

MINUTES
SEVENTH BUDGET MEETING OF THE
COLQUITT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
FISCAL YEAR 2015 - 2016
THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2015
5:00 o'clock p.m.

CALL TO ORDER: The seventh budget meeting for Fiscal Year 2015 - 2016 was called to order at 5:00 o'clock p.m. by Chairman Terry R. Clark. The meeting was duly called and advertised.

PRESENT: Those present were Commissioners Luke Strong, Winfred Giddens, Marc DeMott, Donna Herndon, Paul Nagy, Johnny Hardin, Chairman Terry R. Clark, County Administrator Chas Cannon, and County Clerk Melissa Lawson.

ABSENT: Finance Director Wayne Putnal.

ALSO PRESENT: Road Superintendent Stanley Kirksey, Projects Manager Charles Weathers, Shop Superintendent Mac Lawson, and Chief Compliance Officer Justin H. Cox.

GENERAL UPDATES: Mr. Cannon informed the board that he received notification from Keith Allen, legal counsel to Mr. Tony Lasseter, that the deed to convey ownership of .09 acres of Right of Way necessary for construction of the road to the new high school was almost complete.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (EDA) MEETING: At this time, Mr. Cannon informed the board of a meeting held earlier that day at the Economic Development Authority regarding whether or not to convey 1.29 acres of county property back to the county. Mr. Cannon stated that the vote was 4 – 4, basically meaning that the property would remain with the EDA.

Commissioner Strong stated that when the vote was taken to deed the property to the EDA, he voted against it, preferring the normal bid process as a more feasible method.

Commissioner Strong stated that, from the very beginning, the board decided that they would handle all land transactions themselves. However, Commissioner Strong stated that the board still voted to deed the land to the EDA.

As a result of this, Commissioner Strong argued that the decision to convey the property to the EDA was wrong and in turn, made the board look incompetent.

Commissioner Strong stated that he would even go as far as to say that the board was granted poor advice by legal counsel, and declared that the process should have been handled much more smoothly and efficiently.

Commissioner Strong urged the board to take these factors into consideration when making such important decisions, and further urged the board to always do the right thing.

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Commissioner Strong stated that the citizens of Colquitt County were upset regarding the way the situation was handled, and in the future, the county should handle its own affairs.

Commissioner Strong also stated that he had received several calls regarding a rumor that the county was going to shut down the Courthouse. Commissioner Strong stated that these matters should be communicated clearly so that the public has a clear perception of what is going on.

Commissioner Herndon stated that she did not want anything to happen to the Courthouse, and vowed that she would do everything in her power to prevent it.

Mr. Cannon stated that ABM Building Solutions, along with county personnel, was currently working on a plan to implement necessary repairs to the Courthouse. Currently, Mr. Cannon stated that the proposal includes repairing the roof and painting and sealing the building in order to prevent heat and air conditioning loss.

Mr. Cannon also stated that records storage was still an issue.

Commissioner Herndon stated that she believed it was law that the Clerk's office be within a certain vicinity of an adjacent courtroom. In addition, Commissioner Herndon stated that the probate judge must be located in the Courthouse.

Mr. Cannon mentioned the possibility of keeping the Public Defender and the Clerk of Court in the Courthouse. He further mentioned that any additional space would be inclusive of additional maintenance and utility costs.

Commissioner Herndon declared that the Courthouse must not be abandoned, and must be maintained.

Mr. Cannon agreed, stating that ABM Building Solutions would make recommendations regarding how to facilitate the necessary repairs to the Courthouse.

Commissioner Strong questioned the availability of SPLOST funds for the needed renovations at the Courthouse.

Commissioner Giddens questioned if an estimate had been obtained from ABM regarding repair costs.

Mr. Cannon stated that costs would be significant, but suggested obtaining more information from ABM before any decision was made.

With regard to Commissioner Strong's statement, Mr. Cannon stated that 12.88 acres is what the county originally intended to sell. However, upon surveying and the developer indicating that more space was needed along the outer edges of the property, Mr. Cannon said it was logical to expand the usable acreage if that ensured a successful deal. Mr. Cannon stated that the board had a few options to consider when deciding on how to best dispose of the property, and decided to proceed through the EDA, further stating that this seemed appropriate due to the fact that the EDA is charged with developing jobs and

creating economic opportunities in Colquitt County. Mr. Cannon stated that he believed the board made the right decision.

Commissioner Hardin stated that upon surveying the property, that perhaps the board was in a rush to rebid the property. He further stated that, at this time, the board should have reflected upon what to do with the additional acreage.

On the survey, Chairman Clark remarked that the additional acreage was reflected as right of way.

As a result, Mr. Cannon stated that it was his recommendation, as well as that of Lester Castellow, County Attorney, that the county do all that was legal and justifiable in order to make the project successful. Mr. Cannon stated that the county was not in the business of developing property, whereas this was the EDA's specialty.

Commissioner Strong stated that he disagreed, stating that from the beginning, the board conveyed that they wouldn't deal with the EDA. Commissioner Strong stated that several meetings were held privately with the EDA, excluding the board as a whole. Commissioner Strong stated that public perception is that the county was doing things illegally and under the table.

Commissioner Strong further stated that he said at the meeting in which the vote was taken that it was not a good idea to convey the land to the EDA, thus his vote against it. Commissioner Strong stated that the board needed to avoid similar situations in the future.

Mr. Cannon declared that the board did the right thing by deeding the land to the EDA. Mr. Cannon stated that when the deal closes, the county will recognize the revenue and additional jobs will have been created, as well as much needed expansion of the tax digest.

Again, Commissioner Strong stated that he disagreed with Mr. Cannon.

Commissioner DeMott stated that someone questioned why the county did not scrap the deal and start over.

Commissioner Hardin stated the mistake made was not getting the property surveyed at the beginning of the process.

Mr. Cannon stated that successful county governments work in conjunction with the Economic Development Authorities in order to create jobs and promote industry. As the only authority that specializes in such matters, Mr. Cannon stated that it was only logical to involve them in the process.

Mr. Cannon stated that counties do not exist to sell property, but to provide public safety and services to its citizens. Again, Mr. Cannon stated that the EDA's charter was to promote industry and create jobs.

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Commissioner Strong questioned Mr. Cannon regarding what the county instructed him to do with the EDA. Commissioner Strong further questioned Mr. Cannon regarding what the county instructed him not to do.

Commissioner Herndon recalled the situation being discussed.

Mr. Cannon stated that he worked for the board, and if the board chose, he would not attend any future EDA meetings, stating that his only intent was to assist the board.

Commissioner Nagy inquired as to the name of the road to the new high school.

Mr. Cannon replied that the name would be the Darbyshire Road extension.

Commissioner Nagy stated that entities needed to do a better job of working together, and stated that this issue must be worked on.

FISCAL YEAR 2015-2016 BUDGET CONTINUED: Mr. Cannon reviewed a list of General Fund revenues and expenditures for the month of May 2015, citing no major concerns.

Mr. Cannon also reviewed revenue and expenditures for the Special Service District, E-911 Fund, Solid Waste Fund and Employee Health Insurance Fund.

Mr. Cannon reviewed the list of commissioner options with the board, again discussing millage rate proposals in order to correct the discrepancy in the Gross M&O millage rates in the Incorporated and Unincorporated areas of the county.

Mr. Cannon stated that the board still had available options to consider in regards to the proposed budget.

Mr. Cannon presented a proposed list of overtime changes, stating that overall, \$60,000.00 had been eliminated due to decreases in various departments.

Mr. Cannon stated that all non inmate crew purchases had been deferred until the next fiscal year, stating that all that was included was temporary labor for the mowing crews. Mr. Cannon stated this would be a "trial run," so that the Roads and Bridges department could evaluate the process for cost and efficiency.

Mr. Cannon stated that ABM Building Solutions would update the board during the scheduled budget meeting on June 16, 2015.

Mr. Cannon presented changes and updates to capital purchases, emphasizing cuts and the utilization of SPLOST proceeds.

Discussion ensued regarding capital purchases and their funding sources.

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Commissioner Giddens questioned the age of mowers used by the Roads and Bridges department. Mac Lawson, Shop Superintendent, gave information relating to year and model of the existing mowers in the department's fleet.

Charles Weathers, Projects Manager, stated that the life of a tractor mower was approximately seven years. According to Mr. Weathers, the latter years presented the most maintenance and repair costs.

Commissioner Herndon questioned if it was possible for inmates to pick up litter before mowing, stating that upon recent mowing on Tallokas Road, there was an abundance of shredded paper litter.

Mr. Weathers stated that this had been performed in the past, but stated that the quality of inmates was the main reason for suggesting temporary workers and or county employees to perform these tasks.

Mr. Lawson stated that inmates that operate the tractors get swapped out regularly, so that training is a constant duty. In the mean time, damage to the machine due to inexperience occurs.

Stanley Kirksey, Road Superintendent, stated that the previous year, the mowing crew consisted of all temporary workers with the exception of one county employee.

Discussion ensued regarding budgeted funds for temporary workers.

Mr. Weathers stated that an obvious benefit to the utilization of temporary labor was giving that person the opportunity to earn a permanent position with the county. Mr. Weathers further stated that if the individual did not work out, the county simply instructed the agency that supplied the worker not to send them back.

Mr. Cannon stated that upon recent comparisons of inmate and temporary mowing crews, Mr. Kirksey and Mr. Weathers had already determined that temporary labor is much more efficient than inmate labor.

Mr. Weathers agreed, stating that overtime for supervising inmates during lunch would be eliminated, and in the long run, would more than pay for itself.

Problems relating to the use of inmate labor were thoroughly discussed and debated.

Mr. Cannon stated that the prison was still an asset, but stated that that an efficient method of utilizing inmate labor must be established. Mr. Cannon stated that it cost the county, after state prisoner reimbursement, approximately \$500,000.00 annually to operate the prison.

Mr. Cannon suggested that the county market the provision of inmate labor to surrounding cities and municipalities. In the meantime, Mr. Cannon stated that increased prisoner reimbursement from the state was essential.

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Mr. Cannon mentioned a recent meeting with Chip Blalock, Director of the Sunbelt Agricultural Exposition, regarding ways to utilize inmates as part of his farm operation.

Commissioner Giddens questioned the overtime of dump truck drivers within the Roads and Bridges department.

Commissioner Giddens stated that he observed a crew earlier in the day that accomplished very little for the time spent on the job. He further stated that if an inmate refused to work, they should be sent back to the prison.

Commissioner Hardin stated it was imperative to utilize inmates where and when it increased efficiency.

Mr. Weathers stated that, not only was the quality of inmates poor, it was actually harder for a crew foreman to coerce an inmate to work than it was to perform the duty himself.

Commissioner Giddens mentioned that crew leaders did not have manual jobs.

Mr. Weathers stated it was a very demanding, exhausting job to supervise inmate labor, and further stated that the prison system, in its current state, was no longer working for Colquitt County.

Commissioner Hardin mentioned that reluctance to work could also be discovered with temporary laborers. Mr. Weathers replied that this was true, but upon the discovery of a temporary worker that did not wish to work, they could be easily sent back.

Mr. Cannon stated that as drug reform further expands, there would be less and less workable inmates.

Mr. Kirksey stated he had received compliments from citizens regarding temporary labor.

Commissioner Giddens questioned Mr. Kirksey regarding the progress of a recent request to have waterways within the Bear Creek subdivision cleaned out.

Commissioner Hardin questioned the need for a crew cab truck for personnel within the Compliance Office.

Justin Cox, Chief Compliance Officer, stated that a crew cab truck would better accommodate equipment and allow carpooling for out of town training sessions.

Commissioner Strong stated that the trucks currently driven by Compliance personnel were still reliable and further stated that he did not see the need for a new truck.

Commissioner Nagy mentioned reimbursing employees for their personal vehicles.

Commissioner DeMott stated that if employees already have an assigned county vehicle, it would be more cost effective to use it.

Commissioner Nagy stated he was mainly referring to out of town trainings.

Commissioner Giddens stated that all county vehicles should have the Colquitt County emblem on it.

Mr. Cannon stated that certain law enforcement vehicles must be as inconspicuous as possible.

The board recessed for a five minute break.

Commissioner Herndon stated that if routine facility inspections were being performed, the leak at the Courthouse could have been discovered much sooner. She further stated that it was imperative that routine inspections occur in order to discover and prevent future facility issues.

On a positive note, Commissioner DeMott stated that upon the recent tour of the new high school, School Board personnel spoke very highly of the energy performance contracting program implemented recently by ABM Building Solutions.

Commissioner Giddens stated that he could not fathom replacing something that was functioning properly.

Chairman Clark stated that the plan was to focus on controls, in an effort to make county buildings more efficient.

Commissioner Hardin questioned the decision made regarding the increase in pay to court reporters in the Southern Judicial Circuit.

Mr. Cannon explained that upon receiving a letter requesting the increase, himself and Wayne Putnal, Finance Director, met with all of the superior court judges collectively.

Mr. Cannon stated that he rejected the original, proposed pay increase. However, upon an analysis of existing costs for compensation of court reporters, an agreement was reached.

Commissioner Hardin stated that the matter should have been brought before the board.

Discussion ensued regarding grant funding for the Drug Treatment and Accountability Court.

Mandates, lost revenue, and exemptions were discussed by the board.

Commissioner Hardin stated that upon researching the budget for ways to save money, the last remaining alternative was to consider cutting benefits to employees, in an effort to keep the millage rate down.

Commissioner Herndon questioned the costs of granting salary adjustments to employees.

Mr. Cannon stated the major difference would be that a salary adjustment did not have a recurring impact on the budget, whereas an implementation of a COLA would require increasing salaries. Mr. Cannon also mentioned a state mandated COLA for commissioners, constitutional officers, and elected officials.

Commissioner DeMott stated that a salary adjustment was a temporary fix, whereas a COLA would be permanent.

Commissioner Nagy stated that the mandated COLA upset him due to the fact he was forced to accept the raise when the county struggled to grant raises to its own employees.

Commissioner Giddens stated that he would be in favor of a salary adjustment, and the inclusion of allotted funds within the budget for merit increases.

Commissioner Giddens questioned the number of department heads that were granted raises during the current fiscal year.

Mr. Cannon stated that only two department heads were granted raises, and further stated that no department heads received across the board raises or merit increases.

Commissioner Hardin stated that he would like to see lower paid employees receive an increase.

Commissioner Nagy questioned the amount required to fund salary adjustments.

The fiscal repercussions of granting a Cost of Living Adjustment and/or merit increase was thoroughly discussed.

Commissioner Giddens stated that low paid employees were struggling to survive.

Commissioner Herndon urged the board to consider a plan regarding salary adjustments or increases.

Commissioner Strong voiced his concern that the county could not afford both merit and COLA increases.

Mr. Cannon stated that no COLA had been granted to county employees since 2007.

Commissioner DeMott questioned the cost savings if the percentage of COLA was reduced to 2.5%.

Commissioner Hardin stated that he would rather see a cash incentive for employees.

Commissioner Strong urged the board to consider the community and economy, stating that revenues were not likely to be any better next year.

Mr. Cannon discussed the revenue lost on an annual basis to exemptions.

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Commissioner Strong replied that there was basically nothing the board could do regarding state mandated exemptions.

Mr. Cannon stated it was imperative to research ways to generate revenue outside of taxation.

Commissioner Hardin stated that county employees received an excellent benefit package.

Commissioner Hardin stated that the county was in good financial shape, but voiced his reluctance to increase the burden of the taxpayers in Colquitt County.

Mr. Cannon stated that the board must decide what it takes to operate the county and set the millage rate accordingly.

Commissioner Giddens questioned the number of county employees covered under the Defined Benefit plan.

Commissioner Hardin stated that an individual covered under the Defined Benefit plan would be foolish to leave county employment, especially considering that upon retirement that individual will receive 51% of his salary.

Commissioner Giddens questioned if this was fair to the taxpayer.

The board discussed the fiscal impact of the Defined Benefit plan.

Commissioner Nagy stated that he would like to grant a 2.5% increase across the board, stating that the county has basically become a training facility.

Commissioner Giddens stated the only problem with that was granting the same increase to everyone, regardless of their performance.

Commissioner Nagy stated that if department heads perform their jobs effectively, low performing employees will not remain in employment long enough to be granted a raise.

Commissioner Hardin stated that he would rather see the board grant salary adjustments.

Commissioner DeMott stated that he was in favor of a COLA increase. He further stated that it conveyed a message to the employees that their service was appreciated.

Commissioner Hardin stated that, like Commissioner Strong, he was reluctant to support both the COLA and merit increases.

Mr. Cannon proposed a 1.5% COLA for county employees and retaining the \$125,000.00 for merit increases.

Commissioner Hardin stated that he could support that.

The board discussed the budgetary impact of the suggested COLA and merit increases.

APPROVAL OF MOTION TO INCLUDE COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT AND MERIT INCREASES IN PROPOSED BUDGET: Commissioner Nagy made the motion to include a 1.5% Cost of Living Adjustment for county employees, as well as \$125,000.00 in merit increases, in the proposed fiscal FY 15 – 16 budget. Commissioner DeMott made a second. The motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Hardin stated he was thankful that the county was in good financial shape.

Commissioner DeMott remarked that with the recent eliminations of capital purchases and the decision regarding employee raises, the budget was now starting to take shape.

Chairman Clark stated that a decision needed to be made regarding the sale of the cell tower easement to SBM Communications.

Commissioner Hardin stated that he was not in favor of selling the easement.

It was the consensus of the board to retain ownership of the easement.

Commissioner Hardin mentioned the utilization of more reserve funds.

Commissioner Giddens questioned the utilization of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds received by the county.

Mr. Weathers stated that the utilization of county labor, rather than outsourcing, saved the county a substantial amount in repair costs.

Commissioner Giddens questioned the size of pipes that were replaced as a result of the weather event.

Mr. Weathers explained that when federal funds are utilized to pay for repairs, federal regulations dictate specifications such as pipe size, etc.

Mr. Cannon stated that he would ask the Health Department to participate in the ABM energy audit.

Mr. Cannon reminded the board that \$75,000.00 was added back to Library funding.

Commissioner Nagy stated that he was comfortable with that figure.

Commissioner DeMott agreed, stating that he hated to cut their funding so drastically.

Mr. Cannon stated that all non-inmate equipment had been delayed or eliminated from the budget.

The registered nurse position at the prison was briefly discussed.

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Commissioner Strong questioned the reduction in funding to the Parks and Recreation program. Mr. Cannon replied that the county reduced funding for this particular program by \$81,000.00.

The reduction in funding to the Parks and Recreation program was briefly discussed.

MOTION TO CANCEL SCHEDULED BUDGET MEETING FOR TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2015: Commissioner Hardin made the motion to cancel the scheduled budget meeting to be held Tuesday, June 9, 2015. Commissioner Nagy made a second. The motion carried unanimously.

At this time, Commissioner Hardin thanked Mr. Cannon for his hard work and dedication.

Commissioner Giddens agreed, commending Mr. Cannon on his performance as Administrator.

Chairman Clark stated that Mr. Cannon pursued avenues in which to generate revenues, which was imperative to the county.

There being no further business to come before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry R. Clark
Chairman

Melissa Lawson
County Clerk

Approved:
