



You Are Why We Are Here

**FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION MINUTES
June 30, 2020
6:00 P.M.**

BOC: Commission Chairman Thomas Bridges
District 1 Commissioner Robert Franklin
District 2 Commissioner Dr. Jason Macomson
District 3 Commissioner Ryan Swails
District 4 Commissioner Eddie Wester

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

Staff: County Manager Beth Thomas
County Clerk Kayla Finger
Planning Director Scott DeLozier

Item 1: **Call meeting to order** – Chairman Bridges called the June work session to order and thanked everyone for attending.

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

Item 3: Items for discussion

- a. **FY21 Budget Resolution:** Chairman Bridges commended County Manager Beth Thomas for the long hours put into the budget and asked her to present the resolution. Manager Thomas provided the board with the FY 21 Budget Resolution to adopt the budget which is the same as the draft that has been on file in the clerk's office, advertised in the legal organ, and talked about at the two (2) public hearings. As a result of this last public hearing there may be some items the board would like to change and Manager Thomas recommended making those changes as modifications once the board is able to take a look at the tax digest and look over at least two (2) more months of sales data. Manager Thomas asked the board to take action on the FY 2021 Budget Resolution. Chairman Bridges thanked Manager Thomas and opened the floor for questions. Commissioner Swails asked if the board could still make modifications after the budget is adopted, specifically regarding the library. Manager Thomas confirmed that was correct. Chairman Bridges confirmed this as well and asked for a motion to pass the budget. Commissioner Macomson made a motion to approve the fiscal year 2021 budget, but asked that it include a three percent (3%) raise across the board for all employees that have been in service for 12 months, this would allow any employee with less than 12 months to be eligible for the raise once they reach 12 months, and



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this would exclude the County Manager until January because she received a raise when the board extended her contract back in January of this year. Chairman Bridges noted the addition to the budget and asked if there was a second. Commissioner Franklin gave the second. Chairman Bridges called for any discussion. Commissioner Swails asked if any research had been conducted to see how this proposal would affect the raw budget and noted that his question did not imply that he was not in favor of giving the employees a raise. Manager Thomas responded that she had run the calculations based on the hire of the actual run rate of using March annualized out for the year. She also referred to prior email correspondence regarding this issue and expressed that she wished this would've been brought to light during the public hearing for discussion. Manager Thomas noted that the county doesn't have their commodity reports in yet and it was suggested that the board use the county's reserves for this raise which in her opinion is bad fiscal policy. She further advised the board to take lessons from the Board of Commissioners and the Board of Education in years past that when you balance your budget with reserves on operating expenditures it's a bad fiscal policy. Manager Thomas stated that with the a 3% increase the additional expenditure would be about \$300k which would be using the max of the actual budget, combining this with the board's desire to rollback taxes, these two ideas are going in opposite directions. Manager Thomas stated her opinion has always been and she holds steady to it that she will put the employees first, we made budget and salary adjustments and she always put them first in terms of when she gives the board her goals for the year. She also noted that she does not want it to be pinned that she is not in favor of the raise, rather that she is in favor of waiting until the end of the pandemic to see what the sales tax does and committing to the first dollar going to the employees on a salary adjustment. Manager Thomas reiterated that to make the operational decision now is bad fiscal policy in her opinion. Commissioner Macomson stated that he knows the reserves are important and he wants to see the county build those reserves long term but we do have a problem with Franklin County employees being under paid which results in losing employees that the county hired and trained and some of those employees that leave have paid leave time which results in a double whammy. Commissioner Macomson continued stating there were several years after the recession where the employees didn't get raises and now that we've done that for several years we need to send a clear signal to the employees that they are a priority and he thinks it will improve employee morale, motivation, and retention. He noted that it is important now more than ever given the difficult times we are all facing and the county is blessed enough to do this. Commissioner Macomson expressed his hope that the economic data will continue to improve and if it doesn't, he thinks this is a valid use of the county's reserves. Manager Thomas stated if Commissioner Macomson really wanted to put the employees first that three percent was not enough and Banks County just gave a three-dollar increase, if you want to put them first are you going to put them above the millage rate. Commissioner Macomson stated he thinks it's a priority and 3% is a place to start. He asked if



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the county did 3% last year. Manager Thomas stated they did a retro salary adjustment which is what she would suggest here. She continued that since she has been with the county, they went about 9 years without a raise and they have worked very hard to put employees first, but like Commissioner Macomson said we are all in a period of uncertainty, so how do you make a decision. Commissioner Macomson stated the importance of the situation in that we can't function without our employees and he would love to give a 5% raise but at least we can do 3%. Manager Thomas stated appreciation goes beyond money, such as employee appreciation luncheons. She stated that she welcomes the commissioner(s) to come out and do mirroring with their employees and be present and see them, it's more than just money when it comes to appreciation. Manager Thomas also stated that she knows she doesn't show the employees enough, how much she appreciates them, but sometimes there are a lot of non-monetary things that go a long way. Chairman Bridges wondered how it would look if we had to lay off employees, and noted that the county has been blessed enough to have a reserve to provide for employees. He expressed his concerns with not knowing the situation stating that it would be disappointing to give a raise only to have to turn around and cut it back. Chairman Bridges stated that he thinks they are stepping out on a limb and that they could wait a few months to check on the economic situation they could modify the budget and make the raise retro if it is determined that it is good at that time. He praised the current staff and touched on the fact that the county has been understaffed, overworked, and underpaid for a long time, so he agrees that the board should do what Commissioner Macomson is suggesting, just at a later time once the county is able to get a clearer picture. He fears if the board acts now they could end up hurting the employees and the county if they don't have the funds later on. Chairman Bridges posed the question of what would the county do if they don't have the funds? He stated that they would have to go back on their tax dollars & tax payers would see a millage increase to cover that cost. Chairman Bridges restated that he is 100% in favor of giving to the employees as long as it doesn't put the county in a bind and he has looked at the research and other counties where they have had to lay off employees and Franklin County's employees have stayed put and have been provided for. Commissioner Macomson stated that he thinks giving the employees more is excellent, so let's give them 3% now and another 2% in November if things are looking up and the budget can handle it. Chairman Bridges questioned if the county couldn't handle the 3% now. Commissioner Macomson continued that the 3% wouldn't be paid out for the entire year right off, that it would be spread out over the year and he thinks the budget can handle it. County Manager Thomas asked if the board intends to increase the millage rate to account for the increase. Commissioner Macomson stated he didn't think it was necessary. Manager Thomas restated that if the situation comes down to it, would they increase the millage rate. Commissioner Macomson stated if it turned into that, but he does not believe that it will. Manager Thomas reasoned that it would be good for her to know these goals when she creates the budget instead of waiting until



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after the election. She continued that she needs to know when building the budget if the employees go first. Commissioner Macomson stated what would be good is if we had more information on revenue by then, but we are still a month or so away on that. County Manager Thomas stated that was correct but that they were still making a budget decision. Chairman Bridges commented it's a gamble and if the county doesn't have enough revenue, they will have to raise taxes. Commissioner Macomson stated he didn't believe they would have to do that. Commissioner Swails commented he makes his own budget with his own money and he has to make those decisions based on what he knows not what he hopes. He continued that he admires the thought behind this proposed action and he puts money out of his own pocket toward first responders and people in the county, so he does not want to be misconstrued as being not in favor of an employee raise. Commissioner Swails pointed out that not too long ago our county and nation were in a drastic situation and no one knows what is coming in the next few months so in my mind why would we not wait until we know what the money is and what the situation looks like then we can give freely from the heart and not worry about what's coming down the pipe. Commissioner Macomson thinks the county's reserves can handle the proposed raise. Commissioner Swails stated that the reserves were there for emergencies. Commissioner Macomson stated that COVID-19 qualifies as an emergency in his opinion. Commissioner Swails further stated that the county employees were currently employed and there are a lot of industries out there that let a lot of people go. Commissioner Macomson stated that was true but he didn't think the county would have to do that. Chairman Bridges asked what the difference would be in voting on the raise tonight versus waiting until they have a better understanding of the financial situation, other than voting now looks good to the employees. Commissioner Macomson responded it is good for the employees and the county can handle it now and they would just have to leave it up to a vote by the board. Commissioner Wester stated he was thinking about the employees that do still have a job with the county but may have families that have been laid off and with the county being able to give them a pay raise, they need it now rather than later. Commissioner Swails stated he agreed with Commissioner Wester's thinking but still stated that the board was in a position of uncertainty and making this decision now could potentially strap all of the taxpayers with a significant millage increase and there is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect our tax digest. Chairman Bridges stated the situation was very clear that it would be a popular decision to go forward with the 3% employee raise and he is hoping he will be wrong about the taxes but the county's reserves are about half of what they should be. Manager Thomas confirmed this and stated back in 2015 the county had no reserves and they have worked very hard to get them up by slashing some budgets that have never been reinstated and the board has been provided a list of unmet needs in the county. She continued that Franklin County has been very blessed in the past few years with the production of revenue from both sales tax and property tax and she doesn't want to go backwards and be in the same situation as 2015. Manager Thomas



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stated that because of this same fiscal policy of relying on reserves the county watched nine million dollars go out and there is a clear-cut chart showing it all the way down and another example of this is the board of education who followed the same policy of funding positions through reserves. Manager Thomas expressed that she wants to give the employees money and every year her priority is making sure the employees come first, but her job is to provide the board with the best budget. In Manager Thomas's opinion too much is still unknown on the tax digest and the sales, but if the board wishes to commit tonight to spending the first three (3) months of sales tax that come in over the budget amount let's do it and as soon as we have it cut a check for a salary adjustment Commissioner Macomson stated that we shift and go back and forth on the reserves for lots of reasons and the board has to make choices. He continued that this would be a gradual thing where the board can look to see where they have to balance it out or shave if necessary and the board can increase it if we are blessed with more revenue. Commissioner Macomson continued that it's not an immediate hit to the budget or the reserves and with the level of reserves we have we can take care of this particular issue. Manager Thomas stated it's actually worse because it's gradual but unstoppable once you do this, it compounds and moves on rather than buying something tangible like a vehicle out of reserves where you have an exact idea of the amount being pulled out and the amount that will need to be replaced. Manager Thomas stated that they were obviously on two separate ends, and the board will vote to make a decision and she will make the budget adjustments for the resolution but she stands firm in her initial recommendation and her opinion that this proposal is bad fiscal policy. Commissioner Macomson responded that he respects her advice but disagrees. Chairman Bridges stated the first thing the board did was look to shave where they could, then they looked at their reserves and they looked at the uncertainty of the future and all the commissioners agreed that they need to help the employees out, and a good safe way to do it would be to make the proposal retrograde. He continued that the commissioners are elected to be good stewards of the county and not do anything to put it in jeopardy. Commissioner Franklin commented what bothers him is that they have talked about helping the employees for a long time but nothing has been done and he remembers that in the past they tried to do a 5% increase and they could only get 3%, but when he suggested breaking it up into and 3% & 2% it passed. He continued by saying when you know you've got good employees do something about it don't just talk about it, and he doesn't see any problem with the proposed raise. Chairman Bridges stated that he did not share that vision and that since he had been on the board it had historically been 3% increases in his sight it is important, they see a pay raise provided they don't fall off in a hole. He stated he could remember when they didn't have reserves and now, they only have half of where it should be. Chairman Bridges remarked they need to pray to God that they don't have a real disaster here, because what they are about to do is a big no-no. Commissioner Macomson stated if they have a disaster this will pale in comparison and he feels this action is doable.



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*Chairman Bridges stated they have a motion and a second to give a 3% raise across the board and they would need to adjust the budget. He asked Manager Thomas for the number. Manager Thomas stated what she would put in the budget is exactly as calculated \$292,533.85 will not line up exactly with the motion made but it will ensure those funds are there for any employees, and obviously this won't happen tomorrow, calculations will have to be done. Chairman Bridges asked was the motion to give raises across the board Manager Thomas replied that it was and the motion was to give a 3% COLA to any employee greater than 12 months tenure and anyone less than 12 months provide when they meet 12 months, except for the county manager even though this contradicts her contract will not apply until January 2021. Manager Thomas noted this she would be the first to give up her raise to help the employees and Commissioner Swails noted there is always personal money involved to show appreciation to the employees. Manager Thomas further stated that while they are on opposite sides of this decision she is happy to see a board putting their employees first and she hopes to see additional actions besides monetary, such as seeing the employees and thanking them and as a manager of employees she appreciates seeing the board put employees first. Chairman Bridges thanked Mrs. Thomas and called for the vote. The motion passed by three (3) **YES** votes to two (2) **NO** votes. The **YES** votes were Commissioner Franklin, Commissioner Macomson, Commissioner Wester, the **NO** votes were Commissioner Swails and Chairman Bridges.*

- b. FY20 Budget Modifications & Resolution: Manager Thomas reviewed the modifications requested: 2 LMIG projects, grants, GRP monitoring, airport authority payments, legal services, employer contributions of 2% for 401-A, Gateway Distribution, firefighter worker's comp & association dues, GEFA Loans, USDA funds, sheriff's budget for vehicle repairs, and elections equipment (new equipment was required due to COVID 19). Commissioner Macomson made the motion to approve the FY20 Budget Modifications Resolution. Commissioner Swails gave the second. The motion passed by five (5) **YES** votes to zero (0) **NO** votes. The **YES** votes were Commissioner Franklin, Commissioner Macomson, Commissioner Wester, Commissioner Swails and Chairman Bridges.*
- c. FY21 Contracts & Agreements*
 - a. UGA Extension Office: Manager Thomas announced that the UGA office amended the language on the contract so the board will need to review this to vote on Monday's regular board meeting. Commissioner Macomson asked for it to be resent since his came through blank. Manager Thomas obliged.*
 - b. FY21 District Attorney State Paid County Reimbursed Personnel MOU/Contract: The board was provided with a list of members, currently Franklin County only pays for one of those members. Last year Manager Thomas had them update the documents to show only Franklin County's portion owed. She asked the board to review this to vote on at Monday's meeting.*
 - c. Landfill Compliance Task Order 31: Manager Thomas Jacob's Landfill*



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services has been handling the county's compliance and the agreement presented is the same amount as last year. Manager Thomas asked this be reviewed and voted on Monday as well. Commissioner Macomson asked how much. Manager Thomas stated \$22,300.00.

d. Disposition of Property

a. Surplus: Manager Thomas asked for approval to properly dispose of old computers, they would be properly wiped and destroyed. She asked that the board consider this and take action on Monday. Commissioner Franklin asked if there was a computer salvage buyer. Manager Thomas explained they had to use a particular service and get a certificate that the hard drive has been wiped clean. Commissioner Macomson asked if the computers could be donated. Manager Thomas stated they were in pretty bad shape.

*b. Tax Map # C002 083 BLD - LeCroy Building: Manager Thomas explained that the building was purchased by the county in July of 2019 and on Tuesday of last week the building's eastern facing wall has begun to crumble and fall. She continued that after assessing the building the best option for the safety and health of those around the building would be demolition of the structure. It is not explicitly written on how the board should proceed with demolition, but a resolution will solidify the boards intent. Two demolition quotes have been received thus far. Manager Thomas asked for a vote and motion to move forward immediately given the risks of waiting. Chairman Bridges echoed Manager Thomas's urgency and asked for a motion to move forward. Commissioner Macomson made a motion to approve demolition of the LeCroy Building. Commissioner Wester gave the second, and noted he drove by and it is a definite safety issue to the public. The motion passed by five (5) **YES** votes to zero (0) **NO** votes. The **YES** votes were Commissioner Franklin, Commissioner Macomson, Commissioner Wester, Commissioner Swails and Chairman Bridges.*

e. Speed Zone Ordinance: Manager Thomas stated GDOT provided updated ordinances regarding speed zoning. It is the responsibility of the county to sign off on these documents and copies will be provided to the sheriff's office & public works as well. She asked they review and take action on these on Monday night. Commissioner Macomson inquired about Pleasant Hill Circle. Manager Thomas replied she had not gotten the study back on it yet and it was not included on this current list.

f. Public Works Update:

a. GEFA Loan Modifications for Deferred Interest (COVID19)

*i. *DW09043; *DW12002; *DW2018005; *DW98003 Manager Thomas explained the GEFA is offering deferment on all loans except one which is still under construction. The deferment period is July 1, 2020 – January 1, 2021 because of this the loans will have to be modified. A list of these proposed modifications was provided to the board for approval.*

b. Water System Improvements - Portable Generator Bid: Manager



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Thomas explained this will be part of the GEFA project loan and four bids have been received so far in amounts ranging from \$106k – \$139k it is my recommendation that we go with the lowest bid of \$106,558.00 which is from J & T Service Center Inc. This portable generator will be used throughout the county's water system.

- c. Water System Improvements - Pump Installation Bid: Manager Thomas stated only one bid was received from Fortson Well Drilling and Environmental Services in the amount of \$50,406.75 which will be funded by GEFA as well. Manager Thomas recommended moving forward with this on Monday.*
- g. Planning & Zoning*
 - i. Planning & Zoning - Vegetative Buffer Update: Planning Director DeLozier referenced the email for the drafted approved planning list that had been sent out to the board for review. He asked that per County Attorney Bubba Samuels advice, the ordinance be made into a zoning text amendment. Director DeLozier commented that the Planning Commission voted unanimously to adopt it and two public hearings would be required. He asked the board how they would like to proceed. Commissioner Swails asked what he recommended. Director DeLozier stated he would go with Bubba's recommendation of a zoning text amendment. The board agreed to proceed with it being a zoning text amendment which will just add two months to the adoption timeline.*
 - ii. Building Inspection Ordinance Proposal & First Reading: Director DeLozier introduced the building inspections and code enforcement program that he is looking to adopt in Franklin County. The first item he addressed was a clarification on page 29 (in booklet provided to board) on system changes. He gave examples of how a system change would apply if, for instance you are changing from a gas to electric system, this would require a permit. Commissioner Swails asked for clarification if it was just from one system type to another or did it include upgrades of the same type of system. Dir. DeLozier stated if the change or upgrade requires more than the current household's capacity of the current system, a permit will be required because it is a public safety matter. Commissioner Swails asked how much permits would be on smaller items. Dir. DeLozier stated the fee permit minimum would be \$100.00 for residential and he referred the fee permit schedule that shows the differences between residential and commercial fees. Commissioner Swails commented that the safety aspect is spot on and essential and \$100.00 is a small price to pay. Commissioner Franklin asked if town hall meetings would be held. Dir. DeLozier stated they did town hall meetings when the idea was first presented and only two or three people showed up, but he has no issue doing a press*



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release or something. Commissioner Macomson asked if this could be added to the vegetative buffer hearings to add to public awareness. Dir. DeLozier stated that would be doable for the August Planning Commission Public Hearing and he has digital copies available to anyone that needs a copy. Commissioner Macomson asked that we have the hearing on a different day from approving it. Manager Thomas said they could double up on millage rate hearings to get it out there. Director DeLozier reserved the community center in Carnesville for July 26th for a community event to discuss the process and address any questions and he has been spreading the word with local tradesman. He also suggested putting it on the county website and working with the media to promote awareness. Commissioner Swails noted that licensed builders don't have issues with inspections programs, it really affects those that are not qualified to performing this type of work. He also expressed that he did not want to drag this process out any longer and that we can talk to the press or hold an informational meeting to make sure the public is aware but we need to move forward. Commissioner Macomson expressed his concern to make sure the public is aware and that he is in favor of a limited inspection system. Commissioner Swails talked about lenders requiring home construction warranties since Franklin County does not require inspections. These warranties run anywhere from \$550.00 - \$1,000.00. These potential homeowners are paying this money and could still get stuck with a poorly constructed home. Commissioner Macomson asked how often do people hire their own inspector. Dir. DeLozier stated he had no way of knowing or tracking that. As far as public safety goes, Dr. DeLozier stated he would hate to know he signed off on a building permit that resulted in shoddy work or someone's death. Commissioner Swails stated he personally has had to spend money fixing gaps in work that was done on his own home. Dir. DeLozier stated that right now the main issue is things are not being built where people say they are supposed to be and this could be remedied by inspections and permitting through the process. Commissioner Wester stated they had recently had that problem come up. Dir. DeLozier proposed tonight be counted as the first reading of this program and the board set the second date and have the board adopt the ordinance as drafted, the table of structures and the fee table as resolutions and he asked that the policy and procedures not be adopted as a resolution. Commissioner Wester stated his intention would be to go by state codes and not overreach as a county. Director DeLozier agreed and stated that the presented plan goes by the state required minimums. The board thanked Director DeLozier and agreed to



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count tonight at the first reading and the second reading is scheduled for July 6, 2020.

h. Manager's Report: Manager Thomas mentioned a press release received yesterday from the state of Georgia about title 5 of the Care Act which includes resources for state and local governments and our cities and counties are eligible. Based on our population Franklin County is eligible for up to \$873,212.00 with a 30% advance. In the next fiscal year Manager Thomas wants to look at rate structures. She mentioned changing cash management systems August 1st at the landfill/convenience center to no longer accepting cash and only accepting checks or cards. Manager Thomas stated revenue 5 tags for \$5 for 5 tags and truckloads are charged as follows: single axel \$35 double axel \$45 non-residents are charged single axel \$100, double axel \$120 and the proposed increases would be \$45 single and \$55 double axel for residents and \$125 single and \$150 double axel for non-residents. The next item she discussed was occupational tax which she proposed we change from \$35.00 to \$50.00. The county is required to hold one public hearing prior to changing taxation so Manager Thomas proposed we have a public hearing in September. The last item Manager Thomas proposed was an increase in assisted animal burials from \$50.00 to \$200.00. This rate has not been updated since the early 2000's and this is a convenience service we offer as a county. Commissioner Macomson asked if this was on their own property. Manager Thomas said yes and it was and on-call service. In closing Manager Thomas praised the intern staff that has been assisting the board of commissions office in the recodification process and what an asset they have been.

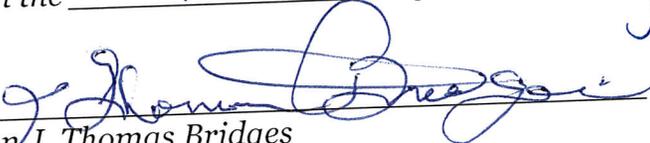
Commissioner Franklin asked about a citizen phone call he had received regarding used tire and he inquired if there was a program that could help this individual. Manager Thomas said she would have to research the matter further.

*i. Adjourn: Chairman Bridges thanked everyone for their time and attendance. Commissioner Wester made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Swails gave the second. The motion passed by five (5) **YES** votes to zero (0) **NO** votes. The **YES** votes were Commissioner Franklin, Commissioner Macomson, Commissioner Wester, Commissioner Swails and Chairman Bridges.*



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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