



**HALL COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
BOARD RETREAT MINUTES
The Ridges Resort on Lake Chatuge
3499 Highway 76
Young, Harris, GA 30852
November 6-7, 2024**

Meeting on Wednesday, November 6, 2024 began at 1:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

Chairman Richard Higgins, Commissioners Kathy Cooper, Billy Powell, Gregg Poole, and Jeff Stowe

OTHERS PRESENT:

Chairman-Elect David Gibbs, County Administrator Zach Propes, Assistant County Administrators Katie Crumley and Casey Ramsey, County Attorney Bill Linkous, Communications and Strategic Engagement Manager Sarah Crowe, and Financial Services Director Taylor Samples

Welcome

Zach welcomed the Board of Commissioners and Chairman-Elect to the Fall Board Retreat. The conversation immediately turned to the result of the Nov. 5 General Election and the Transportation Sales Tax ballot question that failed. Zach reviewed the County's highest priority projects from the ballot question, including Spout Springs Road Phase II, McEver Road Phase I, White Sulphur Road, and the McEver Road Intersection Improvements. Various opportunities to fund these projects over an extended period of years were discussed, including property taxes, adjusting the current SPLOST 8 program, incorporating these projects in SPLOST 9, and reducing our current budget to allow for these projects to be incorporated back in (would result in a net neutral budget position). Additionally, we discussed potential to include a roads category in the Impact Fee Program. The Impact Fee Program generates a few million dollars in supplemental funding each year to help offset the impacts of growth. Currently, the allowable categories for collection include, Parks and Leisure, Libraries, and Public Safety. A new road category would allow for future opportunities to help the County fund smaller road projects, such as intersection improvements and to address turn lanes and traffic flow issues around new developments. This funding source is not adequate to solely fund large road widening projects that cost \$40, \$50, or \$60 million, but it is a good supplement source of revenue to help put towards road projects. We also discussed how staff and the Board currently works with developers to improve roads and traffic flow during the planning and zoning process, as appropriate. This conversation concluded with the acknowledgement that staff would continue to work on creating a recommendation for Board consideration during the FY 2026 Budget Development Process to fund and/or partially fund these highest-ranking road priorities.

Law Department/Ethics Discussion

Bill Linkous provided an updated on the Law Department. The Law Department is still considered a new department within our organization, as for years we outsourced this service to a third-party law firm. Bill reviewed the benefits of an internal law department which include improved efficiency and reduced financial impact. Over the past few years, we have realized a reduced financial impact to the County for legal services, while also adding quality of service in various areas of legal support, including contract review, ordinance compliance, department level issues, etc. The return on investment of restructuring the County's legal services to an in-house model has been highly positive.

Additionally, Bill Linkous spent a few minutes providing an overview of the County's Ethics Ordinance. Reviewing various aspects of the ordinance and certain procedural steps outlined in the ordinance as part of the County's on-going training.

Sales Tax Discussion

We reviewed major SPLOST 9 project ideas with the BOC. The following projects and ideas were discussed.

- South Hall Park (Spout Springs Road Property that the Hall County Sewer System owns) - \$20 million in SPLOST 9 (up to \$40 million project). Consider more inclusive playgrounds.
- Need to consider adding a marina on Lake Lanier in the northern area of the County. Would generate additional revenue.
- Commissioner Powell mentioned an additional community center in his district, perhaps at Cool Springs Park.
- Commissioner Poole mentioned clarifying why youth ball leagues are not being operated through the elementary schools like they used to. Will need to follow up with Parks staff.
- Sheriff Training Center on Allen Creek Road - \$17.5 million (includes a 6 year term @ 3.5%)
- Highlands to Islands Trail network - \$2-4 million. Would like Oakwood and Flowery Branch to participate. We want to connect further south.
- Resurfacing 20-30 miles per year? 20 miles a year (\$9 million x 6 years = \$54 million) or 30 miles a year (\$13.5 million x 6 years = \$81 million). Maybe move this out of sales tax program and over to property tax funds. There was a discussion about resurfacing more miles per year or reducing the miles per year.
- Fire Station 18 - \$4 million
- Sheriff's Vehicles Replacement - \$2 million
- 911/CAD System - \$3-4 million
- Commissioner Powell wanted us to look at renovating the 1936 Courthouse in SPLOST 9. We will review.

The Board of Commissioners called for an Executive Session. Executive Session began at approximately 4:20 PM and ended at 5:00 PM.

Meeting on Thursday, November 7, 2024 began at 8:30 a.m.

PRESENT:

Chairman Richard Higgins, Commissioners Kathy Cooper, Billy Powell, Gregg Poole, and Jeff Stowe

OTHERS PRESENT:

Chairman-Elect David Gibbs, County Administrator Zach Propes, Assistant County Administrators Katie Crumley and Casey Ramsey, County Attorney Bill Linkous, Communications and Strategic Engagement Manager Sarah Crowe, Financial Services Director Taylor Samples, Public Works & Utilities Director Bill Nash, Community Services & Parks Director Brent Holloway, Planning & Zoning Director Beth Garmon, Development Services Director Randi Doveton, MIS Director Daniel Sexton, Warden Walt Davis, Central Services Director Kevin Ivey, Fire Chief Jerry Smith and Human Resources Director Dr. LisaRae Jones (who joined later in the morning)

Strategic Plan/KPI

Sarah Crowe provided an update on the Hall County Strategic Plan and the tracking of recently identified department level performance measures. Overall, the County has made significant progress regarding the strategic plan. Additionally, it is important to track performance measures to ensure the County is delivering the highest level of service to the community, specifically in the areas of customer service, responsiveness, and quality assurance. The performance measures are tied back to the County's organizational vision to set the standard for excellent local government services in the State of Georgia.

- Reviewed the high-level strategic plan and provided an update on percentage completed
- Mental Health discussion is to approach the State about mental health institute.
- Take the opioid money to start a program like the City of Gainesville with a mental health specialist.
- Homeless center off Pearl Nix Parkway
- Review the first round of preliminary performance measures overall comment from BOC was positive.
- Commissioner Cooper asked about how the value of the Spout Springs Reclamation Facility land will be handled. We should consider the Tax Assessors Office giving an appraisal.
- Discussed the need to implement a monthly membership fee rather than take in an hourly use rate.

Cybersecurity

Daniel provided a high-level cybersecurity training for the Board. He reviewed the new email system and the threat of employees. He played a training video, and the BOC participated in a 5 question test. The BOC passed with a score of 100%. This is part of the County's on-going training.

Solid Waste Master Plan/Sewer Master Plan

Bill Nash reviewed the Solid Waste Master Plan that has been in place for a few years and provided updates on the Candler Road Landfill and the Allen Creek Landfill.

- We discussed the Candler Road Landfill cell and phasing plan
- The methane gas extraction operation was discussed that would go to a utility company injection point. There will be a meeting on Nov. 18 regarding that operation.
- Commissioner Stowe would like to see us move forward with the additional efficiencies of the Candler Road Landfill entrance and exit. End of next year? (FY 2026)
- Commissioner Poole and Chairman-elect Gibbs asked a few questions regarding the timeframe of the program build out.
- Commissioner Stowe asked for an update regarding the land acquisition.
- Commissioner Stowe requested we look at a financial model where we borrow from ourselves (reserves) and pay ourselves interest to save on the interest that would occur from borrowing money. Will need to review this option with PFM.
- Commissioner Stowe would like to sell this Chestnut Street building and lease it back to get cash to help build the Recycling Center. Commissioner Powell suggested the starting price is \$2.5 million. Appraisal is \$1.4 million. Add the west property (\$6 million) to the Chestnut Street property to get the highest value to a future commercial development.
- Discussed the Pond Fork Phase 1 sewer line. This is ARPA funded, and the PO must be issued by end of December 2024, and construction completed by end of December 2026.

UDC/Comp Plan

Beth Garmon provided a final updated on the final draft of the Comprehensive Plan and Unified Development Code that was approved by the Planning Commission on Monday, Nov. 4, 2024.

- All Board members are good on the final draft of the Comprehensive Plan and Unified Development Code
- Commissioner Poole requested a follow up on the PRD/PCD and overall comp plan and UDC at the Fall 2025 Board Retreat.

Parks Master Plan Update

Brent Holloway provided an updated on the progress of the Parks Master Plan.

- Updated the BOC on the master plan, joint management agreements, and capital outlay projects.
- Looking to set up a "Friends of Hall County Parks" and "Friends of the Animal Shelter" at the North Georgia Community Foundation. Discussed advertising the giving opportunities at ball parks and other Parks & Leisure facilities.
- Commissioner Powell would like us to have an additional dock at Sardis Creek Park and noted that there might be an opportunity for one to be donated.
- Commissioner Powell wants to look at other camping parks. Brent noted that Van Pugh is the next to evaluation.
- Commissioner Powell wants us to look a new layout for RVs at our current parks/jointly maintained parks.
- The Board mentioned being added to the Parks Newsletter distribution list.
- Chairman-Elect Gibbs asked us to look at if the Corp would approve a boat dock/slip at Sardis Creek. Furthermore, we need to determine what qualifies as a marina.
- Commissioner Stowe suggests that YMCA help with cost of the construction of the new South Hall Park currently in the planning phase. Selling ourselves short if we expect them to cover only the operations.
- Commissioner Stowe wants staff to finalize the negotiation for the 5 acre lot at Healan's Mill.
- Chairman-Elect Gibbs asked about tents/camping at Healan's Mill.

Fire Rescue Standard of Cover

Jerry Smith provided an update on the progress of the Fire Rescue Standard of Cover, Community Risk Assessment, and Strategic Plan.

- At this point the review has been good for the department. We anticipate a final report and strategic plan over the next few months.
- Commissioner Stowe questioned how we staff bilingual members. Are we strategically placing these members throughout the County Fire Stations based on where these residences are located.
- We need to look at all fees in the Fire Rescue Department.
- Reviewed the 2019 Fire Station Local Master Plan, including various capital outlay updates such as the Fire Training Center, new Fire Station 18, and relocating Fire Station 4. These projects are either under evaluation or in the initial planning stage.

Sales Tax Discussion Follow up

Zach led a final discussion regarding the upcoming SPLOST 9 development, which is the renewal of our current sales tax program that has been in place since the mid-1980s in Hall County.

- Discussed the two major projects remaining in SPLOST 7: 1) Mulberry Creek Back-pumping; 2) Cagle Road Improvements and White Sulphur Road Realignment.
- Discussed SPLOST 8 surplus and how the County has been applying the surplus to resurface more roads and offset inflationary increases reflat to specific projects. Discussed if the Board would support moving unassigned funds from project categories that have been satisfied per the SPLOST 8 IGA and referendum to other categories that have higher priorities needs, for example roads or parks. This reassignment would all be in alignment with State Law and the local IGA between the County and Cities. The decision was made to continue to assess this and make a recommended decision later, maybe with the FY 2026 Budget Development.
- Board requested that staff consolidate needed capital projects into one page for BOC reviews.
- Staff committed to studying the need for a community center in northwest Hall (possibly Cool Springs).

Further Discussion

Zach led a discussion on a few final topics.

- Confirming a few ordinance changes that need to go before the Board the next few months.
- Discussed Superior Court Judges and State Court Judges and case volumes.
- Discussed space at the main courthouse and the timeline of the final draft of the Judicial Study.

The retreat adjourned at approximately 3:45 PM
