn't built to standards as County ordinance states. Commissioner Lucas said he felt the same.

Commissioner Pope said the County Engineer told them it met the specifications for acceptance. Commissioner Burse said that as stated in the Work Session when someone wants the County to take over a road it's at the front end of the project while the road is being constructed. That way the County can be involved in the process and can be assured it is built to specs. In this case, it is years after the fact. The Chairman said he looked at the road and thought it looked good. As long as it is built to specs, he feels the County is obligated to accept it. Commissioner Barnard pointed out that by the time the subdivision complete, there will be several million dollars' worth of homes which equals quite a bit of tax dollars.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Leonard Burse-no; Commissioner Jerry Pope-aye; Commissioner Timmy Lucas-no; Commissioner Steve Barnard-aye; and Chairman Elmer Thrift-aye.

B. Alcohol License Ordinance Correction – Package Sales on Sundays

Chairman Thrift asked if there was a motion on this item.

Commissioner Pope made a motion that the ordinance correction be approved. Commissioner Burse seconded the motion.

Chairman Thrift asked if there is any discussion.

Commissioner Pope asked the Assistant County Attorney to explain the correction. She said at the most recent meeting a document was put before the Commission to change Sunday sales in Ware County. There was a scrivener's error (a typo) in one section where package sales were also included in the Sunday sales. That should not have happened as that was not approved by the voters on the ballot, nor was it the intent of the Commission. This ordinance correction will fix that error, and there will be no Sunday sales for package sales which is convenience stores and package stores. There will be package sales for restaurants, bowling alleys, and pouring licenses. Commissioner Burse asked if there would be time constraints on those sales. Attorney Herzog said there would be constraints which are outlined in the document.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Leonard Burse-aye; Commissioner Jerry Pope-aye; Commissioner Timmy Lucas-aye; Commissioner Steve Barnard-aye; and Chairman Elmer Thrift-aye.

C. Property Lease Approval – Non-Aeronautical Facility Lease Agreements

Chairman Thrift asked if there was a motion on this item.

Commissioner Barnard made a motion to increase the property lease from \$100 per month to \$300 per month for the non-aeronautical facility lease agreements (Pyrotechnico and Scotbilt) as of May 1, 2024. Commissioner ---- seconded the motion. (There was no second to the motion.)

Chairman Thrift asked if there is any discussion.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Leonard Burse-aye; Commissioner Jerry Pope-aye; Commissioner Timmy Lucas-aye; Commissioner Steve Barnard-aye; and Chairman Elmer Thrift-aye.

D. Resolution 2024-02: Support for Mental Health Resources in the State of Georgia

Chairman Thrift asked if there was a motion on this item.

Commissioner Burse made a motion to approve Resolution 2024-02 Supporting Mental Health Resources in the State of Georgia. Commissioner Pope seconded the motion.

Chairman Thrift asked if there is any discussion.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Leonard Burse-aye; Commissioner Pope-aye; Commissioner Timmy Lucas-aye; Commissioner Steve Barnard-aye; and Chairman Elmer Thrift-aye.

E. Purchase Request – Ware County Health Department Boiler Replacement

Chairman Thrift asked if there was a motion on this item.

Commissioner Lucas made a motion to approve the purchase of a boiler for Ware County Health Department in the amount of \$50,417. Commissioner Pope seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Leonard Burse-aye; Commissioner Jerry Pope-aye; Commissioner Timmy Lucas-aye; Commissioner Steve Barnard-aye; and Chairman Elmer Thrift-aye.

COUNTY MANAGER’S REPORT:

County Manager Moye reminded the Commission the TPCC meeting will be held Thursday, February 15 at 10:30 a. m. in the general meeting room. The Chairman asked for an update on the overpass. County Manager Moye said he just knows they are trying to coordinate with CSX and asked County Engineer Brandon Wallace if he had more info. Mr. Wallace said the original schedule called for the Right of Way plans to be ready in a couple of months. It also showed them starting on January 1st, but the process of getting their contract approved caused another two-and-a-half-month delay. He feels ROW plans should be received soon, and we can start the acquisition process. Commissioner Burse asked about the ROW, if it was worked out whether the road could go under or around. County Manager Moye said CSX has basically said that Ware County cannot impede the CSX Right of Way. The County will have to shift the road farther east to get outside of their ROW. He clarified that CSX does not have ROW on the west side. Per County Engineer Wallace said he does not believe that CSX owns the actual crossing.

The Chairman then asked for an update on US 1. County Manager Moye said there are ROW issues which are causing delays with the design which can delay that project about a year. He noted that it is possible that the Albany Avenue Overpass and US 1 project could wind up going on at the same time which would not be good. US 1/State Street could not be used while under construction. Albany Avenue will be taken out on both sides of the intersection.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Commissioner Burse commented that the resurfacing that was done on Blackshear Avenue all the way up to Gilchrist Avenue looks really good. He would love to see this done on more of the roads that are in bad shape.

Commissioner Barnard wanted to dispel some rumors regarding the Commission does not back the Fire Department. He wanted the public to be aware that the Commission recently bumped the starting pay of all Fire Department employees by \$1 per hour. Those who have been employed for 15 months or less received the \$1 per hour raise. Those employees who have been on the job for more than 15 months received a 5% (five percent) bump in salary. He said the Commission does try to make sure the department has what it needs.

ADJOURN

A motion was made by Commissioner Burse to adjourn the Regular Meeting with Commissioner Pope seconding the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 5:51 p. m.


Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Leonard Burse-aye; Commissioner Jerry Pope-aye; Commissioner Timmy Lucas-aye; Commissioner Steve Barnard-aye; and Chairman Elmer Thrift-aye.

Date proposed to be approved: March 11, 2024


Elmer Thrift, Chairman

ATTEST:


Melinda L. Brooks, County Clerk

3-13-2024
Date

[SEAL]

