

**DAWSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
VOTING SESSION MINUTES – THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2023
DAWSON COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER ASSEMBLY ROOM
25 JUSTICE WAY, DAWSONVILLE, GEORGIA 30534
IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE 4:00 PM WORK SESSION**

ROLL CALL: 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 Attorneys Angela Davis and Melissa Tracy; County Clerk Kristen Cloud; and interested citizens of Dawson County.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Chairman Thurmond

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Chairman Thurmond announced that a groundbreaking ceremony for Styles Park would be held on October 27, 2023.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Motion passed 4-0 to approve the Minutes of the Work Session held on October 5, 2023. Stowers/Gaines

Motion passed 4-0 to approve the Minutes of the Voting Session held on October 5, 2023. Dooley/Stowers

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Motion passed 4-0 to approve the agenda with the following change:

- Addition of Nos. 3-6 under New Business:
 - War Hill Park Master Plan Update;
 - Special Event Permit Application - NAPA Auto Parts Grand Opening Event Featuring Chase Elliott Autograph Signing;
 - Georgia Department of Natural Resources Recreational Trails Grant Program and Project Budget Request; and
 - County Manager-Proposed Emergency Services Department Staffing Program Plan

Gaines/Bruce

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Dawson County Comprehensive Plan 5-Year Update (2nd of 2 hearings; 1st hearing was held at the October 17, 2023, Planning Commission Meeting)

Planning & Development Director Sharon Farrell reviewed the Dawson County Comprehensive Plan 5-Year-Update, which was followed by board discussion.

Chairman Thurmond opened the hearing by asking if there was anyone present who wished to be heard on the Dawson County Comprehensive Plan 5-Year-Update.

The following spoke on the Dawson County Comprehensive Plan 5-Year-Update:

- Mike Turner, Roswell, Georgia, said he represents the Kenneth Turner Estate and B&K Turner Family LLP of Dawsonville. “I want to refer you to the character area of the ‘Dawson’ and, to the eastern portion of that character area, we have a parcel of land that is approximately 600 acres. It has common ownership in the Turner family name. It’s known as “Magic Dam.” There is about a 111-acre portion of that that is recently added to that larger parcel and it is in a different character area and we’d like that to all be the Dawson character area, and that’s Tax Map Parcel 103-002. However, it’s only 111 acres of it. The rest of that parcel belongs to the Noblin Estate, not to us.” Turner added, “The second part of my request is on the west side of Dawsonville, and we have approximately 1,500 acres there to the west. Portions of that property are in the Dawson character area [and] portions of it are not, even though it’s all the same property. We are asking that Tax Map Parcel 083-024, Tax Map Parcel 083-025 and Tax Map Parcels 083-025-001, 002 and 003 all be made into the Dawson character area, which would consistently make all the property we own in those parcels one character area.”
- Jane Graves, Dawsonville, Georgia, said she is a member of the Long Range Planning Committee. “I’ve taken a look at the vision statement and I know that’s been gone over several times. My concern is that...‘scenic’ is a subjective term and is in the eye of the beholder. ...Views of mountains can be quite nice from a concrete jungle. So, the talk about growth, promoting economic value and further economic expansion gives the idea in the current vision statement that that’s what we’re all about and, I think that in some of the surveys, that doesn’t quite ring true. So, I attempted something slightly different, some type of modification for your consideration.” Graves proposed, “Dawson County will foster a growth strategy that is sustainable, respect the natural environment and balance beneficial economic expansion, diverse housing and job opportunities to support and enhance life qualities and prosperity.” Graves added, “One other thing I might suggest is, do we really want to have a photograph of Dollar General? Are we advertising for them? Do we want more of those?” She also cited numerous pages within the transportation portion of the plan that contain maps. “On these maps, it does identify recreational areas and it has slapped right over the lake area, where a lot of us pay tremendously high taxes, that it is a recreational area. The concern we have is it is turning into that because Forsyth has changed their short-term rental ordinance. So, people are flocking to Dawson because we don’t have the controls on the lake. That’s something you might want to think about changing in that ordinance. Putting that ‘Lake Lanier Recreational Area’ on those transportation maps basically begs the question is that what you want of that area?”

Chairman Thurmond asked if there was anyone else present who wished to speak on the Dawson County Comprehensive Plan 5-Year-Update and, hearing none, closed the hearing.

Motion was made by Commissioner Dooley and seconded by Commissioner Stowers to approve the Dawson County Comprehensive Plan 5-Year Update with the following changes:

- Page 33, Agricultural Conservation district: delete references to density since density can be found in the Land Use Code;
- Page 39, Lake Area: delete references to density since density can be found in the Land Use Code;
- Page 52, Rural Living: delete references to density since density can be found in the Land Use Code;
- Page 45, Landscape Requirements in the Hightower district: delete “a minimum of 20 percent” and “exclusive of utility easements” (can reference Landscape and Tree Ordinance);
- Dawson district (Page 42) and Suburban Living (Page 55): correct typos from “acres” to “percent”; and correct any other applicable density references from acres to percent;
- Ensure the 2019 element of the Lumpkin Campground Road traffic study is included in the transportation plan;
- Expand Suburban Living of the character area map to Tax Map Parcels 098-002, 098-015 and 098-016;
- Expand the Dawson character area of the character area map to Tax Map Parcels to 103-002 (“Magic Dam,” 111 acres of parcel), 083-024, 083-025 and 083-025-001, 002 and 003;
- Remove any references and/or photos of commercial entities; and
- Change the vision statement to: “Dawson County will foster a growth strategy that is sustainable, respect the natural environment and balance beneficial economic expansion, diverse housing and job opportunities to support and enhance life qualities and prosperity.”

Motion was amended by Commissioner Gaines and seconded by Commissioner Bruce to change the vision statement to: “Dawson County will foster a growth strategy that is sustainable, respect the natural environment and balance beneficial economic expansion, diverse housing and job opportunities to support and enhance quality of life and prosperity.”

The amended motion passed 4-0.

The original motion passed 4-0.

Proposed Revisions to a Dawson County Ordinance Involving Massage and Bodywork Therapy Businesses (1st of 1 hearing)

County Attorney Melissa Tracy reviewed Proposed Revisions to a Dawson County Ordinance Involving Massage and Bodywork Therapy Businesses.

Chairman Thurmond opened the hearing by asking if there was anyone present who wished to be heard on Proposed Revisions to a Dawson County Ordinance Involving Massage and Bodywork Therapy Businesses and, hearing none, closed the hearing.

Motion passed 4-0 to approve Proposed Revisions to a Dawson County Ordinance Involving Massage and Bodywork Therapy Businesses. Stowers/Bruce

Proposed Revisions to a Dawson County Ordinance Involving Tattoo / Body Art Businesses, to Include a Sunset Provision (1st of 1 hearing)

County Attorney Melissa Tracy reviewed Proposed Revisions to a Dawson County Ordinance Involving Tattoo / Body Art Businesses, to Include a Sunset Provision.

Chairman Thurmond opened the hearing by asking if there was anyone present who wished to be heard on Proposed Revisions to a Dawson County Ordinance Involving Tattoo / Body Art Businesses, to Include a Sunset Provision, and, hearing none, closed the hearing.

Motion passed 4-0 to approve Proposed Revisions to a Dawson County Ordinance Involving Tattoo / Body Art Businesses, to Include a Sunset Provision. Bruce/Gaines

ZONING:

ZA 23-07 - Ben Trail is requesting to rezone 2.036 acres of TMP 102 030 from RA (Residential Agriculture) to RSR (Residential Sub Rural) (New Bethel Church Road).

Chairman Thurmond announced that if anyone contributed more than \$250 to the commissioners or chairman in the past two years and wished to speak, they would have to fill out a disclosure form, which would be made available to them. Under the normal program, 10 minutes is given to those who wish to speak in favor of or opposition to with some redirect, time permitting.

Planning & Development Director Sharon Farrell said, “This is a minor split from a larger 16-acre parcel. Since the plat came in, there’s a correction - the plat was approved and the actual acreage is 2.161...” Farrell said the request is to rezone from Residential Agriculture to Residential Sub-Rural Manufactured/Moved, or RSRMM. It’s a consistent request,” said Farrell, adding that the Planning Commission recommended approval of the application.

Applicant Ben Trail, Dawsonville, Georgia, said, “My client owns 17 acres in that area. ... The existing zoning states that if I was going to subdivide the property, I needed to have at least 5 acres. The owner wants to sell to a client that has been renting that greenhouse... He can’t afford 5 acres. He’s agreed to buy 2 acres with the existing well. Therefore, I need to rezone that area to RSRMM.”

Chairman Thurmond opened the hearing by asking if there was anyone present who wished to speak either for or against the application and, hearing none, closed the hearing.

Motion passed 4-0 to approve ZA 23-07 with the change to the acreage (2.161 acres); rezone from (Residential Agriculture to Residential Sub-Rural Manufactured/Moved. Dooley/Stowers

NEW BUSINESS:

Consideration of Request to Write Off Old, Uncollectable Ambulance Accounts

Motion passed 4-0 to approve a Request to Write Off Old, Uncollectable Ambulance Accounts in the amount of \$553,374.44. Gaines/Bruce

Consideration of Settlement Agreement Concerning Stacy and Kevin Latimer

Motion passed 4-0 to approve a Settlement Agreement Concerning Stacy and Kevin Latimer, authorizing the chairman to sign the agreement. Gaines/Dooley

Consideration of War Hill Park Master Plan Update

Motion passed 4-0 to approve a War Hill Park Master Plan Update with the following contingencies:

1. Remove a proposed observation tower;

2. Move a proposed electronic gate to the entrance of the campground; and
3. Give staff the ability to engage with local citizens in the area to design a fire pit area for local citizens.

Stowers/Bruce

Consideration of Special Event Permit Application - NAPA Auto Parts Grand Opening Event Featuring Chase Elliott Autograph Signing

Motion passed 4-0 to approve a Special Event Permit Application - NAPA Auto Parts Grand Opening Event Featuring Chase Elliott Autograph Signing. Gaines/Bruce

Consideration of Georgia Department of Natural Resources Recreational Trails Grant Program and Project Budget Request

Motion passed 4-0 to approve a Georgia Department of Natural Resources Recreational Trails Grant Program and Project Budget Request; to allow staff to submit for the grant, set a \$500,000 budget for the park's trails, commit to a 50/50 grant match, and send a support letter. Money will come from either Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax or impact fee funds. Dooley/Bruce

Consideration of County Manager-Proposed Emergency Services Department Staffing Program Plan

Motion passed 4-0 to approve a County Manager-Proposed Emergency Services (ES) Department Staffing Program Plan; to approve a memorandum provided to the Board of Commissioners – Nos. 1-7, effective immediately, as follows:

1. Allow ES management to provide details and hold discussions with all ES staff related to the proposed Career Advanced Through Training (CATT) program prior to the formal approval of the FY24 budget. These group and one-on-one discussions would take place in the next few weeks;
2. Allow Human Resources to post/advertise the proposed new Training Captain position on October 20, 2023, and allow ES to fill the position prior to the end of FY23. This position is proposed in the FY24 budget. The position will be, if approved, advertised internally and externally (per the motion, this position will be unfrozen);
3. Allow the implementation of the shift stipend (\$1.00 per hour) for EMTs currently being utilized on Medic shifts to become effective October 28, 2023. The shift stipend is proposed in the FY24 budget and, if approved, would continue in FY24. It is estimated that for the remainder of FY23 the implementation will cost approximately \$10,000;
4. Allow the conversion (reclassification) of three (3) existing and approved full-time FF/Medic positions into six (6) part-time FF/Medic positions effective October 20, 2023. There are no budgeting costs associated with this request;
5. Allow the implementation of a Sign-On Bonus Program to provide a one-time payment of \$2,000 for FF/EMT positions and a one-time payment of \$3,000 for FF/Medic positions. The program would be effective retroactively to September 1, 2023, and would end July 1, 2024. Depending on the results of the program, staff may request an extension of the program after July 2024. Participants (new hires) will be required to remain employed with Dawson County for a period of one year or they would be required to pay back the bonus. Formal policies and procedures of the program will be formally developed. The financial costs of the program for

the proposed time period depends on the number of new hires, but the estimated cost is \$30,000. Additionally, allow the implementation of a referral program that will allow any Dawson County employee who officially refers a new hire candidate for FF/EMT/Medic positions only to qualify for a \$1,000 referral award (the referral program would end July 1, 2024, unless extended by the Board of Commissioners);

6. Allow an average pay rate increase of 10.85% for certified staff effective October 28, 2023. The table (included with the original memo) reverts the ES positions into general government existing grade and eliminates the separate ES grade system. This initiative is proposed to close the gap between the average pay rates in the Dawson County area and those communities in which we are in direct competition for skilled Fire/EMT/Medic labor. If approved, staff will make adjustments to the previously proposed CATT program that accounted for wage compression. In the CATT program, wage compression adjustments were proposed for Captain and above positions. If this proposed pay rate increase is approved at this time, the wage compression adjustments for Captain and above positions will be eliminated for the CATT program. Likewise, calculations were made based on slotting assumptions for FF/EMT/Medic for the FY24 CATT. Based on a full review of existing training documentation, less funding than was proposed in the FY24 budget will be needed for the CATT program. The changes to the proposed CATT program will result in \$225,000 in funding that is proposed in the FY24 budget that can be utilized to fund the 10.85% average pay rate increase. The estimated costs for the remainder of FY23 for the pay rate increase is approximately \$70,000. The costs for the wage increase for FY24 is \$459,162.34; however, taking into consideration requested adjusted funding (-\$225,000) from the proposed CATT program in FY24, if approved, the total additional funds needed in FY24 to fund the average pay rate increase, including benefits, is \$234,162; and
7. Allow, if No. 6 is approved, a 5% pay increase effective October 28, 2023 for Division Chiefs (2 positions) and the ES Director (1 position) to account for wage compression. Total cost for FY24 is approximately \$17,000.

The motion also gives staff the ability to amend the handbook in coordination with the initiatives outlined above if needed.

Stowers/Bruce

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Don Silverberg said, "I have special needs grandchildren. There's a place in Dawsonville called Creative Enterprises. It is in the basement of the Harmony Church on Harmony Church Road. One of the reasons I'm here is because we are in dire need of additional space in our own building, or something better to service these people. They are people that are ages 18 to 65-69. They have no place else to go other than sitting at home watching TV." He added, "This place has been active for about two years. They've gone from eight people to now 36 people. We're trying to make a better Dawsonville and a better location for these people. They need assistance, a safe place to go and a possible new location. It's a day facility. We have representatives that pick up to our facility from Lumpkin, Dawson and Forsyth County." Silverberg said, "We're not asking you guys to give us a building. We're asking for your help and support and maybe some guidance on the best way to do this."

Laura Boschelli said, "I'm here to tell you what a wonderful program [Creative Enterprises] is. I have been a teacher over 40 years. I retired at 70. I stayed home maybe six months, and then I started working with the adults here. I've always said that, once my special needs kids get out of high school, there's nowhere to go. They sit at home. They play video games. They eat and get really large and get very, very unhealthy, and they don't have friends. So, as a teacher and also working with these great adults that are so much fun, anybody's welcome to come visit us over at the church. We may put you to work, but Harmony has been such a wonderful thing for us, but as we acquire more and more wheelchairs, it's harder. We have to get them up a gravel road. There's only one bathroom that's wheelchair accessible and sometimes they fall down in the bathroom and I have to go get them." She added, "We just want you to know we're here. You're welcome to visit us any time. If you know anybody – some great real estate agents - anything's possible. We're growing, and we want to keep growing in keeping these kids. We just had a new kid from Dawson County High School that didn't know we were here. He just started this week and he's amazing. It is just an amazing place, and we would love your support and guidance and anything you can give us." Boschelli said, "I'm a parent of a special needs kid, too; an adult who's 45. They don't go away after high school. We need a spot that they can make friends. We go to movies together, we volunteer at the thrift stores, they make friends."

ADJOURNMENT:

APPROVE:

ATTEST:

Billy Thurmond, Chairman

Kristen Cloud, County Clerk