

**Baldwin County Commissioners
Planning Retreat
Middle Georgia Regional Commission
175 Emery Highway, Suite C
Macon, Georgia
March 28, 2024
9:00 a.m.**

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

John Westmoreland
Kendrick Butts
Henry Craig
Emily Davis
Sammy Hall

OTHERS PRESENT

Brandon Palmer
Carlos Tobar
Dawn Hudson
Cindy Cunningham
Traci Rollins

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman John Westmoreland called the Planning Retreat to order at 9:00 a.m.

ADMINISTRATIVE / FISCAL MATTERS

Recreation

Commissioners and Recreation Director Traci Rollins discussed the goals and objectives of the Recreation Department, i.e. whether to attract people to Baldwin County to spend money for the economic benefit or for the Recreation Department to make money. She discussed whether to increase fees for tournaments and whether to have sponsors pay part-time employees required to maintain fields and bathrooms when tournaments are held. Ms. Rollins reported the Department currently needs more employees. She stated there are 4 vacant positions that need to be filled - 2 full-time and 2 part-time. Consensus of Commissioners was to authorize the Director to hire 2 full-time and 2 part-time employees to fill the vacancies. Commissioners discussed how much the fees would need to be increased to cover the maintenance of fields, water usage, supplies, salaries and other related expenses. County Manager Carlos Tobar recommended determining the actual cost to cover Departmental expenses before making the decision to raise fees. Discussion was held about the value of attracting people to Baldwin County to experience the rich history, retail opportunities, great recreation such as the lake, walking and biking trails.

County Manager Carlos Tobar stated the light replacement project at the ballfields is on the SPLOST list. However, this year most of the funds are already committed. He stated an application will be submitted under the Land and Water Conservation program for funding for the light replacement.

Assistant County Manager Dawn Hudson reported the first two months of SPLOST collections must be used to fund the 911 Motorola lease. She stated there is sufficient money budgeted in the SPLOST to do the lighting project which, if necessary, can be done through a lease with payments made from future SPLOST collections. Commissioner Sammy Hall stressed that current facilities must be taken care of as well.

Traci Rollins stated the lights on four fields at the bottom need to be replaced as soon as possible; however, the top fields can last a few more years. Assistant County Manager Hudson stated the estimated cost is approximately \$500,000.00. County Manager Tobar responded the project can be planned for 2026. Commissioners felt this project should be a top priority; however, if lights are the highest priority, WHAT projects are not going to be done on time? Commissioner Hall discussed the Golf Course which is self-sustaining and needs work. He felt the County should hire an expert to come and evaluate what needs to be done at Golf Course so people will continue coming out to play on our course. Commissioner Hall stated he felt the Recreation Department has not been made a priority. Commissioner Emily Davis stated repairs should be made when things are broken. Assistant County Manager Hudson stated she will get estimated costs on lighting replacement.

County Manager Tobar discussed the Aquatic Center proposed Standard Operating Procedures including proposed entry fees and various features of the facility such as a commercial kitchen. Mr. Tobar recommended that cafeteria workers from school system be hired to work in the kitchen during the summer months of operation. Commissioners asked Mr. Tobar about projections of the number of people that would be required to staff the pool and the cost to staff it? Mr. Tobar responded that due to the 48" depth of the pool it will be easier to hire and train lifeguards. Commissioners stated the policy should specify that everyone who comes to the Aquatic Center will be required to pay the entry fee. Commissioners felt it would be a good idea to hold a Work Session to review the policy. It was also recommended that a written brochure be developed and distributed throughout the community outlining rules / policies such as requiring an adult chaperone for those under certain age, consequences for not following rules and stating that everyone will be required to pay the entry fees. Commissioners stated there must be a large sign posted at the Center outlining rules and that rules will be enforced.

Commissioner Craig recommended the County publicize all available activities being offered at the Recreation Department and when the facilities can be used in order to better inform citizens of the many recreational opportunities. Commissioners discussed distribution of pamphlets at the Convention and Visitors Bureau and places around town to get the word out.

County Manager Tobar discussed the pickleball courts citing one challenge is player safety and the distance between courts. He stated the proposed location at the upper area will allow more space between courts.

SPLOST

County Manager Tobar stated SPLOST projects were discussed in other Agenda items to include E911 equipment, vehicle fleet, aquatic center, Sibley-Smith funding match, environmental process for sewer project at Sibley-Smith property, pickleball courts, and lights at ballfields. He stated big ticket items include fire department(s) and fire engines which have to be ordered two years prior to delivery due to time it takes to build the trucks.

Assistant County Manager Hudson distributed a spreadsheet outlining anticipated sales tax collections, SPLOST projects and timeframes of obligation of the funds. She stated she will also provide a spreadsheet on T-SPLOST anticipated collections and obligation of funds.

Attorney Brandon Palmer recommended that in the future a bond issue should be included on the referendum in the event a project must be done before sufficient collections can be made.

T-SPLOST

County Manager Carlos Tobar reported County Engineer Brian Wood is developing the road list. Commissioners stated they want to review the road list as soon as possible.

TAX ANTICIPATION NOTE (TAN)

Commissioner Butts asked if there is any way for the County not to have a TAN? Assistant County Manager Hudson stated the County has historically borrowed money in anticipation of tax collections. She said the way not to have a TAN is to raise taxes. When the County has funds in reserve, Commissioners roll back taxes which is good for citizens but not for County. She stated the County needs to build back cash reserve. Ms. Hudson explained monthly expenses stating during the first month of the calendar year there is a large expenditure because the pension plan payment is due. She stated approximately 70% of revenue is collected in the last quarter of the year which creates cash flow issues. Commissioner Butts stated he would like to see the County develop a plan to stop having a TAN; not necessarily right away but looking to the future. Commissioners discussed various ways of addressing the situation, Discussion was held about changing back to the July 1st fiscal year. Assistant Finance Director Hudson stated changing the fiscal year would help with budgeting because you would be setting the budget and millage rate closer together timewise. She said it is a matter of timing; for instance, grant funded projects must be done before getting reimbursed. She stated that as far as the TAN note is concerned, it is interest. However, \$150,000 - \$200,000 paid in interest is not an extreme cost to be able to have available cash. Ms. Hudson reported one mill of taxes raises about 1.4 million dollars; ¼ of mill brings in \$400,000. Commissioners discussed real growth of digest and Inflationary growth which is what you have to roll back. With real growth comes additional expenses to provide more infrastructure and services. Assistant County Manager Hudson stated she will provide a cash flow report on taxes and get more information on options.

PROPOSED SITE FOR PUBLIC SAFETY TRAINING CENTER

County Manager Tobar stated the Sheriff's Office is looking at the Sibley – Smith site for a new public safety training center which would be located on the right side of the property and would not affect industrial sites. He stated there will be a shooting range utilizing simulated equipment which was paid for through the grant; however, there are plans for using non-simulated equipment. He said a request will be made to the Department of Transportation for money to assist with the cost of an entrance into Sibley-Smith site. Commissioners requested that Sheriff Masee and Major King meet with them to discuss the proposed site for a training center. Assistant County Manager Hudson stated an AARPA grant funded the equipment and money is included in the SPLOST to build a facility.

ELECTIONS BUILDING

Assistant County Manager Hudson discussed two options for construction of the Elections Building at the Government Center. The first option is a 3,500 square foot facility which would be for early voting and some storage. Voter registration would remain in the main Government Building. An estimated cost for this option is \$769,000. The second option is an 8,000 square foot building that would house everything, i.e. early voting, storage and voter registration. With this option, everything would be moved to the new building. Estimated cost for larger building is \$1,789,000 which is roughly \$1,000,000 more than option 1. Ms. Hudson stated building specs must be developed before the project can be officially bid out because the information she has provided is merely estimates.

Commissioners stated staff should proceed with getting drawings done in order to move forward. Consensus of Commissioners was to authorize the County Manager to sign a

contract for design of the footprint for the larger building that can be sized back if needed.

SHORT TERM VACATION RENTALS (STVR)

County Manager Tobar reported there are sixteen STVR properties that have been identified that are not registered. Assistant County Manager Hudson presented information on collections. Last year \$71,230.00 was collected; however, State law mandates restrictions as to what this money can be used for. 43.75 % of fees collected must go to the designated marketing agency which is the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) for tourism promotion. 18.75 % comes to the County and is restricted for use on tourism, and 37 % goes to the County General Fund. She stated the County also has a lodging tax that is remitted to the County and can be spent on anything. Last year \$43,000.00 in revenue was collected from the two RV parks. County Manager Tobar stated the CVB monitors websites for rentals and keeps track of properties being used as STVR. Assistant County Manager Hudson stated one of the problems with enforcement and collection is the revenue reports received by the County do not breakout who collections are from; it is a total remittance.

ROUNDBOUT CONCEPT FOR NORTH JEFFERSON STREET AND LOG CABIN ROAD

County Manager Tobar stated County Engineer Wood has been asked to develop a concept for a one lane roundabout at North Jefferson Street and Log Cabin Road. There is no right-of-way acquisition necessary for a one lane roundabout. Mr. Tobar stated there is not enough political support for a two-lane roundabout and without full political support the project is not likely to get funded by GDOT.

Commissioner Craig asked if the City is onboard with the project. County Manager Tobar responded he does not know at this time what the City will be willing to contribute as far as match. He said DOT will provide 80 % funding with a 20 % match. Consensus of Commissioners is to send the City a letter regarding the one lane project and requesting a joint meeting if needed.

RURAL HOUSING INITIATIVE

County Manager Tobar discussed the Rural Housing Initiative which encourages development of affordable workforce housing through collaborations between local governments and real estate developers. Mr. Tobar stated four potential properties have been identified in the County, and the County must pick one property for any future applications. Consultant Rhonda Gilbert is working with the Department of Community Affairs on this initiative.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION POLICY

Chairman John Westmoreland discussed a proposed Citizen Award and Recognition Policy establishing general guidelines for recognizing citizens who have demonstrated heroism, extraordinary service and exceptional acts of community caretaking. Commissioners discussed whether there was a need for a formal policy establishing criteria for awards and recognition. Commissioners Craig and Butts stated they would review the policy and bring recommendations back to the Board on this matter.

PRESENTATIONS

Commissioners discussed how presentations by outside agencies and organizations are handled on Commission Meeting agendas. County Management Staff stated these presentations take up a great deal of time during the Commission Meetings which should be restricted to County business. It was recommended that presentations be

made only by agencies / organizations that involve County departments and functions, and a time limit be set in order to allow Commissioners to handle administrative / fiscal matters of the County. It was also stated that in some instances citizens are subjected to lengthy presentations when they are there to participate in official matters of the County. A suggestion was made that presentations be made during a Work Session rather than the Regular Commission Meetings.

MEETING ROOM RENTAL

County Manager Tobar reported there have been situations where groups requested use of a meeting room at the Government Building and did not want to pay to use our facility. Organizations have been denied use of meeting space because their organizations were not related to County government departments / functions. He stated there is a rental agreement that has been used thus far for holding meetings and training sessions at the Government Building. He reported that County Management Staff must be present for any meetings that are held after hours. After discussion on this matter, Commissioner Sammy Hall recommended that staff continue to enforce the current rental policy until such time as it may be changed by the Board.

SALE OF PORTION OF LANDFILL PROPERTY

County Manager Tobar stated he was originally approached about the County selling sand from the sandpit at the landfill property. He was then asked about the County selling that portion of the property to a business that would mine the sand from the pit. Commissioners discussed the matter and consensus among members was to notify the prospective buyer that the County is not interest in selling the property.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIC PLANNING

Commissioners discussed the need for a short-term strategic plan that is more specific than the current Comprehensive Plan which must be updated in 2028. Commissioners stated they want to have more influence and involvement in projects County Manager Tobar is working on, as well as, prioritization of projects that the Board wishes to see accomplished in a shorter time. It was consensus of the Board that a Work Session be scheduled to set goals and outline which projects will be done during the upcoming one-year period.

Commissioners stated they continue to receive complaints about the service provided by the Waste Management, and they feel Company is not providing the level of service it should provide to the County. County Attorney Palmer was asked to review the current Solid Waste Contract with Waste Management in order to provide the Board with information on the pros and cons of continuing under the contract. It was stated the City should be contacted to determine if it would be beneficial to all parties if the City and County combined solid waste services under one contract. County Manager Tobar suggested waiting until 2026 when the contract expires to make any changes based on whether a transfer station will be built at the Landfill.

Discussion was held on the number of vacant positions in County departments. Commissioners also discussed whether changes should be made to the Employee Handbook to ensure the County has the most up to date policy in accordance with applicable laws.

OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioners discussed the need to upgrade the sound system in the Commission Chambers and requested that information be researched on the best type of system and associated costs.

A sewer line installation to the Sibley-Smith property was discussed. Commissioner Emily Davis stated Mott Smith, with the Aging Department of the Regional Planning Commission, will be hosting a workshop on Dementia and Alzheimer's on June 6th and June 13th if anyone is interested in attending. She stated if there is interest in the subject, it may be possible to hold a workshop in Baldwin County.

Chairman John Westmoreland reminded everyone the April 16th Commissioner meeting has been cancelled.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Henry Craig made a motion to adjourn the Planning Session at 3:20 p.m. Commissioner Sammy Hall seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,


John H. Westmoreland
Chairman


Cynthia K. Cunningham
County Clerk