



**After Agenda
Board of Commissioners - Special Called
Meeting February 15, 2023
1:00 PM
411 East Solomon Street
Griffin, GA**

The Spalding County Board of Commissioners held a Work Session on Wednesday, February 15, 2023, at 411 East Solomon Street, Griffin, Georgia, beginning at 1:00 p.m. with Chairman Clay Davis presiding. Commissioners Gwen Flowers-Taylor, Ryan Bowlden and Rita Johnson were present for the meeting. Commissioner James Dutton were absent from the meeting. Also present were County Attorney, Stephanie Windham and Kathy Gibson, County Clerk. Dr. Steve Ledbetter, County Manager participated in the meeting via ZOOM.

I. OPENING (CALL TO ORDER) by Chairman Clay Davis.

PLEASE SILENCE YOUR CELL PHONES AND ALL OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES.

Chairman Davis stated that this is not the Commissioners Retreat, that will be held at a later date when Dr. Ledbetter is back in the office. The purpose of this work session is to allow the Board to express their priorities for the upcoming retreat so that Dr. Ledbetter will be able to better address the priorities of the Board for the citizens of Spalding County.

II. AGENDA ITEMS

1. Discuss the upcoming FY 2024 Budget.

Chairman Davis advised that he had asked the board members to come into this meeting with at least 3 things on their priority list. He then started with his items on the list:

- The General Fund is not in the best of shape and that is high on his priority list.
- He then advised that although it was included under the Budget, Code Enforcement is high on his list of priorities even though is it a Personnel/ Staffing issue. We have got to get the money to be able to hire for this position. If we do this through Abbott, we do not have to have law enforcement, but we do have to have people on the ground and if we need law enforcement to back us up the Sheriff has assured him that if Code Enforcement calls, they will respond. He feels that now we need to have approximately 10 people out on the road doing code enforcement for the remainder of this year to get control of code enforcement issues.

- We have got to work on retaining our staff. Governments around us are increasing their pay schedules and we have to figure out how to get money to keep our staff. He is concerned with where we are financially, if we do a pay study and try to increase everyone's pay for the long haul, we can't sustain that, so we need to do something like a bonus or something that can be done this year and next year we will approach it however the budget demands.
- Impact fees is something that we need to get approved. We are now to the point where we need to have Dr. Ledbetter back and bring the consultants in so we can increase our Impact Fees. There is a possibility we can go from \$2,500 to \$8,300, Chairman Davis stated that he would like to settle around the \$5,600 range. This would bring us in line with Henry County. If we go with a higher number there may be less people who want to develop within the county.
- Raise the bar, this means different things to each one of you. We must figure out how we want to "Raise the Bar" and what it will cost us to do this. How do we want to approach the issue to make our community look different than it is right now.
- Pay off the Disaster Relief efforts. FEMA advised they are willing to pay 75% of the disaster costs.

Chief Polk advised that FEMA would pay 75% and the Griffin-Spalding County area is eligible for 2.5% because of the disaster plan we currently have in place. Typically, it is a 15% local match and 10% State match, but since we have the 2.5% we will be responsible for 12.5% of the disaster costs and that is best case scenario.

Chairman Davis then stated that we have approximately \$2-3 million in additional funding coming out of the budget that we have not planned for. How do we find that \$2-3 million?

- Downstream items will be the Jail, the Courthouse and the Airport. The latest he has heard is that we are going to have to come up with \$30-32 million if we are going to get the airport to continue. These are all downstream items and big number issues. Also, one of the downstream items we have talked about is splash pads. We said we were going to try to put splash pads out in the county and here it is time to budget for these items and they have moved way down the list and we really wanted to do the splash pads.
- He would like an agreement that in FY26 we dedicate 2 mils off the top to roads. That is the end of the TSPLOST money. He wants to solve the roads problem. 2 mils off the top for roads along with the LMIG should keep us moving so that we don't get into the situation we are in now.

He believes the citizens are excited about TSPLOST and what has been done with those funds and if we must, we can pass TSPLOST again.

He stated that is his list and then asked for the Board members lists:

Gwen Flowers-Taylor gave the following Items:

- Code Enforcement – We have no feet on the ground. We were already in bad shape, but things have gotten worse. We need to hire someone with staff to go ahead and get them to work. There are a number of people who are violating the codes and know they are in violation; however, yet they also know we have no one to enforce them.
- Impact fee approval needs to be completed. However, she is certain that is not going to make a difference in the General Fund, because it can only be spent on Impact Fee approved projects.
- We do have some “Raise the Bar” issues. Commissioner Dutton has been asking that we get higher standards than the State has. She’s not sure why we can’t do that even if it is just structural improvements.
- We have no choice regarding the disaster recovery funding, we have a bill and we’re going to have to pay it.
- Recreation – She doesn’t know what projects are currently out there in need of funding, but as a board we need to determine what we are going to spend money on. She certainly is not going to approve any new recreation projects, but we need to finish anything that is underway.

We need to look at services we currently provide and see if it is something that is required of us. It would probably be easier to go back and look at what we are statutorily required to do and figure out from there where to get the money to fund it.

She wants to make sure that the funding for Rosenwald is still in place.

- Regarding roads, if people are happy with the TSPLOST and we can spend TSPLOST money to help our road budget. \$2 million in FY26 is not a lot, but at this point it time she feels this is something that we cannot consider. We need to try to figure out how to pay the bills next year without any frills.

Rita Johnson stated that she agrees with Commissioner Flowers-Taylor’s list, but if she had to narrow it down to the top three it would be:

- Fund Balance, she is concerned about the conversation we are going to have this year with the auditors. We had a good rating last year, but she isn’t sure what that is going to look like this year.
- Code Enforcement – Trash is everywhere now.

- Staff Retention – what can we do to make the county competitive once again to keep the staff we have and to fill some of the positions that are vacant. Getting the right people to do the job and retaining those individuals.
- If there is going to be a conversation to add 2 mils for roads, she feels we also need to look at allotting something for the Development Authority. When she thinks what could drive getting more money into the budget. Extending money to the Development Authority so they can purchase more land and get the businesses here, is one way to offset this.

Ryan Bowlden stated that he agrees with everything that has been said, however:

- His number 1 is going to be Code Enforcement.
- Community Development which goes along with better building standards and focuses on how we see the county developing. Do we want the county to be commercial or do we want it to be somewhere for people to live? He wants to see the standards raised and he would like to see bigger lot sizes.
- He would like to see more sewer capacity. We are never going to be able to grow on the north side of 19-41 and we will never be able to grow on SR16 until we get sewer available to those locations.

Steve Ledbetter stated that he feels the board has nailed the needs for the community.

- Code Enforcement would be top on his priority list as well. He still worries about “Right of Entry” and feels that is a big issue, but he does agree that having more people down range and getting participation from the Sheriff’s Office in pushing forward with “Right of Entry” is going to be a big challenge.
- He agrees with Commissioner Flowers-Taylor that 2 mils in FY26 for the road maintenance is an absolute must, and has move forward. If we don’t grab something whether it’s 2 mils or another TSPLOST, he feels we are going to be backing up for the amount of road work that is coming to us.
- With respect to “Raising the Bar” one of the things that staff has done with BOC approval is engage Municode to do a complete rewrite of our Zoning Ordinance and in the 9 months since we have contracted with them, they have had the same challenges that we have had with staffing. They can’t keep an attorney assigned to us because the attorneys keep leaving and they are struggling to perform the duties that we have been contracting with them to do.

Chairman Davis added that we are going to have to look at the projects we currently have and it may be that we have to look at some of those and say: “That was a good idea, but we don’t have the money to do this.” We need to go back and look at some of the things that we have going, that we may have to postpone.

If it is under contract, that would be a different situation, but we need to go back and look at where the money is allocated.

We have a huge issues with regard to the jail and the airport and he simply does not see how in FY2024 we are going to have the money to do anything with either one of these.

Chairman Davis stated he is okay with the list that we have established and we will go ahead and talk about Personnel and Staffing.

Ms. Windham advised there is a bill currently pending, that if passed would require Chief Polk and his staff to go out and assess properties and assign a tier of damage to each property. It would then allow for the Board of Commissioners to discount property taxes. It bypasses the Tax Assessor and their evaluation process because their hands are tied. They must assess a property as it sits on January 1. So the fact that something happened on January 12 to change the status of the property, the Tax Assessor cannot do anything about that in its assessments for the 2023 Tax Year. She doesn't feel the bill is well written and she doesn't believe that the unintended consequences have been considered at all. So, she is hopeful they will consider those issues. She has talked with Representative Mathiak who advised that she would put those concerns forward.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor then asked what the unintended consequences would be for this legislation?

Ms. Windham stated that evaluation would include every building damaged in the storm and would people would coming to Chief Polk appealing his decision on the determination of the amount of damage to the property. That is not his job, to hear appeals like that and it puts the onus on the Board of Commissioners to make a determination without absolutely no guidance. Whether it is a dollar amount or a percentage decrease that you give to folks who have their property declared a total loss. It also creates an nightmare on the part of the Tax Commissioner who is no way equipped, software or staff wise or otherwise to give these additional types of discounts where there is no clear framework. It puts the board in a difficult position, it puts Chief Polk in a difficult position and it put the Tax Commissioner in a difficult position.

Chairman Davis then summarized the issues as:

- Code Enforcement
- Fund Balance
- Disaster Funding

2. Discuss Personnel issues and Staffing.

Chairman Davis then wanted to address Personnel and Staffing his three are as follows:

- Director of Community Development

- Assistant County Manager – Need to address with Dr. Ledbetter the need for a law degree. This has been a requirement for more than a year, we have only had one applicant for the position who had no managerial background.
- Director of Administration – Ms. Garrison is planning on retiring sometime soon and we have to find a replacement for Ms. Garrison, and we have to figure out how to create some overlap so that we can have two people performing the job so that when Ms. Garrison decides to leave, we have somebody who can do the job.

These are the Chairman's three. It has nothing to do with the number of openings within the County.

Commissioner Johnson advised that she feels we need to be concerned about Ms. Gibson's position and then asked Ms. Gibson when she was planning to retire.

Ms. Gibson advised that her plan is to retire in February 2024.

Chairman Davis stated that Dr. Ledbetter had also mentioned Ms. Gibson's position and he had forgotten to put it on his list. We will also have to find a replacement for Ms. Gibson.

Chairman Davis stated that the hiring and firing of people is the responsibility of the County Manager; however, it is the board's responsibility to pass along to him guidance on what we think needs to be done.

Commissioner Johnson then asked if there were any other Director or Management positions planning retirement in 2023 or 2024?

Chairman Davis stated that the people to whom he has talked at that level, these are the only ones within the next year.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor stated that the people that we have as Department Heads and Directors have done an awesome job of running everything during this disaster. She is confident in the staff that we currently have in place, but what she is disappointed in is that we do not have a succession plan. The current situation has clearly shown that it is only by the grace of god and the fact that we have had good people, because if we had the wrong people during Dr. Ledbetter's absence, we would be in much worse shape than we are now. That has got to be a priority. We have departments that currently do not have qualified leadership.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor then stated that she would like for us to look at what the State requires us to do and figure out how much money that is going to cost us. No matter how we are going to look at ways to cut the budget, we have a statutory responsibility, and we need to make sure we conform. Once we get past the statutory responsibility what is the budget going to look like? Her goal is that we not cut anyone's salary and that no one is fired. The people we have stuck with us for a number of years, and we need to recognize that.

Chairman Davis hopes that at the retreat the staff will come to us and make recommendations on mandated services versus non-mandated services. Do we turn around and say that we are not doing trash. We are going to close the recycle centers due to the disaster and that is where we are going to get the money back to pay for the disaster relief. We must think about the mandated services.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor stated that whatever needs to be done, she doesn't want anyone to lose their jobs or for salaries to be reduced. During the disaster our employees have gone above and beyond and they didn't have to do that.

Commissioner Johnson stated that she agrees with succession planning and with the individuals we know are planning to retire, we need to get out in front of this. Whether it is a succession plan or know who is planning to retire, we need to ask that question over the next couple of years. Finding that information out would make the transition easier for us to prepare.

Chairman Davis then stated that we have a seasoned staff which is a good thing, but the seasoned staff is getting to retirement age. We have these experienced staff and they have been working for us a long time and within a few years we will be experiencing the loss of their expertise.

Dr. Ledbetter then advised that 25% of the County's workforce is eligible for retirement today. Out of that 25% a good number are at the Department Head level. He and Chief Polk have been working on succession planning and Chief Polk has done a good job of putting the material together. That was one of the main reasons he has been sharing with the Board his concern about not having number twos in place so that we could move forward. This is a significant concern. Our succession goes from a Department Head down to someone who could be ready in 3-5 years to replace them. That is a big gap and that is something we need to sit down and discuss how we are going to close that gap.

Ms. Windham added that a need for an Assistant County Manager is very clear and she would say that they need more managerial experience than legal experience.

Miles Neville, Human Resource Director, stated that the Board mentioned taking money from departments who have understaffed positions to use as bonuses or other means of retaining employees. It has been his experience that if you get rid of jobs, you typically don't get them back. He then asked the Board to please keep in mind that because these department currently have understaffed positions, most of them are exceeding their overtime budgets because the people they do have are having to work shifts for the positions that are not staffed and the overtime is taking up a significant amount of the money that would have been available had the positions been staffed.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor then asked if we want to consider residential trash pickup services and have the recycle center only handle certain items, but household garbage be picked up.

Chairman Davis stated this is something at we can talk about when Dr. Ledbetter gets back in the office. He has had conversations with Troup County who has implemented garbage pickup for the County residents and that was very favorable.

3. Discuss Archways and the direction the County would like to take as a Board in the upcoming renewal.

Chairman Davis stated we are going to have to make the decision if we are going to pay \$20,000 to continue the Archway program. We have been doing this for the 7-8 years and he has three points regarding Archway:

- Return on Investment is phenomenal. We pay \$20,000 and we get \$250,000 of work, engineering drawings and things like that. So, return on investment alone makes it worth it for him.
- This is a forcing function that keeps the three parties involved: the City of Griffin, the Griffin-Spalding County School System and the Spalding County Government. We're trying to create one tunnel, not three silos.
- He believes we should continue with Archway.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor feels that principals before personality is important to us and to our relationships in Archway. There are some things that need to be repaired in terms of the County and the City's relationship. She is not sure if the School System is having a problem with us or not. When she looks at the number of researchers we have had and the number of projects we've been able to pull together without having to pay for them because we have had the resources of the University of Georgia. We pay \$20,000 a year and the return on investment is well over ten times that amount. It is good business, it is good for the community and she is totally in support of doing what we need to do to work on our interpersonal relationships as a group. What this brings to Spalding County is much more important than us not being able to talk to one another. She absolutely supports continuing with Archway.

Commissioner Johnson stated that she also supports Archway, the return on investment has been great, but if the three governing partners are not working together to do this, then we do not need to do it. Unless the three partners agree, it has to be a no go.

Commissioner Bowlden stated that he supports continuing with Archway.

Dr. Ledbetter stated that he is in favor of continuing this partnership. He thinks the return on investment is important for how we work our projects, we get fresh ideas that come through. He loves the idea of Archway pulling the partnership together. He thinks it is a wonderful program and he supports it completely.

Ms. Windham stated that Archway is near and dear to her heart and the process of Archway is so much more important than any personality and she would hope that it would continue.

Chairman Davis then advised that there is legislation regarding "Certificate of Need" being considered at this time. It is legislation to create a 100-bed hospital just across the line in Butts County. The Certificate of Need has routinely not been approved. Suddenly, this came out of committee, and it was passed.

This would have a major impact on Spalding County if a 100-bed facility were to open right across I-75 on SR16. This is a Certificate of Need for the rural areas. Before it was a Certificate of Need statewide, the new bill specifically states that it is for rural areas. The issue is what happens to WellStar Spalding and Sylvan Grove if there is a new hospital? WellStar came to the Hospital Authority and asked that they send a letter stating that they do not support this legislation. The Hospital Authority is looking at that letter and coming up with their own response to the request.

Chairman Davis stated the question for the Board is do we feel there is a need for the County to come on board and express to our legislators that we support not allowing this legislation to pass. This would almost assuredly eliminate Sylvan Grove and a lot of our staff. WellStar is absolutely against it. Right now, there is no hospital who has claimed the proposal for the new hospital is theirs. If the law is passed, they can then search for a hospital that may be interested. The question to the board is do we think we need to get involved.

Commissioner Johnson stated she thinks that we should have an opinion.

Commissioner Flowers-Taylor stated that she doesn't think that we need to get involved because, while WellStar provides a service in the community, they get paid for it, but the County gets absolutely nothing back for it. If it we're going to affect the Board of Commissioners then there would be something for us to say, but when you are a not for profit hospital, you are trying to get the same money that somebody else is getting. She would not want the board to come out against the bill because there are places like Gay, Georgia and Monticello, Georgia that have no medical facilities in their area and a Certificate of Need that would allow a rural place to have a hospital would help them to cut through the tape of being able to build.

Commissioner Bowlden agreed with Commissioner Flowers-Taylor, there is a lot of need for a hospital in that area.

Dr. Ledbetter stated that he is torn regarding this decision as it will impact our community, but back to Ms. Gwen's comment, competition can drive the price, the opportunity and the quality of service. He is struggling because it will be an impact to the community. However, from personal experience over the last month in being in three different hospitals, the best service he received was in the hospital that he could look out of his window at Piedmont Hospital across the street. The competition did prove to provide better service to the patients than he received at the other hospitals where there was no competition.

Chairman Davis stated that the issue Commissioner Flowers-Taylor brought up is us versus the State. We primarily think about Spalding County, this issue is going to be statewide and do we want it voted down and some rural counties that need service not be able to get service?

Ms. Windham stated that she is biased on this topic as well. If there was a great need in that area, then they wouldn't need this legislation. They need it because they can't get an Certificate of Need. She doesn't support the driving forces behind it and she feels it will be harmful to our hospital, to Spalding County and it will definitely be detrimental to Sylvan Grove.

Chairman Davis stated that WellStar did not come to the Board of Commissioners and ask for a letter, they went to the Griffin-Spalding County Hospital Authority and the Butts Hospital Authority. He just wanted to make sure if we felt there was something that we needed to do that we write a letter.

III. ADJOURNMENT

Motion/Second by Flowers-Taylor/Bowlden to adjourn the meeting at 2:35 p.m. Motion carried unanimously by all.