

Baldwin County Commissioners
Planning Retreat
January 28, 2021
9:00 a.m.

A Commissioners' Planning Retreat was held Thursday, January 28, 2021 at 9:00 a.m., Middle Georgia Regional Commission, 175 C Emery Highway, Macon, Georgia with Chair Henry Craig presiding.

Members Present: Henry R. Craig
John H. Westmoreland
Kendrick B. Butts
Emily C. Davis
Sammy Hall

Also Present: David McRee
Carlos Tobar
Dawn Hudson
Cindy Cunningham

Call to Order

Chair Henry Craig called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. and expressed his appreciation to everyone for taking time to attend the planning retreat.

T-SPLOST

Discussion was held as to whether the County would pursue a T-SPLOST. The next opportunity to place the T-SPLOST on a ballot would be in November 2021. The entire 1% could be collected for a maximum of five (5) years if the County and City enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement which would outline a negotiated split. If the city chooses not to enter into an agreement with the County, the maximum rate that can be levied is 0.75% and the collections would be split based between city and county on how much each entity spent on transportation projects in the last three (3) years.

Commissioners agreed a list of proposed projects should be developed as soon as possible, and a meeting scheduled with the Chair, Mayor and management staff to discuss proposed T-SPLOST. Commissioners felt it imperative that the public be educated on proposed projects in order to gain community support.

SPLOST Review

Assistant County Manager Dawn Hudson reported that internet sales taxes were collected in 2020. She presented an update on current SPLOST projects including Administration Building, Courthouse renovations, Jail / 911, Health Department building, Airport and recreation.

Commissioner Westmoreland recommended the County set up a program for rotation of vehicles in the County fleet.

Recreation

Commissioners discussed an aquatic facility that would provide the community with some type of water activities, i.e. splash pad, pool, etc.

County Manager Tobar reported the County has a contract with Georgia College and State University for use of their pool during summer months for the community to take swimming lessons and for water recreation. Of course, the utilization of the GCSU pool will depend on the situation with COVID.

County Manager Tobar discussed the aquatic facility to be constructed in phases. Phase I would be some type of splash pad, a small concession stand, bathrooms, and pump house. There are two sites to consider for the splash pad – (1) area where old pool was located and (2) old state prison site. After initial phase, the next SPLOST could include another phase to finish and build out the aquatic facility. The old state prison site has more room for expansion.

Mr. Tobar discussed footprints, layouts and cost estimates to build a splash pad, concessions building, pumps house and bathrooms at one of the sites on Highway 22 near Walter B. Williams. He also proposed constructing a small splash pad in Harrisburg in the area in front of the community garden.

Commissioner Emily Davis reiterated the fact that due to COVID GCSU may not be able to open their pool for community use. She stated she agreed with phased construction of the facility. She stressed the importance of getting the information out to the community to make them aware of the plan. She said the Board should begin the project soon with a goal of having the first phase completed by this summer.

County Development

County Manager Tobar discussed future development in the County according to Character Areas, which set development standards for different areas in the County, or countywide zoning.

Commissioners felt decisions must be made now to address future development for the betterment of the County. The County must be able to change with the needs of the community, and zoning sets the parameters / bounds to be followed. If at a future date, these need to be changed, the Board can revisit and change the policy.

County Manager Tobar said the assistance of the Regional Commission (RC) will be necessary for this project. Commissioners felt more information is necessary from the RC staff on differences between Zoning and Character Areas. Mr. Tobar stated he would request assistance from the Regional Commission with information to be provided to the Board at a later date.

Manufactured Homes

Discussion was held about a proposed manufactured home ordinance; requirements for placement of manufactured / mobile homes outside of a mobile home park and within a certain distance from the shores of Lake Sinclair. Commissioners decided upon a revision to Section 16-49 (c) of the proposed ordinance to reflect the distance of one quarter (1/4) mile from the shores of Lake Sinclair in the Ordinance.

COVID Protocols

Consensus of Commissioners and staff was for the County to grant an extension of eighty (80) hours COVID leave to employees until June 30, 2021.

Chair Craig asked County Manager / Assistant County Manager to look into placing temperature checking machines at front and back entrances to Government Building.

Bids for Hunting Lease at Miller Pit

Discussion was held about the solicitation of bids for a hunting lease on the Miller Pit property located off Vinson Highway. Mr. Tobar stated a lease could potentially generate \$2,840 each year.

Sibley – Smith Property

Discussion was held about the Sibley-Smith property. The house located on that property is falling into disrepair and could be a deterrent to leasing or selling the property.

Laptops / Tablets / Phones

County Manager Tobar recommended providing County purchased laptops or tablets for Commissioners. He stated with increased email and virtual meetings / training sessions that it would be beneficial.

Assistant County Manager stated the County will be implementing a new meeting management program, and computers will be purchased at the time the County "goes live" with the meeting management program. All Commissioners declined a County issued phone.

County staff will determine what type device will be most compatible and will best serve the County's needs for the new meeting management program.

Commissioners and Constitutional Officers Salary

Discussion was held on ways salaries are increased for Commissioners. There is no interest at this time in increasing salary for Commissioners.

Assistant County Manager Hudson provided information on the law that outlines how constitutional officers are paid.

Property Maintenance

County Manager Tobar discussed issues of property maintenance. He reported that for the most part people have complied when notified by the County of violations. In those incidents where the citizens do not comply, demolition would have to be done by the County and the property owner must pay the cost of demolition.

County Attorney McRee stated the County must have a court order to demolish the property. It is incumbent on the county to minimize the cost by salvaging as much material as possible. To recoup costs the County can place a lien on the property; add the cost of demolition could be to the next property tax bill; sell the property at a tax sale; and if the property doesn't sell the County takes possession of the property.

County Manager Tobar reported there are some properties the county owns that will go up for sale, and he would like to use the proceeds from the sale as seed money for demolishing structures. He stated there are a large number of properties throughout the County that need to be cleaned up.

Commissioners agreed the County must go through the proper steps in the court system to demolish such properties. They also stated they would rather have voluntary compliance, and if not, further action would be taken. Commissioners discussed appropriating money in the budget to demolish two structures, per year, per district which is a start to cleaning up these properties.

County Manager Tobar reported there are two main issues with property maintenance – (1) "junk" in the front yard that would be visible from the road; and (2) landlords who do not repair things that present life and safety issues. The current Safe Property Standards deal with vacant buildings. He recommended Article V – Safe Property Standards be amended to address these two issues. He stated he would provide the proposed revision to the Board for their review prior to any actions being taken.

Plan First Application

County Manager Tobar requested approval for submission of an application for "Plan First" designation. He stated this designation would allow the County to be eligible to apply for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds each year for three (3) years. Assessment would be made and the County could become eligible for an additional (3) years. Board consensus was approval for submission of the Plan First application.

Probate Judge and Election Issues

Chair Craig stated Probate Judge Blackwell, who also serves as Election Superintendent,

previously addressed the Board regarding the increased amount of time required of him to oversee an election. Judge Blackwell recommended the County transition to a Board of Elections. Consensus of the Commissioners at that time was to further discuss this matter with Judge Blackwell to come to an agreement about how best to move forward.

Chair Craig presented information from a meeting with Judge Blackwell. Recommendation was for an additional employee to be hired for elections and another clerk to be hired in the Probate office. Discussion was held regarding an increase in the supplement the Probate Judge receives for serving as Election Superintendent. A proposal would be presented to Judge Blackwell; and if accepted, the matter would come before the Board for approval.

Commissioner Hall recommended that a letter be sent to the Governor and the Secretary of State expressing concern over how much the use of voting machines cost per day. Express the County's disagreement with another unfunded mandate.

Broadband

Commissioners discussed the importance of broadband in the County which would require the County to invest a great deal of money to make it happen. Broadband brings business in and could create a technology hub. County Manager Tobar is working on an application for "Broadband Ready" designation.

Assistant County Manager Hudson stated the County could build broadband and treat it as any other utility.

A feasibility study on broadband was recommended before a decision is made to pursue broadband. Commissioners Craig and Hall agreed to work with County Management staff to get representatives to bring information about broadband to the County.

Other Business

Discussion was held about a wellness program for employees which would decrease medical expenses for the County. The County could work with gyms / fitness groups to obtain special rates for employees, propose incentives for employees to participate, conduct evaluation of employees through insurance company and promote preventative maintenance / care.

Commissioner Davis reported she has been contacted by citizens requesting street lights in the County. She informed citizens the County does not provide street lights. She asked if future subdivision developments could be required to install street lights.

Commissioner Butts asked for a report of Sheriff Department employees and inmates at the jail that have tested positive for COVID.

Discussion was held about the amount of trash along roads throughout the County. County Manager reported that due to COVID the number of community service crews that normally pick up trash are much fewer. He stated there is only one (1) van and it can accommodate seven workers. He stated it is possible that workers could be hired through the WorkSource Development program to help with the trash problem.

Commissioners requested work orders be placed for various issues on Marshall Road, Hopewell Church Road and the road in front of East Baldwin Fire Department.

RV Ordinance

County Manager Tobar reported the entire Land Use Committee has not reviewed the proposed ordinance and recommendations from the subcommittee. He stated this ordinance will be discussed at a later time once the Land Use Committee reviews it.

Convenience Centers

Discussion was held on additional hours / days for opening convenience centers. Possible discussion with the City with a reasonable offer for their use of the centers to help offset the cost of operation of the centers.

Live Streaming Meetings

Discussion was held regarding live streaming meetings and recording meetings to be published on the County website / Face Book page.

Adjournment

Commissioner Hall made a motion to adjourn at 3:25 p.m. Vice Chair Westmoreland seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "H. R. Craig".

Henry R. Craig
Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cynthia K. Cunningham".

Cynthia K. Cunningham
County Clerk