



You Are Why We Are Here

**FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
June 18, 2020
5:30 p.m.**

- BOC:** Commission Chairman Thomas Bridges
District 2 Commissioner Dr. Jason Macomson
District 3 Commissioner Ryan Swails
- Absent:** District 4 Commissioner Eddie Wester
District 1 Commissioner Robert Franklin
- Media:** Shane Scoggins, Franklin County Citizen
MJ Kneiser, 92.1 WLHR
- Staff:** County Manager Beth Thomas
County Clerk Kayla Finger

1. Call Public Hearing Meeting to Order Chairman Bridges called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. He asked people to respect the rules of social distancing and remarked that the hearing was also being documented on Zoom.

2. Items for Discussion

a. Public Hearing Items

- i. **County Budget 2021:** Chairman Bridges asked County Manager Beth Thomas to present a review of the proposed 2021 budget. Manager Thomas stated the draft budget has been on file at the clerk's office since June 4th and was available for public review. The board was provided with copies as well with an attached highlight report documenting some changes in revenue. Manager Thomas noted that the overall economic impact of Covid-19 is still uncertain. The last sales tax revenue stream that reflects March's sales was comparable to what it has been running the last 12 months and the last 18 months. The sales tax that comes in at the end of June will be reflective of April and that should give a better understanding of Covid-19's effects on sales tax. The way Manager Thomas budgeted revenue this year is similar to how sales tax revenue was budgeted last year in that anything that was brought in via real growth or inflationary growth last year was set aside with the plan of moving forward on capital improvement projects such as a new judicial or administrative building. The idea last



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year was to take that money and set it aside for a few years then the county would know they could support a debt service payment. Manager Thomas explained that because of this approach the county now has that revenue that was not used for operational purposes that can be used this year to offset the unexpected drop in sales tax which puts Franklin County in a better position than some of the other surrounding counties. According to Manager Thomas the draft budget includes a \$500,000.00 estimated reduction in sales tax and a \$300,000.00 reduction in fines and forfeitures. The court system has been closed and is just now beginning to open back up it is unknown how long this may impact the county. Manager Thomas explained that the budget must be completed prior to the tax digest so any inflationary growth seen afterwards can be rolled back since the budget is not created on the increase of property tax, with the exception of the county's largest taxpayer, it is anticipated from their returns that their bill will increase and we will utilize that to fund our uncontrollable necessary expenses and our health insurance so that our employees will not be impacted since a COLA was not budgeted. Manager Thomas mentioned expenditure charts and that salaries and wages account for 67% of the overall cost. Manager Thomas pointed out some risk areas of minimal budgeting for capital expenditure at 1.3% of overall cost, and about 53% of the overall budget goes to public safety which breaks down to the sheriff's department at 30%, 911 and EMS at 23% and the judicial system has the bulk of the funding. Global adjustments were made on the county health insurance which will have an approximate increase of \$175k, based off of a fully staffed model and based on a 7.5% increase in premiums. Additional global adjustments include no COLAS and changes are coming for elected official salary calculations which are prescribed by law. Manager Thomas explained that these changes are not currently included in our budget due to the delay in the legislative session. Property Insurance will be increased by \$22k, and retirement will increase \$85k based off of prior year adjustments, the firefighter policy will also increase by \$1,700.00, and no adjustments have been made for workers compensation yet. Manager Thomas stated fixed expense would be staying the same and these fixed items include stuff like the light bill that is necessary and can't be changed. Manager Thomas went over some risk areas in the budget which included the pay scale being below market and the county's reliance on SPLOST for updates and upgrades on aging facilities and no vehicle replacement policy. In regards to the county's highways and streets Manager Thomas stated that back in FY2016 Franklin County adjusted to everybody's run rate and then looked at all possible ways to control and pull back and the end result was



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a cut back on the county's gravel budget and the contract labor & asphalt budget by about 35% that has never been reinstated. Manager Thomas emphasized that even though the road department comes in under budget, it is because of conscious efforts to be as conservative as possible with gravel application and holding off on projects until the end of the year to know how much money is left. According to Manager Thomas the county is currently experiencing issues with its radio system and there is a definite need to convert from an analog system to a digital system and the county does not have that in the SPLOST. Manager Thomas continued that all of the EMS monitors need to be replaced and there is no money for this and GIS technology needs to be on the forefront of Franklin County's future. The next point from Manager Thomas was about the last fly over which took place in the fall of 2014 and it has been budgeted for the past two years, but usually several counties try to go in together as a group to help with cost. Georgia Mountain Regional Commission has recently been asking for interest again amongst the counties. Commissioner Macomson asked the date of the last flyover and cost. Manager Thomas stated fall of 2014 and she didn't have an exact number just an estimate of about \$15,000.00 in the budget depending on the number of other contributing parties. Manager Thomas clarified the county would get a general flyover map and would not be purchasing the more expensive option of LIDAR. Manager Thomas also emphasized the importance of updating and integrating GIS for planning & codes, 911, and the tax assessor's office. Manager Thomas addressed budget requests including the animal shelter's increase. The rationale behind this decision to increase the animal shelter's budget can be attributed to the overwhelming response from the citizens for county wide animal control when the newspaper reached out to the public. Manager Thomas also noted the increase for the public defender budget and the request from the library administration for an increase to compensate cleaning purposes. The most expensive item on the budget is a proposed technology contract which is very important for the Board of Commissions office and all other departments. Commissioner Swails asked about potential malware threats and if an IT partnership would help with this. Manager Thomas stated yes that in most cases they cover the payment and recovery process. Manager Thomas explained that the commissions office has its own server and each department has a server and the commissions office has been storing internally and the guy that set up the office has been graciously helping on an ad-hoc basis. Manager Thomas explained that currently the office backs up to tape every other day and puts it in the safe and this IT contract will provide a third back up offsite.



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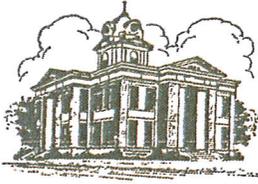
Commissioner Macomson asked if the county had anything offsite currently like a remote server for the county website. Manager Thomas responded that the hard files are on Gina Kesler's computer and it is cloud hosted but currently the county has nothing off site. Commissioner Macomson suggested it may make more sense and be less expensive to house the webpage offsite through a third party. Manager Thomas agreed and referenced a price quote of approximately \$10,000.00 for Municode to redesign the website and \$2,200.00 annually to host. The website was last updated about 5 years ago. Commissioner Macomson asked how long was left in SPLOST V. Manager Thomas responded about three (3) years are left and it works in cycles of three (3) years in and three (3) years out and the county will have the option to renew but her opinion would be to continue it because if the county doesn't they will have a hospital payment and initially it was set up that the hospital payment would work over 3 cycles to make it affordable and currently the county is in the first cycle. Commissioner Macomson suggested that the county may need to look at SPLOST VI for capital expenditures such as the courthouse or jail. Manager Thomas stated she would provide a list of SPLOST V categories and she noted again the hospital debt and the fact that public safety funding is coming up short because the EMS units have increased by about \$40,000.00 per unit and when you multiply that by 5 units and all of a sudden the county has an entire unit they can't pay for in the SPLOST budget. She continued that the county would have to look at what account would you take the money out of to give to the administrative building. Manager Thomas suggested the approach of capital leases that would have someone else could provide the up front cost and the county could pay rent, if the county could get it down to a 5 or 6 million dollar facility it would potentially be a 400k - 500k debt service payment and that would be less than the amount of funds set aside last year in the budgeting process. Manager Thomas continued that her concept with that was if the county can prove that they can do that for 2 or 3 years, that's the debt service payment and it proves the county can operate without this tax revenue and it wouldn't impact SPLOST. Commissioner Macomson asked for clarification on SPLOST cycles and Manager Thomas explained the county 3 years left and is in the first cycle of paying off the hospital debt. She also explained SPLOST can run on a 5 or 6 year cycle, the 5 year option would not include agreements with the cities and projects are handled in levels and what is left over gets allocated to the cities, which is why the county usually opts for the 6 year cycle and entering into agreements, but this leaves the county bearing the full cost of countywide services out of it's 70%, such as building a new



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courthouse intended for all inhabitants. Commissioner Macomson stated that the county has to do something about the jail and government center at some point. Manager Thomas stated that the government center can be done with a capital lease but the jail cannot, but she has heard conflicting reports on that, but she would recommend going for a capital lease for the administrative building. Manager Thomas also noted that it should be called the judicial building instead of administrative building. Commissioner Macomson asked if there were any updates on the Paladin Wireless renting tower space. Manager Thomas stated the county does not want them to be the sole renter but they are highly interested and the county ran calculations to figure out whether or not to allow them to put a building in and the county decided they did not want to build the building for them, so now we are back to building it ourselves. Commissioner Macomson thought they just hung their equipment on there. Manager Thomas explained they have to have an actual power source, so this went in to the pricing. Commissioner Macomson asked if they were interested in exchanging rent for free local Wi-Fi service. Manager Thomas thinks they are open to that and there is a new gentleman involved that wants to meet with her. Manager Thomas also reminded the board of her previous recommendation to give them free rent for so long, but be reasonable about rent since they do currently charge Southern Linc \$1,300.00 to be on the Gerard Tower. Commissioner Macomson asked if it was \$1,300.00 annually. Manager Thomas stated it was \$1,300.00 per month. There were no other questions for Manager Thomas.

Chairman Bridges invited Mrs. Pam Stone to the floor to speak on behalf of the animal shelter. Mrs. Stone expressed her appreciation for the county's continual support of the animal shelter. She informed the board of the numerous DUI cases happening that involve animals. Unfortunately, they are not a no-kill shelter, but thanks to rescues and adoptions only 38 of the 15,000 animals taken in this year had to be put down. Animals can be taken to the shelter for free as a service to the entire county. Mrs. Stone explained that the shelter has not asked for an increase since 2009. The department of agriculture has updated laws regarding space between sick and healthy animals to prevent exposure and the shelter will have to add-on to adhere to those changes. The shelter is able to do most maintenance from donations and money brought in from fundraising. The budget runs around 220k a year and the shelter gets about 158k from the counties and cities together. The shelter also writes grants to offer spay and neuter services to the county which helps control the population. The drop-in hours did change during COVID 19, but they still took animals in and stayed available to deputies and animal control.



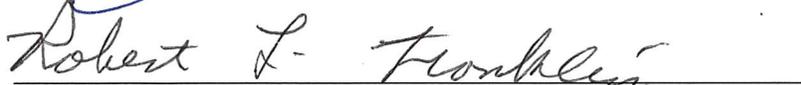
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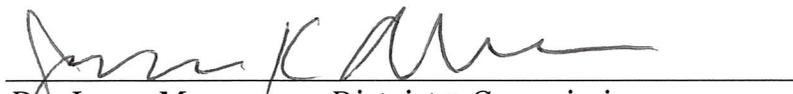
Commissioner Macomson asked was there an after-hours option for the deputies. Mrs. Stone responded that one of the employees, Tammy stays on call and comes in whenever they need her. Commissioner Swails asked if Mrs. Stone thought President Trump's new legislation regarding animal abuse would cause an uptick in the number of animals coming in to the facility. Mrs. Stone responded it was possible. Commissioner Swails recalled an instance of animal abuse he witnessed and the sheriff of that city had no legal standing to act on behalf of the animal. Mrs. Stone stated that Lavonia Animal Control has the authority to go out and speak to owners and issue fines if needed, but the county would have to go through the sheriff so maybe the federal law will help in those cases. Chairman Bridges thanked Mrs. Stone for her time.

There were no additional comments or questions on the public hearing items. Chairman Bridges closed the public hearing at 6:00 p.m.

Signed on the 13th day of July, 2020


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


Kayla Finger, County Clerk