

Dawson County Board of Commissioners Planning Workshop
Thursday and Friday, January 25 and 26, 2024
Brasstown Valley Resort, 6321 Highway 76, Young Harris, Georgia 30582
1-5 PM Thursday, January 25, 2024
8 AM-Noon Friday, January 26, 2024



Minutes

Those present were Chairman Billy Thurmond; Commissioner Seth Stowers, District 1; Commissioner Chris Gaines, District 2; Commissioner Alexa Bruce, District 3; Commissioner Emory Dooley, District 4; County Manager Joey Leverette; County Clerk Kristen Cloud; Marshal Angela Byers; Public Works Director Robert Drewry; Planning & Development Director Sharon Farrell; Human Resources Director Kristi Finley; Emergency Services Director Troy Leist; Chief Financial Officer Vickie Neikirk; Parks & Recreation Director Matt Payne; and Information Technology Director Herman Thompson.

Day 1 (January 25, 2024)

Chairman Thurmond called the meeting to order.

- **Welcome and Growth Discussion**

County Manager Joey Leverette welcomed everyone and said the planning workshop's theme is "A Path Forward." He reviewed the afternoon agenda, topics discussed during 2023's Board of Commissioners (BOC) Planning Workshop, as well as highlights and accomplishments of 2023.

Leverette discussed residential housing development and growth in terms of lots. Lots not approved / possible pending between 2024 and 2026 is an estimated 1,000. That number, plus those lots developed in recent years, total more than 4,300.

Leverette also discussed population predictions for Dawson County, based on calculations from the Governor's Office of Planning & Budget. The population in Dawson County in 2060 is expected to total 45,638. Leverette also looked at Dawson land cover, 2001 versus 2021, and showed a predicted land cover for Dawson County in 2041. "I do think there's a strong counter argument to those people who say 'we're turning into Forsyth County,'" said Leverette, pointing out that good leadership, a comprehensive plan, and land use guidelines put Dawson County in a good position.

CFO Vickie Neikirk reviewed the county's finances, including inflation history, expense history, and revenue sources like Local Option Sales Tax (LOST), and projected LOST. "We have been very, very fortunate with our LOST, as well as our SPLOST (Special Purpose Local

Option Sales Tax),” said Neikirk, who also provided an update on the county’s investment history.

Discussion followed among the board and staff, particularly concerning investments made in staffing (wages, benefits, retention) and equipment, etc. as well as remaining in excellent financial standing.

- **Transportation Study Reviews**

Public Works Director Robert Drewry reviewed the county’s future infrastructure needs. He discussed Lumpkin Campground Road, which underwent two corridor studies – in 2019 and 2023. He discussed each of those studies, with projects being recommended into tiered priorities. Discussion followed among the BOC and staff.

Drewry discussed an upcoming Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST) referendum, which will appear on the May 21, 2024, ballot. Drewry reviewed TSPLOST funding and projects, if voters approve the referendum.

All agreed that the Highway 53 and Lumpkin Campground Road intersection is a top priority, regardless if TSPLOST is approved.

- **Parks & Recreation Future Needs**

Parks & Recreation Director Matt Payne reviewed the accomplishments of the Parks & Recreation department, including being able to accomplish many SPLOST VII projects with SPLOST VI monies. He said the department’s biggest need is a new gym facility. He showed the increase in youth basketball and wrestling participants from 2017 to 2022. He said youth volleyball participation is maximized. “We can really do some special stuff with a new building,” he said. In addition, Payne said that inside pickleball numbers total 350 participants. Payne used Dobbs Creek Recreation Center in Cumming and the Fannin County Recreation Center as examples of rec centers he would like to mirror in Dawson County. Payne also said such a rec center could generate some revenue by hosting tournaments. Dobbs Creek with six courts, he said, brings in \$8,500 per weekend event; Suwanee Sports Academy with eight courts brings in \$10,000 per weekend event. Discussion followed among the BOC and staff.

Break

- **Solid Waste Fund Update**

Drewry reviewed the solid waste (enterprise fund) unrestricted net position between 2017 and 2023. He also detailed needed solid waste capital improvements. He and Leverette discussed funding options for the needed improvements. Discussion followed among the BOC and staff.

- **Current Projects Update**

Leverette briefly provided an update on current large projects, to include the E9-1-1 center/radio communications, Styles Park (and nature trails), other Parks & Recreation 2024 projects, a new health department building, and a new training burn building for the fire

department. Leverette also provided a list of upcoming local and state/federal transportation projects in Dawson County.

- **Presentation: Russell Creek Reservoir**

Leverette showed a video from Etowah Water & Sewer (EWSA) about Russell Creek Reservoir. “It’s going to be a jewel for Dawson County,” said Leverette. He reviewed a presentation from EWSA General Manager Brooke Anderson, who was unable to attend the workshop.

Final questions and discussion from Day 1 were had.

Chairman Thurmond adjourned the meeting.

Day 2 (January 26, 2024)

Chairman Thurmond called the meeting to order.

County Manager Joey Leverette welcomed everyone and reviewed the morning agenda.

- **Community Improvements Discussion / Ordinance Updates**

Leverette said the litter control and solid waste management (chapter 46), abatement of nuisance property (chapter 48), and property maintenance ordinances would be discussed. He said, no matter which path forward is chosen, it would be a long-term commitment. Leverette reviewed each of the ordinances as well as results of a recent “Sense of Place” survey concerning property maintenance, etc. He also detailed options to consider concerning the property maintenance ordinance, which currently is under a moratorium. Options include: make no changes to the property maintenance ordinance or solid waste ordinance; revise the property maintenance ordinance; revise the solid waste ordinance to include provisions of the property maintenance ordinance (rescind the property maintenance ordinance); or create Gateway Corridor Overlay Districts that address specific property maintenance in certain area. Regardless of the option chosen, it will be necessary that goals and an enforcement plan with a manageable range of cases annually is developed and approved. Discussion followed among the BOC and staff. Commissioner Gaines suggested BOC members sit down one or two at a time with appropriate staff members and review the property maintenance ordinance line by line. “Let’s just get more surgical about it and prioritize [what each of us and our districts want and do not want]...” he said.

Break

- **Informational Presentation from Jarrard & Davis**

Attorney Aaron Meyer of Jarrard & Davis made a presentation about a fire tax district for informational purposes only. Discussion followed among the BOC and staff.

- **Non-Conforming Use**

Leverette said, “This issue in Dawson County is not unique to Dawson County.” He reviewed what currently “is on the books” and discussed options for compliance of non-conforming existing properties, including special use permits with restrictions, spot zoning (county initiated) with restrictions, and others. Planning & Development Director Sharon Farrell talked about home-based businesses and about commercial vehicles in agricultural zoning (truck routes), etc. Discussion followed among the BOC and staff.

- **Stormwater Updates and Improvements**

This topic was not addressed due to time constraints.

- **Final Thoughts and Adjournment**

Chairman Thurmond adjourned the meeting.

APPROVE:

ATTEST:

Billy Thurmond, Chairman

Kristen Cloud, County Clerk