

After Agenda

Board of Commissioners of Spalding County
Special Called Meeting
Wednesday, November 3, 2021
10:00 AM
Room 108, Annex Building

The Spalding County Board of Commissioners held a Special Called Meeting in Room 108 of the Spalding County Annex on Wednesday, November 3, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. with Chairman Clay Davis presiding. Commissioners Rita Johnson, James Dutton, Ryan Bowlden and Gwen Flowers-Taylor were present for the meeting. Also present were County Manager, Dr. Steve Ledbetter, County Attorney, Stephanie Windham and County Clerk, Kathy Gibson to record the minutes.

I. OPENING (CALL TO ORDER)

PLEASE SILENCE YOUR CELL PHONES AND ALL OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES.

II. INVOCATION

Commissioner James R. Dutton, District #2, delivered the invocation.

III. PLEDGE TO FLAG

Commissioner Ryan Bowlden, District #4 led the Pledge to the Flag.

Motion/Second by Flowers-Taylor/Johnson to amend the agenda to include an Item #2 under Agenda Items to a discussion on the pay plan. Motion carried unanimously by all.

IV. AGENDA ITEMS

1. Discuss and approve the proposed Spalding County Redistricting Map as advertised and submit to the State of Georgia.

Motion/Second by Flowers-Taylor/Johnson to approve the proposed Spalding County Redistricting Map as advertised and submit to the State of Georgia.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor stated the week before we got our maps back she went to a meeting at the City of Griffin where they saw their redistricting maps. So she is trying to understand why we have to submit our map after 7 days, but they haven't done theirs yet.

Ms. Windham stated that you don't have to submit, the meeting simply had to be a week after publication.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor then stated there has not been a lot of time for public discussion, not that we have to do that. It was her understanding that we had to vote on it within 7 days of advertising. She is just trying to figure out why we are rushing this. Not that she thinks anyone in the community is going to say anything about it, but this is important enough that we shouldn't push ourselves up to the wire. Her question is: "When is the drop dead date for submitting this redistricting map?"

Dr. Ledbetter advised that the “drop dead” date for the redistricting is October 2022.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor then stated that she would suggest that we offer the opportunity for the community to come in to be able to publicly hear the explanations and understand why the changes that were made were made. She’s not comfortable with this being sent to the State for approval without any public input.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor added that the School System is not going to be able to discuss their stuff until today. That is the email she received from Chairman Holmes and it is going to be on their agenda today. So, if it is not necessary then she doesn’t feel we should be rushing the school system to make a decision. She feels it’s not appropriate for us to call this for a vote if we don’t have to today.

Commissioner Johnson stated that she feels we have had time and when she spoke about this two meetings ago, we were going to take this to our school board counterparts. She feels that Commissioner Davis’ school board person was the only one who had an issue with the map and they were given time to work it out and decide what they were going to do.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor stated that she had talked with Mr. Holmes and Mr. Brown and they haven’t had an opportunity to discuss this as a body, they should be allotted the time to do so.

Commissioner Johnson stated that if we decide to move it, we need to simply move it to the next meeting to give them time to do what they need to do to get this thing taken care of. What she is saying is she feels they have had ample time, like we have had ample time to speak as a Board. Why haven’t they done it? Is it not a priority for them? We are backing ourselves up to assist them. If we want to wait, that is fine but she does feel that we need to put a date on this. It needs to be sooner than later.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor then added that we can tell them that we are done and ask them when they think they will know what they want to do.

Chairman Davis then stated that the first people to talk about redistricting was the Board of Education. They came to us and said that they wanted to use Flo Analytics to for the redistricting, they wanted us to pay for your half and they would pay for our half. Then we said “no we’re not going to do that” we’re going to go out and use the State resources for the redistricting. Then they stopped all progress going forward and then they called us to say they weren’t ready after he had sent the briefing with the update. It was taken to the Board meeting the next day and they advised that they weren’t ready amend the agenda to discuss this.

Chairman Davis then polled the Board to see how the Board as a whole felt.

Ryan Bowlden advised that they are meeting tonight to discuss it, we can wait to see if they are able to make a decision on it.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor stated they have more different issues than we do. They have busing, they have school lunches, they have Title V, Title I so it’s not the same as us talking about who our constituents are in that area. We don’t have to worry about the safety of kids getting to school. Whether or not there are too many kids of this race in the school, etc. If you guys are fine with it, four is enough. She is just simply saying that if we are going to continue trying to work as a community together, there is no sense to force this issue, we can simply give them a deadline and say we have to have the information by a certain date.

Commissioner Dutton stated that if they come back to us on December 6th and ask us for more time then we will consider it at that time.

Commissioner Johnson stated she is also okay with waiting until December 6th.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor then rescinded her motion and Commissioner Johnson rescinded her second to the motion.

Motion/Second by Flowers-Taylor/Bowlden to table the proposed Spalding County Redistricting Map as advertised and submit to the State of Georgia until the December 6, 2021 meeting. Motion carried unanimously by all.

2. Consider request from Commissioner Flowers-Taylor to discuss the Spalding County Pay Plan and proposed raises.

Commissioner Davis then stated he would like to walk through how he saw the pay plan go. The original issue came from Commissioner Flowers-Taylor for 17 people. It started off with part-time people that were not making what we felt to be the reasonable amount of pay for part timers. He then went to Miles Neville and told him there were 17 people and Miles came back and told him, no there is 51 people when you consider all of the County employees who are part time.

Next, Commissioner Flowers-Taylor, myself and the County Manager went to see the Sheriff who talked with us about a problem he was experiencing with people leaving his department and he thought he was going to have an exodus of people based on salaries and what was going on with the City of Griffin. Then at the end of the conversation he talked about a compression problem that he was concerned about.

The next step was Commissioner Flowers-Taylor stating that she was really concerned about people in EMS who are having to go out into the public and face people directly and she wanted to try to do something for them. Whether it is to use CARES funding or some kind of way to take care of those people. Not people sitting in offices.

Next, we met at the Senior Center and where we discussed a rollback or not rolling back of the taxes. We found out that the ARP funds did not allow us the opportunity to rollback taxes without giving the money we have received back. At that time, the County Manager stated that would provide us with approximately \$3 million and he would be able to take that \$3 million and he would be able to solve the pay problem throughout the county.

The County Manager presented a Powerpoint that showed the ranges and what was going on with pay to our people. Then there was the meeting of the Sheriff, Wendy Stinchcomb and Tony Thomlinson to lay out how that would need to happen and worked out exactly what was supposed to be done throughout. That was agreed upon. There was a meeting where the County Manager advised his staff that this is going to happen and these are the dates of implementation. Then we had our meeting on Monday and the Sheriff came forward and stated that "this is not what I thought was happening." We as a Board were caught off guard as to what all the changes were and what was going on.

Since that time Chairman Davis has found out that (1) the money for the future, when we agreed to do ARP, it is for 3 years. As long as we have ARP, we cannot rollback the taxes. So, we have these funds for the next three years. (2) Compression was done for only one organization, the way the County Manager did it, he had the \$3 million and he distributed the money the way he thought it should be throughout. He ended up with funding left over could not do

compression in all areas and did compression in the Sheriff's Office only. Some of the other supervisors, at that point said "what about me?" It was a money issue, there was a limited amount left over and it was allocated to the Sheriff's Office as opposed to not doing it at all across the Board.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor stated that when we started this process it was about the part timers and first responders. This was when we thought we had the premium money from ARP, but that pay would have reflected what they should have gotten from January of 2019 to January of 2020. So that had nothing to do with the money that would have happened with the rollback. What she is confused about is how we started out with working with the premium pay and helping the part timers and first responders and it turned into a pay compression budget.

Two years ago, we spent three to four million dollars to work on pay compression issues. She has been here 16 years, and we have only addressed pay compression every 6-7 years when we were able to. She feels that there should not be this much money going out of our budget for this. She appreciates everyone else, but the ones she is concerned about is the folks who have put themselves at physical risk and the other thing is that the City increased pay for their police officers, firemen and EMS, and we can't match that. That is where she was coming from.

When she finally did see this report she was confused and stated that when she looks at this report, she sees people getting raises who should not be getting raises and she has to go back and also look at some people's pay to realize they are not properly being paid. They're being paid at a scale that is not commiserate with their education and their skill set. For example, the Election Supervisor, Kimberly Slaughter's pay was \$48,500. This is the pay that Marcia Ridley was getting. Marcia Ridley had a Master's Degree, multiple years of experience in the Elections Office and while it is up to the Elections Board to hire a new elections person, Marcia's salary was based on her skill set and she just got the increase in her pay last year and we are talking about going from \$48,000 to \$51,000 for somebody who has been in the job two months and has no experience.

What she would like to see in the future and with this is that there is some conversation or some workshopping that happens with the Board. She appreciates all of the input from the Sheriff's Office and everyone else, but it does no good to bring this to us when we have not had any input on it. Her bottom line is that nobody should be getting an increase but the first responders and working on the pay compression in terms of part time people. She feels pay compression overall needs to be something that we look at as a whole when we start talking about the retreat and what we want budgeting to look like. If we're there and we're not there.

Then all of the negative feedback directed at the Board before we knew anything. She never likes to be "hit with something in the face" and she doesn't have a clue and she is sure the remainder of the Board feels the same. Her looking at the report, she feels it does not reflect what they were going to get. We didn't reach our goal for what it was we wanted to do for the Sheriff's Department and if we are able to do that by backing out some of these increases, that she's not saying people don't deserve it, it simply was not part of the plan. It wasn't part of what she thinks that we were going after.

Commissioner Johnson then stated that if we were to abide by the report, will we be meeting the needs of the departments and do we have the money to do this? She then asked Commissioner Flowers-Taylor if she is saying that we should not do this for all the employees and give more money to the first responders?

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor stated yes. She further stated that we did not ask them to address pay compression. Pay compression involves a study, where are

we in terms of the median income for people in this skill set. A problem came to our attention that the City of Griffin had increase pay for all first responders and the second problem was with the part time people. That is what she expected staff to come back with. So, because of these other pay raises we are not able to give what we wanted to give to the first responders. Outside of any bonus, because we are worried about those people being there when somebody dials 911 or them not being afraid of entering somebody's home where nobody has a mask on and everybody has COVID. They still have to show up. She is saying that she would like to see a plan where the first responders was done first. Then do whatever needed to be done for part time people.

Commissioner Johnson stated that she hears what Commissioner Flowers-Taylor is saying and she definitely gets it, but her concern is what you do for one you don't do for the others. I do understand that these folks put themselves out there, no doubt, she feels they deserve more. She just doesn't know how it reflects on us as a County to not give anybody else a raise. If you put yourself in that situation, she just doesn't know how that looks. What are we telling our employees if we do that? She doesn't think it looks good and that is how she feels. She is not saying that it is not deserving, because it absolutely is deserved.

Chairman Davis then stated that what we are saying is that we did compression in the Sheriff's Office, we didn't do it in the rest of the departments and what you are saying is that we should take that away from the Sheriff's Office. We only did compression in one department, we did it in the Sheriff's Office the remaining departments we did not do. So, if we are going to do it across the Board, we will have to take everything back in order to do compression across the Board.

Commissioner Johnson stated that she does not want to take anything back, we simply need to make addressing compression a priority for the remainder of the employees. We need to find the money to do this because she doesn't feel that we should not do it. Keep it as it is for this proposal but make pay compression a priority in the near future.

Dr. Ledbetter asked Commissioner Johnson to clarify for him what she is asking. If she is saying raises now is a "yes" and compression for the remaining employees to be addressed in the future?

Commissioner Johnson responded "yes" that is what she saying.

Commission Dutton then stated that he wanted to know what the compression issue is?

Dr. Ledbetter advised that compression is where you increase base level, the new position level and make them closer in range to those who have been here for a longer period of time.

Commissioner Bowlden stated that there is a perfect example in the Sheriff's Office where you have people who have been there for 15 years who are making the same amount of money as someone coming in off the street that the 15 year seasoned employee is having to train.

Chairman Davis then stated that instead of raising the base pay to increase the new hire's salary, we would push up the salary of the employees who have been here longer.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor then added that she was not happy with the proposed method to be used for pay compression on the Sheriff's Office. We are paying people for longevity and we moved away from paying longevity pay with the last study that was conducted. She doesn't know what the answer is, but she feels that it needs to be reworked in such a way that it is reflective of the pay, rather than of the time and service. We need to make sure that whatever we are

utilizing in the Sheriff's Office to address compression pay is going to be consistent when we look at all of the other departments.

She then stated that she feels like we need to deal with the first responders and compression pay first and then if there is a need to deal with it in the other departments. We may need to do another pay study. We have to remember also that everybody who worked during COVID is going to get a bonus. Everybody who worked during COVID as a County Employee should get an ARP Bonus for that period of time. She stated that she is not comfortable with this, some of these people are due a bonus, but she doesn't feel they are due a pay raise at this time since we just did this two years ago.

Commissioner Bowlden stated that if the Board would quit spending millions of dollars on a stupid study, you have enough minds here to come together and figure this out. Like the Sheriff's Office did. Spending 2-3 million dollars in a year on a pay study, that is the pay raises right there. We can do this ourselves, we need to quit doing this crap. He backs the Sheriff 100% on this. He has been there so he may be partial to it because he has been there and he has seen people come in, he was a in the department for almost 10 years making \$33,000 a year, had new people coming in making \$38,000 a year. That's just not right.

He then stated that he wants everybody in Spalding County to get a raise, but when compression was brought up, the only one to bring it up was the Sheriff himself. It's wonderful once you hear someone say it, then everybody wants some of it, but he is the only one who has brought up the issue and has worked on it and had Wendy Stinchcomb and Tony Thomason work on it. Right now, that is the only ones that he is worried about as far as compression. We can look into the future and in the next few years try to come up with an idea to address compression, but he believes that everybody else still does need a raise.

Commissioner Dutton stated that he feels that the new County Manager has "knocked this out of the park." He thinks it is amazing. He feels that the work that he and staff has done, we could have paid someone a lot of money to do it, but he doesn't believe it would have come out much different. He likes what has been said by the other Commissioners, he backs them up, but he feels that some of the objections raised is comparing apples to oranges. He feels it was very unfair in the comparisons. That said, this proposal has his whole hearted support and the Sheriff always will.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor then asked Sheriff Dix if he is okay with this recommendation.

Sheriff Dix stated that he wanted to thank the Board for the opportunity to have an open forum to discuss this. He wants to let the Board know and he wants all of the department heads to know that he doesn't want to end up being the bad guy, he's not the one who is saying that nobody should get a pay raise except for Public Safety. But at the same time, if we're talking about being fair and fair is the only focus that we have on this then let's find the highest pay hourly rate employee and raise everybody up to what they make if it is about being fair. But when you start doing that you are ignoring training and certifications the employees have worked hard to achieve.

Sheriff Dix stated that he agrees that people need pay raises, but the last time we did this three or so years ago, we found out that Spalding County employees across the board were paid 17% less than other counties and municipalities who do the same things that we do. One of the things he agrees with Commissioner Bowlden is that we don't need to pay somebody to do a pay study. A pay study is simply hiring somebody to pick up the phone and call other counties and ask what a person in a designated position makes within that County. He also believes that even though he would love for Spalding County employees to be the

highest paid employees around, it is not realistic because of the money. He also believes that there are people in other divisions and other departments that have skill sets that would cause them to make more than a deputy sheriff would make because some of these people are very skilled in what they do.

All he is asking for is fair compensation for the jobs that we do. His understanding was that the rollback was not taken because they wanted the funds to go toward Public Safety. We are currently in a wage war in Public Safety, and it is happening in other departments as well. People are looking. The days of seeing 15-20 year employees at one place are gone. The young people coming on board look for dollar signs.

He doesn't want to be the bad guy in all this like standing up and objecting the other night, but he thinks part of what happened the other night is they are the ones who went out and did the fact finding and pulled together the numbers and he had to find out that people were getting a pay raise through an email that was forwarded from another county employee to somebody in their family within his department.

He feels that the department heads in Spalding County and the employees in Spalding County have become experts in doing what they can with the bare minimum that it takes to do their jobs and he feels that they have stretched and stretched and stretched and at some point the rubber band is going to snap back and when it comes to pay we are at the position now where the rubber band is snapping back. If we are going to be competitive. He is going to look out for his people, we did the study, we found out the numbers and found out the facts and we came in at the numbers that we were asked to come in at, actually lower, to make this happen.

In all actuality, if you want to talk about compression pay, the easiest way to do it and it would be the most expensive way would be to give everyone a 1% per year for every year they have been with the County with a cap of 15 years. But that is unrealistic. That is what has happened with the pay compression, we keep pushing it on down the line and here we are again, and we've got to do something about it. So, what we proposed for our agency was a fix, it wouldn't be a complete fix, but it would be a start in the right direction.

We backed down the increase to \$2.00 an hour and were able to work in the percentages that would work to the benefit of 5-10 year employees and 10 and up employees to help spread those people out a little bit and it came in approximately \$11,000 under the number that was given to us and he thinks if the other department head would look at their pay compression, they could do the same thing as well. We have a great group of people in Spalding County who are well trained and well educated and if as a group we got together to work on this, we could do it.

Chairman Davis then stated he wanted to talk about the options. The first option is to approve the pay plan as presented to the Board by the County Manager. We have an option to stop the raises and ask that the plan be redone. The morale of stopping this when most of the employees have been told is a devastating morale issue.

Commissioner Dutton then stated there is a third option, that being to pass this one and to look at how to address pay compression in the future. For the next 3 years we are not going to be able to roll back the millage rate and he feels this is a good place to put that money.

Chairman Davis then stated that we can do that and go ahead and pass this pay plan and as the County Manager to start working on how we can go about addressing the pay compression for the rest of the County.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor stated there needs to be some uninvolved individuals in evaluating the compression issue and she feels that spending \$50,000 is enough to make that fair. Her goal is to give first responders and the Sheriff's Office an increase in pay of \$3.00. Then what is done after that and raise the people who are part time.

Sheriff Dix stated that when Dr. Ledbetter, Miles Neville, Wendy Stinchcomb and Tony Thomason met, there were some of his command staff that was going to get about a \$10,000/year pay raise based on the way the first study was and he told them in that meeting that was not right. It's not those people who need to get the raises it is the people who are on the lower end of the scale. His stuff is not going to be skewed toward anybody except what is right for everybody. He will stand up for his people, but he is not going to skew anything and his people are not going to skew anything. That is how strongly he feels about this.

Commissioner Johnson stated that knowing how important retention is in business and knowing how important it is to keep good people in the job to provide service on the level that we do what to do to provide excellence. She feels everybody on the sheet is considered important and the public safety folks do have a high priority because they do put themselves out there, no doubt about it. She does feel everybody in Spalding County should get something.

Commissioner Davis then called for the vote. We have to look at the remainder of the organization to address pay compression. Dr. Ledbetter did what he had the funding to do.

Miles Neville advised that he wanted to make sure that everyone understands that the people currently making under \$13/hour is solid waste and recreation and part of recreation is nutrition and nutrition drivers currently make about \$8.73 an hour to start. So, what we are proposing is to bring those who start at that rate up to \$13.00/hour. There are part time people all over the County who are administrative assistants. They get paid the same hourly rate as a fulltime administrative assistant, they simply don't make as much money because they don't work as many hours, but the hourly rate is still up there.

He then added that the Sheriff, Tony Thomason and Wendy Stinchcomb have done a very objective study. They have done a number of them, not just one and it is a study that can be used throughout the system. It may not do what a comp study would do, we could hire somebody. It is really \$40-50,000 years which is a lot of money, but they did a very objective study. They didn't look at people to determine who gets what, they looked at who is grouped together and how are they grouped together? What they did was really good stuff. He isn't a comp expert, but he really likes what they did and he agrees with the Sheriff a 1% increase for every year of service would probably fix the pay compression problem, but that would be a lot of money.

The Sheriff may be skewed toward his people, but the plan that was presented could be used as a model throughout the system at some point. They did a very good job. He just wants to make sure we are clear on that. Whatever, the Board decides to do he will go out and do.

Mr. Neville then explained that every time the Board gives a COLA, they raise the range and by raising the range, that means that a new person is going to be making the same as a 5-year person because we raise the range every time. When you set a range, you are supposed to keep the range until you do a new pay study, that way someone who comes in at \$13.00 an hour, but someone who has been here 5-years is making \$14,00 an hour because we didn't keep raising the range. So, we have made our comp plan difficult by raising the range every time. This exacerbates compression because a telecommunicator who has just gotten here is making the same as a telecommunicator that has been here 5 years. He advised

that he didn't know how long it had been going on that way because it was going on before he ever got here and that this is the only place he has ever worked where that was the case.

Chief Byrd stated there is something he needs to say. To go back on what has been announced would be more devastating than anyone can understand. We have a very young Fire Department, many who aren't vested yet. So, if we go back on this, they are going to start leaving looking for other money and we are finally only 3 personnel short in the Fire Department. We have come a long way and they haven't been able to say that for a very long time and if we take this raise back, he doesn't know if he can forecast what is going to happen.

Motion/Second by Dutton/Johnson to approve the County pay plan as proposed and to direct the County Manager to look at pay compression countywide and come back with a recommendation to address pay compression. Motion carried 4-1 (Flowers-Taylor).

V. ADJOURNMENT

Motion/Second by Johnson/Dutton adjourn the meeting at 11:12 a.m. Motion carried unanimously by all.