



**BALDWIN COUNTY
PLANNING RETREAT**
June 26, 2023
175 Emery Highway, Suite C
Macon, GA
9:00 AM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Emily Davis
John Westmoreland
Kendrick Butts
Sammy Hall
Henry Craig

OTHERS PRESENT

Brandon Palmer
Carlos Tobar
Dawn Hudson
Cindy Cunningham

Call to Order – Chair Davis called the June 26, 2023 Planning Retreat to order at 9:00 a.m.

Government Building Park - County Manager Carlos Tobar reported the County has received \$2.1 million in grant funds for the park at the Government Building. He stated the grant also includes money for a building to be used by Elections.

\$2.2 million in funds have been received for the aquatic center which will have a pool, splash pad, water slides and a lazy river. \$1.7 million have been received for the Harrisburg Park Revitalization project. This project will provide improvements to playground equipment and a new community center. Mr. Tobar stated bid solicitation has been advertised for architectural and engineering services for these projects, and bids are due July 21st. Contracts will be awarded by August 1st.

Elections Superintendent Todd Blackwell discussed different options for the proposed elections building. Assistant County Manager Dawn Hudson stated a good portion of voting machines are stored in a room upstairs in the Government Building that could be utilized for other things.

Elections Superintendent Blackwell stated money is the driving force that will dictate which option is decided upon. He reported that every county is struggling with the size of elections including voting machines and the required components, early voting, audits after election. Mr. Blackwell reported that when the building was designed at government center voting equipment was not as large as it has grown to be thereby attributing to the issue.

Mr. Blackwell discussed the square footage and uses of each of the three options. Option 1 - moves early voting out of government building and provides minimal storage. This would free up room 225A currently being used as storage. The maximum number of voting machines in Option 1 would be 14 machines. A bathroom, small office, and break room would also be needed.

Option 2 – relocates early voting and all machine storage and programming to new building. This option leaves Registrars' office in Government Building.

Option 3 – relocates everything over to new building, i.e. Registrars' office, early voting, all storage and programming, election management system and election night reporting. This option takes Registrar's office off first floor and equipment out of second floor storage.

Chair Davis asked about the cost of the proposed building. Assistant County Manager responded that this is all in the design phase; however, with the cost of materials now it would probably be around \$200 per square foot.

Mr. Blackwell reported that Homeland Security will be inspecting the location, and the Secretary of State's office will have someone there as well. Equipment storage must be temperature controlled. They want elections to have total control of the room. The State will want elections superintendent to have total control of access to room. Must have policy for security of keys.

Mr. Blackwell suggested having the architect design the building so that it is expandable as things change. He stated an awning is needed to cover voters waiting in line.

Commissioners discussed the pros and cons of each option. Commissioner Henry Craig stated the grant was for recreation with an opportunity to use some of it for elections.

Commissioner Craig discussed the establishment of an election boards. He stated regardless of what the County decides the State is going to require it in a few years. He thinks we need to go ahead and decide to do it before the State requires us to. He recommended getting information from other counties to help determine how we want to do it. He stated there is a general election coming up and that would be the perfect time to train an Elections Board while Todd is here to help train them. The Commissioners would decide how it would be established. Mr. Blackwell stated that if you do it now you can decide how to do it. If you wait until mandated you will have to set it up the way the State requires.

Commissioner Hall agreed with Commissioner Craig that a Board of Registrars is preferred; but, the State will eventually mandate an Elections Board. He agrees that the Elections Board would benefit from training while Todd is here.

Discussion was held about what would be included in the park at the Government Building. Commissioners Hall and Westmoreland stated they are open to a walking track at the Government Building Park; but, not all the other things. Commission Craig stated It will be good for our community and our employees.

County Manager Tobar asked Commissioners what they would like to include in the park. The items that may be included are: pavilion, attractive park entrance, track which is the least expensive and requires the least maintenance, bathrooms, space for open air markets, landscaping and water to the area for irrigation and a water feature.

Chief Appraiser Wade Williams – Mr. Williams presented an update on the Tax Digest. He reported the Digest was out of compliance in 2020 and was back in compliance in 2021. He stated values are up across the board by 27% overall in 2022. No changes will be done until 2024, and a complete revaluation will be done. Mr. Williams stated the ideal Sales Ratio is 40.

ARPA Accounting – Assistant County Manager distributed a spread sheet and discussed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. She stated all ARPA funds are allocated or spent on revenue replacement. She discussed the breakout of the funds totaling \$8,720,165.

SPLOST Accounting – Assistant County Manager distributed a spread sheet and discussed the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). She stated there have not been many changes from her last update to the Board. She discussed various projects and reported any overage shown is because this is based on the full six-year collection period. She is estimating that more will be collected through entire collection period. Any balance that is left is to finish Courthouse renovations and to do the aquatic center.

Courthouse Parking – Commissioner Hall referenced the statement by Sheriff Masse that monitoring, ticketing and towing cars at the upper deck of the Courthouse parking lot is not going to work. There are not enough parking spaces for employees, citizens conducting Courthouse business, jurors, court personnel and people shopping, eating and doing business downtown. Students parking in the deck have historically been a problem. Commissioners discussed adopting an ordinance to address the parking situation. County Attorney Brandon Palmer stated that a very general ordinance could state that between the hours of 8 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday parking must be for official courthouse business only. Discussion was held about possible ways to enforce such an ordinance.

District Mapping – County Manager Carlos Tobar discussed district-based land use regulations. He reported a great deal of work has already been done; but, there is a lot of work that still has to be done. He suggested the County set up ordinances dealing with variances, appeals, and different district zones.

Attorney Palmer suggested the County look at similarly sized counties to see what their budgets are. He stated the County will have to comply with zoning procedures, notice requirements, variances, and people requesting that their property be rezoned. Property will be grandfathered in to current use unless property is abandoned. He recommended using a consultant who has done this type work before.

Commissioner Hall asked why not continue with the current land use map and apply the current land use plan. DCA has approved our land use map in our comprehensive plan.

County Manager Tobar asked if the County can use this map without going through the zoning process. How do we officially adopt the land use map & make it enforceable? County Attorney Palmer responded that to make it enforceable it would have to follow an ordinance. County Attorney said that there are very specific requirements that you must go through. The map is part of the comprehensive plan; but it is not enforceable.

Commissioner Craig stated that part of zoning is protecting your neighbor. With current land use you can build anything you want anywhere as long as it meets set back requirements.

Sammy Hall said zoning is not issue. It's just a matter of whether or not we use those maps. Brandon Palmer said we do not have a map dealing with building restrictions. The county has an unenforceable map.

Commissioner Hall stated he does not want any designations in districts. Whatever the land use ordinance says should apply to the entire County not districts. Again, County Attorney Palmer recommended looking at comparable size counties to see what it will cost. Commissioner Craig stated that not having zoning hinders people from locating here. County Manager Tobar stated there are three different things that need to happen. (1) standards for rental properties, (2) planned use development; (3) one structure per parcel.

Commissioner Craig inquired if Commissioners are being asked to proceed with district mapping or not. Commissioner Hall stated he agrees to look into what the cost is and get more information.

Land Use – Commissioners requested completion of suggested revisions to the ordinance. Commissioners Butts and Hall have made specific requests.

Human Resource Policy – County Manager Tobar discussed the grievance policy included in the current Personnel Policy which states: Grievances – employees may appeal to their supervisor's supervisor; then an employee can appeal to County Manager; next step is to appeal to Public Hearing Officer who is selected by Board of Commissioners. County Manager Tobar stated he has assisted with personnel action in the past. However, now the Human Resource Director, Tesha Dixon, will work with supervisors and department heads on personnel matters. Employees can be written up if they contact Commissioners about the personnel matters.

Commissioner Kendrick Butts stated the County needs GPS on all equipment. Commissioner Hall recommended the County look into the cost of putting GPS on all County vehicles. Assistant County Manager stated the County has a contract with Enterprise for vehicles, and Enterprise uses a third party for GPS. She stated she will look into this matter.

Discussion was held regarding verbiage in sections of the Policy. Commissioner Westmoreland recommended the policy be reviewed by County staff and proposed revisions be presented for adoption. Until changes are made, Commissioners want the current personnel policy followed.

Government Building Facility Rental – Assistant County Manager Hudson reported there are many requests for use of the training rooms at the Government Building, and requests are becoming more frequent. She stated there are certain agencies that request use of the rooms on a monthly basis. Agencies such as the Department of Revenue rent the space for training and testing. She requested clarification on how to manage facility rentals moving forward? She asked Commissioners if they prefer to charge a rental fee for use of the training rooms by all agencies.

Commissioner Craig recommended the training rooms be used at no cost only by Government Related Activities. Ms. Hudson stated State Agencies such as Department of Revenue that currently have rental contracts for use of the training rooms will continue to be charged per contract agreements.

Staggered Elections – Commissioner Craig stated Commissioners voted at a public meeting to move forward with pursuing staggered elections for Commissioners. He recommended that local legislators be requested to introduce legislation in the next session to establish staggered elections. Commissioners Hall, Westmoreland and Craig, who voted in favor of staggered elections, agreed for their districts to initially be two year terms with future terms for all districts being for four years.

134 Stevens Drive – County Manager Tobar reported the County owns this property and has clear title. Discussion was held on selling the property. He stated Gov Deals charges 7 1/2%. Another possible way would be to issue requests for proposals from realtors to see if they would give better rate. He reported this property is in the City.

Commissioner Westmoreland recommended the proceeds for the sale be placed in the County's reserve. Standard for fund balance is 3 months reserve. Commissioner Craig agreed that the money from the sell be put in reserve. Commissioners stated they felt a Request for Proposals should be advertised for the sale of the property. Commissioners requested that the de-annexation process be started on the property.

Other Business – Commissioner Westmoreland stated trash is a major problem. He is getting phone calls from companies that want to provide trash services in the County. He asked how many transfer stations are in the County? County Manager Tobar responded there is only one transfer station and Waste Management owns it. County Manager Tobar suggested Commissioners consider building a transfer station at the old land fill on Union Hill Church Road.

Assistant County Manager Hudson was asked to get the Waste Management Contract to the County Attorney for his review.

Commissioner Westmoreland stated the County should change the policy to control who uses dumpsters.

Chair Davis suggested looking into the possibility of installing solar panels in new buildings

Commissioner Craig reported there is a homeless person sleeping at Recreation Department. He recommended an Ordinance be prepared to address this - no camping on county property; no staying on County property. He also suggested investigating the possibility of shelter.

Adjournment – Motion by Commissioner Westmoreland and seconded by Commissioner Hall to adjourn meeting at 3:10 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily C. Davis
Chair

Cynthia K. Cunningham
County Clerk