

Lamar County Board of Commissioners
Special Called Meeting
Administration Building
April 24th, 2023
9:30 a.m.

The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:30 a.m. on April 24th, 2023. Present for the meeting were Chairman Traylor, Commissioner Fletcher, Commissioner Lovett, Commissioner Gilles, County Administrator Townsend, and County Clerk Davidson. Beth Camp, Georgia House of Representatives Corinne B. Thornton, Director of the Office of Regional Services for the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Linda Waterman, Clerk for the Town of Aldora, Skip Seda, City of Milner Council, Tausha Grose City of Milner Administrator, Richard Vereen, City of Barnesville Public Works and Utilities. Vice-Chair Thrash, Commissioner Fletcher, City of Barnesville Manager Tim Turner, City of Barnesville Mayor Peter Banks, and Town of Aldora Mayor Jimmy Matthews were absent from the meeting.

Department of Community Affairs (DCA) Grant Discussion.

Mrs. Thornton, who directs the regional services office for DCA and works with ten counties in Regional 4, opened the meeting with an overview of what the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has to offer local communities, cities, and counties. They are the commissioner's eyes and ears in the State and share information about DCA's program and services. DCA is the community and development housing agency for the State. Much of what they do relates to housing and supportive housing communities and offers communities the opportunities to improve. They work with local governments to ensure they are done so that everyone is ready to apply for, receive and administer grants. The Comprehensive (Comp) plan process is a crucial part of grantsmanship because every community must be updated on the Comp requirements to be eligible to receive grants funds. Also, does your Comp Plan mention grants as a method to pay for activities such as water and sewer? The other reporting requirements are the Report on Local Government Finance and the Report on Management Indicators. If you have any Authorities within your cities or counties looking for funding, they must also be current in their financial reporting.

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) are also a part of the financial structure, which requires specific program structures and reporting requirements. The City of Barnesville has received CDBG grants over the past decade to assist with infrastructure. These funds come from Federal dollars that DCA administers. These funds are related to the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grants that are used to improve the lives of low to moderate individuals. This past year DCA was allocated 40 million dollars based on the congressional budget. These are competitive grants that local governments can apply for once a year, including water, sewer, and street and drainage improvements in areas that will benefit low to moderate-income individuals, 30 to 50 percent of the population. Those funds can be used to build community facilities such as Senior Citizens Centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, and Substance Abuse Treatment Centers. Those applications are due in April each year, and the application cycle has been pushed out to June. The process is complicated because Federal dollars have the most rules and regulations. The awards for the CDBG funds are up to a million dollars. CDBG funds can be used for housing improvements for low-income individuals.

There are about 30 awards per year Statewide, and around half of them are awarded. It is recommended that a professional Grant Writer and an Administrator be hired to assist with the CDBG application process. Some cities and counties within the State get their funding directly from HUD and are called entitlement communities. These are typically larger counties and cities with a population of over 150,000; Macon, Augusta, Columbus, Rome, and Valdosta. If awarded a CDBG grant, you can only apply two years after completion. They do have a program called Plan First for those successful with their Comp Plan, and it allows communities to apply for CDBG funds on an annual basis.

If you are participating in the Georgia community housing initiative, a partnership between DCA, the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), and the University of Georgia (UGA), this is a three-year process where they look at the communities housing needs. You can apply for CDBG housing activities on an annual basis. Another program called the Revitalization Area Strategy is a redevelopment plan for part of your community that can be used annually.

CDBG worked with small communities and did a grant for the town of Aldora in 2018. However, smaller communities have professional grant writers and administrators under contract to do the work. Lamar County was awarded CDBG funding for the Lamar County Health Department. Some programs are State funded, such as OneGeorgia, created in the late 1990s. This was created when all of the States sued the tobacco industry, and each State got a settlement, and Georgia used their settlement for Georgia's rural and economic development. This created the One Georgia Authority. The original funding of this has long since been deployed, but they get an annual appropriation annually from the General Assembly that is used for economic projects and rural areas. They have the Equity Program, which is used for economic development capacity buildings. They are putting money into projects where the communities try to improve land for industrial development, water, and sewer. They have provided funding to local government or authorities to build spec buildings. They made a loan to the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) in Thomaston in the early 2000s, and it was due when they sold the building. They receive applications for these loans quarterly. They are due the 2nd Friday of the 2nd month of the quarter. The following application is due in June, and communities can submit a pre-application at any time, but the complete application is due the 2nd Friday of the 2nd month of the quarter. They do internal reviews for these applications, and the OneGeorgia board decides on what is funded. The board consists of the Governor, the DCA Commissioner, the Department of Economic Development (EDA) Commissioner, and the head of the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority (GEFA). These awards are up to \$500,000.00.

Mrs. Thornton stated that there are State Funds that are easier to administer. The State of Georgia has procurement requirements, but the federal requirements are not imposed on these grants. Some funding for competitive economic development projects is used for publicly-owned businesses. These are discretionary grants, and the Governor decides about the award and the amount, but the DCA is the Grant Administrator. These grants range from \$150,000.00 to millions of dollars. The Governor awarded funds in Spalding County to a company called Ecopol. The company manufactures water-soluble and biodegradable film used to wrap everyday products such as detergents, agrochemicals, cosmetics, and other consumer goods. They are located in the Lakes at Green Valley eco-industrial park in Spalding County. Some funding comes from OneGeorgia, and Spalding County did have to apply even though the Governor made the discretionary decision. They have a financial assistance program called

EDGE, and one called REBA, Regional Economic Business Assistance. Another brand new program for OneGeorgia is the Rural Workforce Housing Fund. Mrs. Thornton said that one of the struggles companies are having is that no one has a place to live. The Governor put 35.7 million dollars in the budget to fund affordable housing initiatives. This is attached to OneGeorgia, and most of the funding is used for infrastructure related to workforce housing, and around 25 million will go towards infrastructure.

Mrs. Thornton said that OneGeorgia also has the Rural Innovation Fund, where the Governor appropriated money last year for rural economic development projects. These are for projects that are job creators. It is unique because it does not go through the usual scoring mechanisms. A separate committee makes the funding decisions, the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and the head of the Senate and House Appropriation committees.

Mrs. Thornton explained that the money from HUD goes to CDBG, but there are two different set-asides. One is the Redevelopment Fund (RDF) which eliminates slums or blight. They used this fund in Zebulon, Georgia, to rehabilitate a building. The grant went to the City of Zebulon, and they sold the building to pay off the loan. The RDF allows for removing blight and for communities and businesses to create jobs. The other set aside is the Employment Incentive Program (EIP) grant, where CDBG dollars create jobs for low and moderate-income people. An EIP grant was used for road improvement in the Town of Aldora to help assist truck travel for Continental Tire.

Mrs. Thornton stated that the Comp Plan should include grants, a requirement established around five years ago. The Comp Plan is a driven decision, but it should define where the road improvements, sewer, and water lines are needed within the County. Mrs. Thornton stated that the DCA Regional Commission could walk them through this process.

City of Milner Council Seda asked about roads that go through several economic differences, with good and bad houses and varying incomes. Mrs. Thornton said that the application goes through several scoring processes, and you look at the entire demographics of the targeted area. Mr. Seda asked if they purchased land for economic development and the land had people living on it, would they be displaced? Mrs. Thornton said that under the OneGeorgia program or any grant, they must determine if the land is suitable for economic development and meets the criteria required; access to highways, water and sewer, and the overall topography. She said she is unaware of State dollars used to relocate people to pave the way for economic development.

Chairman Traylor said that their most significant impact issue is water and sewer. The Water Authority belongs to the City of Barnesville, but how do they involve all the municipalities? He asked if a new Water Authority could be created and what they could do to maximize the ability to get more funds than they receive every other year to make the most significant impact on industrial and residential development. Chairman Traylor said that the Water Authority changed hands about ten years ago, and the Library and the Recreation were involved in a swap with the City of Barnesville. County Administrator Townsend said that the City of Barnesville took over everything involved in the Water Authority from the County, and the County gave away all rights to water and sewer to them.

City of Milner Administrator Tausha Grose said that the City of Milner is affected because even though they can handle adding more water and sewer, they pay the City of Barnesville to treat their water and sewer. They cannot handle the capacity that they are sending them.

They are limited in the number of developers they can let into the City of Milner. They cannot connect to the sewer and must have a septic system. The other problem is that there are some places you cannot put in a septic system. The question becomes, what can the City of Milner do to help the City of Barnesville? Chairman Traylor asked again if they could create a new Water Authority and then apply for a grant collectively. Mrs. Thornton could not give that type of advice but said that engineers for water and sewer are greatly needed to help with this type of issue. She said that the City of Barnesville can only apply for a grant since they own the Water Authority. Mrs. Thornton said that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) invests heavily in water and sewer infrastructures, and GEFA has loans for this type of project. Thomaston and Zebulon received GEFA loans, and Thomaston received a OneGeorgia equity loan to improve their industrial areas. Meriwether has a Countywide Water Authority, one of the few counties with this in the area. The Meriwether Water Authority serves the Meriwether business park; they run the lines to the park. Then they buy their water from the City of Hogansville, and the City of Hogansville buys their water from the City of Lagrange.

City of Milner Administrator Tausha Grose asked if all of the municipalities could apply individually since an intergovernmental agreement is in place. Mrs. Thornton said that would be a conversation for engineers. She said to avoid making a project fit the program, figure out what you need from an engineering standpoint and apply for what your municipality owns. County Administrator Townsend said they need to work together to get what is in place now to where it needs to be. Chairman Traylor said that they have looked to the City of Barnesville for the money, but it does not work that way, and they all need to work together to fix it because it impacts all of them.

Commissioner Gilles thanked Representative Camp for helping to liaison the meeting. She said they had had lots of conversations about how to get the money and move forward with the projects. Representative Camp said there was a time when they would get it in the budget, but that process no longer works that way. The process has to go through GEFA or DCA because they have a balanced budget in the State of Georgia. Representative Camp said that the State only makes money through taxation. She thanked Mrs. Thornton for her work with the DCA making sure the money in the State is spent correctly and they go to the projects that were put in for an application. Representative Camp said she would be more than glad to help with the project once a grant is applied.

Adjournment

Commissioner Gilles made a motion to adjourn the Special Called meeting at approximately 10:45 a.m. Commissioner Lovett seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

THE LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Ryran Traylor, Chairman

Absent

Nancy Thrash, Vice-Chair

_____Absent _____

Jarrold Fletcher, Commissioner

Jason Lovett, Commissioner

Ashley Gilles, Commissioner

Attest: _____ Carlette Davidson, County Clerk