



You Are Why We Are Here

**FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION MINUTES
September 24, 2019
6:00 P.M.**

BOC: Commission Chairman Thomas Bridges
District 1 Commissioner Robert Franklin
District 4 Commissioner Eddie Wester

Absent: District 2 Commissioner Dr. Jason Macomson
District 3 Commissioner Ryan Swails

Media: Shane Scoggins, Franklin County Citizen Leader
MJ Kneiser, WLHR

Staff: County Manager Beth Thomas
County Clerk Elaine Evans

Item 1: **Call meeting to order** – Chairman Bridges called the September work session to order and expressed appreciation to those in attendance for taking an interest in the County business.

Item 2: **Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance** – Commissioner Wester led the invocation and pledge of allegiance to the American flag.

Item 3: **Items for discussion**

A. Public Comment

Chairman Bridges asked if anyone would like to speak in public comment. He said to come forward and state your name.

Mark Blalock stated his background is in engineering and maintenance supervision. He said one of the concerns from the citizens in the area of the power plant is noise from the fans and the steam blow off. There are fan silencers and steam silencers which could be placed on them that would remove the noises from the environment. The decibel level from the power plant is reaching 190 and this is way above the level to cause hearing loss.

Soot is another concern that is affecting part of the neighborhood. Mr. Blalock said there are devices that can be placed on the burners which make the end product be crystal clear air. The citizens are also concerned about what is being burned that may cause contamination. Mr. Blalock stated they are not trying to run the power plant off, the surrounding citizens want them to be a good neighbor and take care of these concerns.

Corey Schiffer a resident of Burke Road stated he lives close to the power plant and is



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concerned about the noise. He made the observation that sound barriers have been built at taxpayers' expense for the residents who live near the Interstate but his neighborhood is expected to live with the noise. Mr. Schiffer said there is light pollution that affects gazing at the sky at night and smoke and soot.

Bruce O'Conner of Whippoorwill Lane stated he is straight across from the power plant facility. He stated he has severe hearing loss and is able to hear the rumble of the plant and is concerned about this. The waste disposal of the ash from the plant is a concern also and EPD should be involved.

Rodney Black of Burke Road stated he is approximately 4,000 feet from the power plant. There are trees on Mr. Black's property which serve as a sound barrier while the leaves are on but this winter the sound will be terrible when they fall off. He stated he is a retired journey lineman and he knows the importance of having a power plant. The stench from the plant is terrible and the sound can be horrific. Mr. Black said his quality of life is affected. He questioned who investigated this power plant and thought this was a good idea.

Gerry Wilson of Whippoorwill Lane said good information was presented tonight with great solutions. She asked the Commissioners to ask Franklin GRP and someone from Veolia to come and speak with the citizens about their concerns. The soot from the power plant has covered the acre of organic blueberries grown by Mrs. Wilson and she is concerned.

Garvis McElroy said the Planning Commission denied the approval of allowing the power plant to purchase the 15 acres but then the Commissioners approved it. The property taxes have gone up and the values of their properties have gone down. Mr. McElroy questioned if the County will lower the property taxes because of this.

John Bertrang of New Bethel Road said his wife has asthma and her oxygen level has gone down since the start of the power plant. He said his wife's doctor told her to get EPD involved. His concern is the power plant is hurting everyone's health.

B. Power Plant issues

Teresa Thomas thanked the Commissioners for allowing her the time to come and make comments and ask questions. She questioned who will hold GRP accountable for the things they are doing. Will the Commissioners hold EPD accountable and then the citizens hold the Commissioners accountable? Chairman Bridges stated all angles will be investigated to study the issue.

Ms. Thomas said she is especially concerned about the quality of the air and soot being breathed in and getting on people's bodies. There are a lot of elderly people in the community and this needs to be looked into. Ms. Thomas said the power plant needs to be a good neighbor and resolve the problems. She asked the Commissioners to please help with this. If the issues are corrected the plant will be a good neighbor.

Donnie Gettys of Burke Road stated he lives a few hundred yards from the power plant. He referenced statements from the American Heart Association and American Lung



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Association that the emissions from this type of biomass fuel plant is the worse type of pollution there is. EPD will not allow this type of plant to be built near a school or a community that has a sensitive population. Mr. Gettys stated the 25 jobs created by GRP has not offset the lives it has destroyed and disappointed in the community. He stated there are days that he and his wife leave their home just to escape the noise and smell.

Mr. Gettys stated the property values near GRP have been severely damaged and asked the Commissioners what would be done about it. He and his neighbors are paying the same amount of property taxes although the plant has devalued their homes. Each of the people near the plant are suffering a monetary loss and loss of happiness while GRP and Franklin County profit. What do the Commissioners plan to do about that? Mr. Gettys said the way for Franklin County to resolve this is for GRP and Franklin County to buy all the property within a one-mile radius of the plant to create a buffer zone. After purchase of the land the owners should be compensated for having to relocate. Mr. Gettys said Franklin County should purchase an insurance policy for those citizens and livestock affected that are within a two-mile area of GRP. He gave a summary as to pray for strength, love your family, our lives matter, and God bless us all.

Chairman Bridges said the Commissioners take this matter seriously and are in the process of reaching out to GRP. Mrs. Thomas said she spoke with the manager at GRP and asked for the public to be addressed. She will forward all the questions and concerns from tonight's meeting to GRP. The start up for the plant is taking longer than was anticipated and GRP is currently performing sound surveys to address some of the issues. Mrs. Thomas said they are still saying when the plant is up and running the sound should not be greater than 80 decibels. EPD will visit for compliance when the plant is fully operational.

C. Presentations

*Coroner **Scott O'Barr** came forward and introduced himself along with his Deputy Coroner Clayton Bryant. The role of the Coroner is to determine cause and manner of death. The Coroner works closely with local law enforcement, GBI, DNR and others to make sure the job is done to the most professional level possible. The Coroner's office does not handle anything criminal, only the death.*

Mr. O'Barr stated for the last 12 years a transport service has been used to carry the deceased to a crime lab for an autopsy. The County purchased a body cooler several years back that is located at Sacred Heart Hospital in Lavonia. Mr. O'Barr said once the body is stored in the cooler, he and/or the County do not have any control over it because it is not located on County owned property. The Coroner's office does not have a way to transport deceased people. Mr. O'Barr stated he and Mr. Bryant have to rely on an on-staff ambulance from the EMS department which causes a potential problem if it is needed for emergency care while the transport is being done.

A building to house the body cooler needs to be found so the Coroner's office will have control of the deceased. Mr. O'Barr said he and Mr. Bryant do not have an office, they both work out of their homes. There is also no space to meet with the families of the deceased. Mr. O'Barr requested a split side building be provided for the Coroner's office that would



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contain body cooler space, an examination room, storage space and office space for both he and Mr. Bryant. The office space Mr. O'Barr is requesting would not have full-time staff from the Coroner's office. He suggested using open space in other office buildings.

This past July there was an accident on the Interstate that claimed seven lives. Mr. O'Barr said for the first hour he and Mr. Bryant worked to find storage space for the seven bodies. A neighboring county had enough space and their staff and vehicles transported the bodies to their facility. Mr. O'Barr said from 7:00 p.m. until midnight the Hart County Coroner, Madison County Coroner and five Madison County Sheriff's deputies helped Franklin County to identify the bodies. Mr. Bryant was in Greenville, SC dealing with a child out of the same accident. This was out of anyone's control but it is possible for something like to happen again. Mr. O'Barr said the Coroner's office is on-track to have involvement with close to 100 deaths this year.

Commissioner Wester and Commissioner Franklin expressed appreciation to Mr. O'Barr and Mr. Bryant for the job they do. Chairman Bridges echoed those thanks.

*EMS Director **Terry Harris** thanked the Commissioners for the opportunity to speak and for their support of EMS, E911 and public service in the County. He said the total calls for 911 for 2018 were 58,218 which is an average of 160 calls per day. Out of the total calls the 911 calls were 21,623 coming through a 911 trunk. The other 36,595 calls came into 911 on the admin line. All of the alarm calls come in through the admin line. The 911 calls for 2019 are projected to be 56,505 with the actual as of today being 41,024. This is an average projection of 155 calls per day.*

Mr. Harris said the 911 radio system is outdated. Franklin County is on an analog system and all surrounding counties have gone to a digital system. He said there is a lot of interference that comes in on the radio system because of it being outdated. This is something that will have to be done in the future although it will be expensive to upgrade the system. Commissioner Franklin questioned if this is the reason 911 calls may go to another county. Mr. Harris explained the cell phone calls bounce off of towers and they go to the nearest 911 center. Chairman Bridges questioned if there are three employees per shift in the 911 center. Mr. Harris said they strive to have three employees per shift.

The call volume for 2018 for the EMS department was 4,703 calls. Out of these calls 65% was transported to the local hospital in Lavonia. The remaining 35% was for out of county transports, including Greenville, Anderson, Athens or Northeast Georgia facilities. The total calls as of yesterday (September 23) is 3,448 with the projection to be 4,731. The average per calls per ambulance is 1,000. The calls are being maintained with four ambulances and the supervisor unit. If the call volume continues to increase another ambulance will be needed. Commissioner Franklin questioned if the ambulance would be added to an existing station or if another station would need to be built. Mr. Harris said it would be to an existing building.

Chairman Bridges asked how the ambulances are holding up. Mr. Harris said the ambulances are holding up well. They swapped back to the F450 and they are running a lot



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better. Chairman Bridges said he has received comments from the public of how professional and what good care was given from the EMS personnel. Mr. Harris said he has a good bunch of people who go above and beyond to do a good job.

D. Resolution – support of HB 302 & SB 172

Chairman Bridges said this was legislation that went through last year. The Commissioners are looking into the possibility of a resolution. Commissioner Wester said this was brought to his attention by several people in the Atlanta area. County governments and local municipalities in some areas are deciding how an individual can build their home and what a business has to look like. This bill was supported by Senator Wilkinson and Representative Powell. Commissioner Wester stated after looking into this, his opinion is this is too much government overreach. The government should not be able to tell anyone how to build a house or how their business needs to look. Commissioner Wester said he would like for the Commissioners to sign a resolution supporting the bill from Senator Wilkinson and Representative Powell. Chairman Bridges thanked Commissioner Wester for bringing this to the attention of the Commission Board.

E. Manager's Report

Mrs. Thomas thanked Mr. O'Barr for his service and his professionalism. She also thanked Mr. Harris for his help with anything he is asked to do. The capital needs referenced by Mr. O'Barr and Mr. Harris will have to be looked at.

The tank on Hwy 59 came down today in about three seconds. Mrs. Thomas said the water projects are progressing with the pump station being wired this week. The culverts for Rocky Ford Road and Banks Road should be delivered Friday with work to begin next week on Rocky Ford.

No applications have been received for the open position on the Planning Commission. Mrs. Thomas encouraged anyone with an interest in serving the County to please apply. Qualifying fees need to be set in December for next year's elections.

Mrs. Thomas said in January a road and bridge improvement funding mechanism was discussed. Franklin County has 500 plus roads with over 50% of them being dirt and gravel. The State has allowed counties the opportunity to implement road and bridge improvement by citizen vote. Mrs. Thomas estimated fifteen million dollars could be collected for roads and bridges if passed. The County can also go into agreements with the cities. Mrs. Thomas presented deadlines to the Commissioners if this is something they want to pursue. Chairman Bridges said it is disheartening to see the roads not be in better shape. Anyone passing through Franklin County would be charged the tax and this would help to improve the roads and bridges.

F. Announcements

Commissioner Wester thanked the Coroner, EMS and Sheriff departments for the jobs they do. He stated most citizens do not understand what these people deal with on a daily basis and they need to be in our prayers.



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Commissioner Franklin thanked the citizens for coming to tonight's meeting. He stated he appreciates the work done on the roads but gets upset when people misuse them and tear them up.

Chairman Bridges adjourned the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Signed on the _____ day of _____, 2019

Chairman J. Thomas Bridges

Robert L. Franklin, District 1 Commissioner

Dr. Jason Macomson, District 2 Commissioner

Ryan Swails, District 3 Commissioner

Eddie Wester, District 4 Commissioner

Elaine H. Evans, County Clerk