

Baldwin County Planning Retreat
April 4, 2022
9:00 a.m.
Middle Georgia Regional Commission
175 Emery Highway, Suite C
Macon, Georgia

Present

Craig
Westmoreland
Butts
Davis
Hall

Others

McRee
Hudson
Cunningham

Call to Order by Chairman Craig at 9:00 a.m.

Burn Permit – Commissioners discussed the need for some type notification requirement to the Fire Department when someone is going to burn at their property. After discussion, County Manager was instructed to meet with Chief Young and 911 Director Ptak to develop a policy for Notification for Burning.

Manufactured Home Ordinance – Commissioner Hall expressed his concerns that the current ordinance eliminates single wide mobile homes, and he would like to revise the current ordinance to allow single wide mobile homes. Discussion was held regarding where a single wide mobile home could be placed; variances; zoning; restricted subdivisions and platted subdivisions. Commissioner Hall asked that the existing Manufactured Home Ordinance be modified to address this issue since there is no zoning at this time. County Manager Tobar asked for a one-month time period to continue to work on zoning before the Ordinance is modified. After discussion, all agreed to give the County Manager one month to work on zoning before amending the Manufactured Home Ordinance.

Lawrence Building Abandoned Supplies – Chairman Craig stated he had asked County Attorney McRee to investigate options for the disposal of property that was left at the Lawrence Building at the time the County purchased it. County Attorney reported he had contacted the State, and they have released any ownership for the property. Since the building was purchased from the Central State Hospital Local Redevelopment Authority (CSHLRA), the County Attorney felt the CSHLRA should be notified regarding this. Options were discussed whether to inventory the items to see if there is anything of value, and if so to sell it on GovDeals.com or if it would be too costly to have an inventory done. If nothing is salvageable or useful, clean out the building and dispose of the property.

Commissioner Westmoreland suggested cleaning up the main warehouse and marketing it for lease. County Attorney McRee stated it will be approximately 2 ½ years before CSHLRA is supposed to buy property back from the County; and that being the case, how much money is the County willing to invest in the property? He was asked to look at the purchase agreement related to interest paid to the County per the agreement. Chairman Craig responded the County bought the property for economic development, and he feels the County should make money by using the property. The County would have to put the leasing or selling of

property out to bid. Chairman Craig stated he felt the County should seek the best proposal for management of the property. Vice Chair Westmoreland stated the bottom line is to determine what needs to be done and direct someone to do it.

County Manager Tobar was tasked with investigating this matter further to determine the feasibility of inventory, cleanup, etc. Commissioners set a date of April 19th for an update on the status of the project. Mr. Tobar will send a memorandum to Commissioners and County Attorney by April 19th.

Finance Update for Revenue and Expenses

Assistant County Manager Dawn Hudson presented an update on revenue and expenses. She stated sales tax revenue has increased due to tax on online sales. She added she does not anticipate a sales tax decline in Georgia. She discussed the General Fund Balance, 911, deficit in Landfill fund, and due from Water fund. She reported the County has a \$20,000,000 budget; however, the majority of County revenue is collected in October and November (approximately \$12,000,000). The County spends 1/12 of the budget each month which presents cash flow issues. She discussed big expenditures such as the Retirement payment which was paid in March so money was drawn down from Tax Anticipation Note (TAN). \$380,000 is the payroll amount that must be paid every two weeks. Some months not enough revenue is collected to cover expenses.

Governor Kemp has authorized a pay supplement of \$1,000 for Public Safety employees. However, he did not define the process. Information on County Public Safety employees has been submitted to the State; it has been approved, and the money has been received. The supplement is subject to tax so in order to make the pay amount \$1,000 the County matched social security for a total cost to the County of \$8,000. She reported the payments will be processed within the next few days. Each employee will be responsible for payment of their own taxes and it will be reported on employees' W-2. Ms. Hudson stated other counties were handling the payment in the same way.

County Manager Tobar stated in the future he hopes the County will not to have to utilize a Tax Anticipation Note (TAN). Ms. Hudson responded the County has made good progress in borrowing less from the TAN. Chairman Craig stated the County must be aggressive in seeking all revenue sources, i.e. short-term vacation rental revenue and ensuring that every business purchases a business license. Attorney McRee stated that even though the County raised business license fees a few years back, Baldwin County license fees are still lower than most counties.

Assistant County Manager Hudson stated the Waste Management contract will increase as outlined in the contract according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) by no more than 3%; therefore, rates for customers will increase in July. Because of unsatisfactory service by the company, which is a violation of their contract, a number of counties have cancelled their contract and are using another company. She reported there is another service here, and if poor service continues Baldwin County should consider the provision of solid waste collection services by another provider. County Manager Tobar will set up a meeting with Waste Management to discuss the problems and see what solutions they offer.

Chairman Craig requested further discussion of ARPA funds and how they will be used. He stated he would prefer not to use \$4,600,000 at the Smith -Sibley property. He feels the money could be used elsewhere. County Manager Tobar stated the cost for designing water / sewer improvements at Smith-Sibley is being estimated. Having the design complete would give a 6-month advantage when industry does come in. After discussion, Commissioners agreed to consider the

cost for the design of the improvements; but, felt ARPA money should be used for revenue replacement.

Succession Plan for Key Employees – Commissioners stated they felt it would be prudent for the County to develop a succession plan for employees. They stressed the need for cross training in order for employees to move into another position when a position becomes vacant.

Discussion was held regarding an additional position for the County. Assistant County Manager Hudson stated she does not feel that a grant writer would be the most effective consideration for a new employee. She stressed the need is for a Public Information Officer who would be a great benefit to the entire County. County Manager stated there is a need for someone to do multiple jobs. The County does not have a Public Information Officer in the personnel plan; therefore, a job description and classification are needed. Ms. Hudson responded the county has been successful in using interns from the college. She stated there is a vacant position in the GIS department which has used interns, and it has worked well.

Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) - Chairman Craig stated County employees were given a 2% COLA and a 2% step increase in the current budget; however, the inflation rate is now 7%. He stated discussions have begun regarding the need to look at the County wage structure in order to hire and retain good employees. Assistant County Manager Hudson would provide information to Commissioners regarding how this can be addressed such as possibly a mid-year COLA. Ms. Hudson was asked to determine what percentage and which positions would be included. Ms. Hudson stated if the wage scale is adjusted for all positions, it would cost approximately \$250,000. She stated the first step should be to set the minimum wage at \$15.00 per hour. There are currently less than 28 positions that make less than \$15 per hour. Her recommendation is to increase the salaries of those positions to \$15 per hour and hire at this rate in the future. Chairman Craig stated he felt the County should commit to changing the wage structure in the future with the advice of Assistant County Manager Hudson on the best way to achieve this. Commissioner Hall stated he has no problem with the \$15 per hour nor with the COLA. However, he feels it should be a COLA addition rather than an increase in salary. He feels it should only be a one-time payment. Ms. Hudson stated it is based on a percentage then the lower paid employees will get less, and she feels it should be a flat amount across the Board for everybody. Law Enforcement employees have gotten increases, and they are furnished County vehicles that offset high cost of fuel for other employees.

Employee Work Environment - Discussion was held regarding a possible 4-day work week and/or working from home. Some positions would not be able to perform their jobs away from the office or job site, and the offices must be kept open. Commissioners asked management staff to look at various positions / departments to determine how this should be handled and to report back to the Board.

Employee Appreciation / Benefits – This is another way for employees to be recognized for going above and beyond the call of duty especially during COVID and on projects such as the roundabout. Vice Chairman Westmoreland stated one way to recognize department / employees is on the marquee in front of the Government Building. Commissioners discussed hosting the Employee Appreciation Luncheon again in the future. Commissioner Hall stated having the luncheon at the Kitchen at CSH could be a possibility.

Staggered Elections – Chairman Craig stated if the County should choose to pursue staggered elections and base it on the same election cycle as the Board of Education, Districts 2, 3, 4 would be for two-year terms initially. Districts 2, 3, 4

would be with the presidential election and Districts 1, 5 would be with the gubernatorial election. Chairman Craig stated it takes a lot of training and hard work to be an effective Commissioner, and he feels it would be a disservice to the County, employees and citizens if a slate of all 5 Commissioners were newly elected officials at the same time. There was not a consensus at this time to pursue staggered elections. Commissioners Craig, Hall and Westmoreland were in favor, and Commissioners Butts and Davis were opposed.

Travel Policy – Assistant County Manager Hudson reported there have been issues with travel for officials and staff. The credit card has been compromised numerous times, and this makes it difficult to process hotel reservations and conference / training registration. Also, it is very time consuming for Tami to continue to prepare travel for the entire County. The County will be changing from Truist Bank to Bank of America for County Credit Card services. Bank of America distributes each person a credit card and they make their own travel arrangements. However, law prohibits Constitutional Officers from possessing a credit card unless the Board passes a Resolution allowing it. She requested the County Travel Policy be changed in order to be more efficient. She stated each department could be issued their own credit card to do their travel or a request for travel could be submitted in advance based on the hotel costs, mileage and per diem. A check would then be given to the individual who would pay their expenses.

Commissioners requested that Assistant County Manager Hudson look at the procedures for travel and bring recommendations to the Board. Chairman Craig reported he will be attending NACo in the upcoming months. County Attorney McRee stated Board action is not required to amend / change the travel procedures.

Baldwin County Government Building Landscape – Assistant County Manager reported the bamboo on the north side of the property has been cut down. Brian Wood will look at area to be sure there is no drainage issue. She stated the intent is to have a natural walking trail; however, if the County should decide to do more, the project could be included in a future sales tax referendum. Chairman Craig stated that in the future he would like to see a park, possibly with tennis courts, pickle ball courts, and amphitheater. He would like for it to become a destination for the community to enjoy.

Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) – Chairman Craig reported he had a meeting with the City and asked for an exchange of proposals for the LOST. However, the City did not present their proposal. He stated the City must provide logic as to how they arrive at the numbers in their proposal. County Manager Tobar and City Manager Griffith will work through the month of April to come up with an agreement. If both bodies have not agreed by May 1st, the County will start the 60-day process to come to an agreement.

Assistant County Manager Hudson reported the split is currently County - 60% and 40% - City. Several formulas can be used to determine the County/City split, and the county's proposal to the city, is based on a blend of ACCG methodology.

Transportation-Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (T-SPLOST) – County Manager and City Manager to discuss and negotiate matters related to the T-SPLOST and bring to elected bodies. Vice Chairman Westmoreland stated he felt both parties should be ready to move forward with bond issues in order for projects to begin prior to the collection of the tax. He stated the City must have a list of projects to be included in bond issues.

Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) – County Manager Tobar reported on the GICH conference he and members of the team attended. He stated it was a great learning experience to network with counterparts around the State. Older neighborhoods are brought back to life, property values go up and the County digest goes up. He discussed low income housing tax credits such as development on the Ogden property. The program would be income based rental rates, and tax credits would be incentive for developers. He stated he would like to consider an apartment complex at the site when the time comes. Assistant County Manager Hudson concurred the conference was a good learning experience especially Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Housing which is a mixed type development based on average median income of the area.

Mr. Tobar reported the CHIP grant announcement will be on April 15th.

Commissioners Comments

Vice Chairman Westmoreland asked for an update on the Tyler training for the Tax Commissioner and Tax Assessor. Assistant County Manager Hudson reported Tyler training is ongoing. An intern was interviewed; however, they could not begin until August 1st. She stated the tasks are highly technical; and in order to be able to accomplish this inhouse, someone with the necessary skills must be hired. Commissioners discussed options to address the matter.

Commissioner Butts asked when the cleanup of the Ogden property would be complete. County Manager replied he felt it would be about 6 months.

Commissioners reported they have received a number of calls regarding restriping roads and about illegal dumping. Discussion was held regarding the gym not being open on weekends, staffing shortages at the Recreation Department, persons desiring to rent the facility being responsible for hiring security has not worked well because some are not providing security for the time they rent the facility. Cleaning at the Collins P. Lee Center is not being taken care of. County must look into the situation and rectify it.

Commissioner Davis asked when the County would build the pool. She asked if ARPA funds could be used for this. Chairman Craig stated he is opposed to using ARPA funds for recreation since that would keep the County from reducing the need for a TAN. Discussion was held regarding possible uses of ARPA funds. Commissioner Hall stated if ARPA money is used to offset general fund expenses then general fund revenue could be used to pay for services thereby reducing the need for as much money from TAN.

County McRee provided updated information on the Central State Hospital Fire Contract suit.

ADJOURNMENT – Meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Henry R. Craig
Chairman

Cynthia K. Cunningham
County Clerk