

Meeting Summary
FY 2023 Budget Workshop Meeting
Lamar County Board of Commissioners
10/25/2022
9:00 a.m.

The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:00 a.m. on October 25th , 2022. Present for the meeting were Chairman Glass, Vice-Chairman Heiney, Commissioner Horton, Commissioner Thrash, County Administrator Townsend and County Clerk Davidson.

Sheriff's Office

Sheriff White addressed the board asking for increases in salaries. The Sheriff's Office is short 5 jailers. Investigator Knapp is leaving the Sheriff's Office to pursue other avenues that they do not provide. She wants to get on a gang task force somewhere and the Thomaston Police Department has hired Investigator Knapp. They have a new deputy that is from Clayton County, who could possible return back to Clayton County to run their crime unit. Sheriff White explained that those employees who have tenure could leave to go to a surrounding county that is paying substantially more money. The request for an increase of \$36,000.00 along with the 10 percent increase in salaries will put them in line with the neighboring counties. Currently, they are not getting any applications and they are having to pay overtime to cover the shifts. Upson County's certified deputy pay scale is \$10,000.00 more than Lamar County's. Sheriff White reported that they do not plan on continuing to use the grant funds from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Grant provided through the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (GCJCC) because they are going to start using the Care Cottage at the Monroe County Sheriff's Office and the Haven House in McDonough for protective orders regarding domestic violence and child advocacy.

Sheriff White also requested an increase in his fuel line item. He stated that the kitchen staff is going up because wheat is going up 60 percent. He said that the menus have changed and they use a lot of starch. The inmates will not eat the bologna so they had to start adding turkey, chicken and green vegetables. Regarding the medical staff, they contracted out with Dr. Hall and comes every Thursday. They hired Mindy Strickland in 2013 and she stayed on with Southern Correctional Medicine when they used them as a contractor. Dr. Hall has since sold his practice to Wellstar in Griffin, Georgia and has approximately 2 more years with Wellstar before he retires.

They have all new locks on the jails and the fire system has been updated. Seventeen new cameras have been installed at the courthouse. Sheriff White said that the internet at the Courthouse is terrible and the streaming system is not good. He stated that the camera system has to have internet access. They recently upgraded to phase 2 for the 911 phone system but because they are having trouble getting parts, they do not have it up and running. They are also working on adding the use of headsets to their phone system but this may not be feasible with what they have. Currently they are still having to listen to the radio which also needs to be upgraded so that they have a recording system. This will cost around \$200,000.00.

Chief Craig Cooper is retiring October 30th, 2022 and they need to make some new appointments to the 911 committee. Vice-Chairman Heiney is on that committee and he is going out of office December 31st, 2022 therefore his appointment will need to have a replacement.

Commissioner Thrash pointed out that under the investigations line item the actual for 2021 was \$590.00 but in the current budget for 2022 and the requested budget for 2023 there is a total request of \$5000.00. Sheriff White stated that this was probably used for body bags when the Coroner did not have a budget.

Commissioner Thrash inquired about his future plan for the jail. Sheriff White stated that his goal would be that the board would buy property to build a new jail because all of the commercial businesses will be around the current Sheriff's Office. They already have trouble getting out of the Sheriff's Office because of the traffic from the Elementary Schools, Zaxby's and Little Caesar's Pizza. One of the biggest hurdles for building a new jail is to get people to understand that the jail that is on the by-pass is owned by the State and it was a pre-release center for low level inmates and it was never designed to house murder suspects, aggravated assault or violent inmates. It would cost \$20,000,000.00 to retrofit this facility into a County jail. There are people that think that they should be using this building even though it does not belong to Lamar County. The jail is old and they need more office space. Commissioner Thrash inquired about the average population in the jail. Sheriff White said that they are averaging around 70 inmates but they can house around 130 to 167 inmates. The Criminal Justice Reform Act lets people out of jail. He said that in 2009 if you had a misdemeanor traffic offense with a pre-set bond, suspended driver's license, marijuana, DUI, etc., they would keep you in jail until you bonded out of jail. Some of the inmates would sit in jail for months on end. Now, they release them within 48 hours if they have not bonded out. The State Department of Corrections would house inmates six months to a year but now they come and get them. They also do not house inmates for other counties because they built new jails. However, they do trade inmates for security or litigation reasons.

Executive Session

Commissioner Thrash requested to go into executive session to discuss litigation at approximately 9:20 a.m. Commissioner Horton seconded the motion. The board came out of executive session at approximately 9:43 p.m. and resumed the FY 2023 Budget Workshop meeting.

Commissioners and Administration

Commissioner Thrash suggested that for the County breakfast they go back to potluck instead of having it catered. County Administrator Townsend reported that the bleachers have been torn out in the gym and that it has been cleaned for the upcoming election as it is one of the designated precincts. County Administrator Townsend reported on various increases in the Commissioners budget. The salary line item increased by \$5,000.00 because of the Cost of Living Allowance (COLA), and the travel increased by \$3000.00 due to conferences opening back up and new Commissioners going to training. There is \$6,000.00 budgeted for a planning retreat on January 26th, and 27th of 2023 in Athens, Georgia. A facilitator will give recommendations for a 5 to 10 year plan. County Administrator Townsend said that he plans on doing a phase 2 for financial reserve in order to avoid having a Tax Anticipation Note (TAN). County Administrator Townsend reported that in the Administration budget he included \$367,500.00 for contingencies which is 3 percent of the projected budget and a 10 percent increase for salaries.

Public Works

Public Works Director Rigdon addressed the board with his budget request. This includes a 20 percent increase in salary designated for a paver, a \$51,000.00 increase for the mowing contract, a \$20,000.00 increase in fuel cost, and the need to replace aging equipment and vehicles. Public Works Director Rigdon stated that he is still short on help and continues to advertise for employees. The need for extra gravel, culverts and pipes was requested and will come from the Special Local Options Sales Tax (SPLOST). There was discussion about the contract with EXP for the TSPLOST paving project and them not having the final contract to the board by October. County Administrator Townsend was tasked with having EXP update several areas of the contract including a time period for tasks to be completed without penalty and a final approval by November.

County Extension

County Extension Agent Jackson addressed the board with her FY 2023 budget request. The budget request includes adding a new Extension Agent that will be strictly funded by the County versus having a part time person that is split between Lamar and Upson County. The proposed salary is \$36,000.00 with which is a budget request of 38 percent and includes a cellphone and travel. The board discussed the areas that County Extension Agent Jackson does with the 4-H including supporting Science Projects in 8 classes at Lamar County and Rock Springs School. They have also done projects such as creating raised flower beds at the schools. Vice-Chairman Heiney led a discussion regarding having a wildflower project in the County.

Fire Department

Fire Chief Matthews addressed the board with his FY 2023 budget request. He said that this year they had a \$15,000 increase for turbos for their fire engines and they also had to replace the brakes on the rescue truck. The FY 2023 budget request includes a washer and dryer set for both stations for a cost of \$2,200.00, an increase in fuel cost of \$3,500.00 and after board discussion, the increase for the fuel changed to \$5,000.00 and a request of \$1,880 for eSchedule, an online scheduling system which is a fire based company that covers a 24 hour shift. Fire Chief Matthews stated that the Fire Department has been busy with car wrecks, extractions, brush and house fires. Chairman Glass said that with the new ambulance contract, they would not have to have as much backup from the Fire Department. Fire Chief Matthews explained that the Fire Department does go with them for lift support and they have their own protocols that they have to abide by but the ambulance company does request their assistance. Fire Chief Matthews explained that all of the orders, including gear, is on backorder. They may have to start renting gear so that new firemen can be trained. Fire Chief Matthews said that there are no major general fund budget request for FY 2023. There are some equipment request for SPLOST including longer hoses that are needed for fires such as chicken houses that they cannot get to with their fire trucks. Fire Chief Matthews thanked the board for the new fire truck tankers because they have made the biggest difference in their job. The cluster homes on the North end of Lamar County is his biggest worry and his concern is having a new Fire Station close to the 4-lane and downtown Milner. His plan for a new a new Fire Station is to have one that is centrally located between the South and North end of the County so that they are covered. Fire Chief Matthews stated that he has been with the Fire Department for 19 years and he has never not had to run a wreck with an entrapment but before he could get there, they had the patient out and backboard and because of the competence of the new Firemen and the speed of the new Fire Truck, he was able to turn around and go home. Commissioner Horton said that he is a short timer and he is very comfortable leaving knowing that everything will continue to run correctly.

Board of Elections

Election Superintendent Reid and board members Bill Christopher and Mike Perry addressed the board with their FY 2023 budget request. There is a Special Election in March and the requested election expenses is \$25,000.00. The warranty cost for the election equipment will cost approximately \$15,000.00. There is a City of Milner election and possibly a Barnesville election in November of 2023. There is a Sunday Alcohol Sales election for the City of Barnesville in March which will require a separate polling place which will be at the Barnesville Civic Center. They will need 5 to 6 machines and a separate machine for early voting. They have included a \$20,000.00 increase in Capital Outlay to purchase 2 brand new

high-speed ballot scanners and 6 cellular poll pads. The scanners are \$5,000.00 each and the poll pads are \$1,147.00 each. They come with hardware and software licenses. The Board of Elections is requesting that they have bigger computer rooms, storage space and a window in the tabulation room so that people can see in the room but they cannot come into the room. They reported that the support from the State has not improved and there has been a loss in staffing. The Reapportionment office has had delays in sending out the voter registration cards that relate to re-districting. The Reapportionment office sends maps once everything is approved. They cannot send out voter registration cards until state approves them. They received a box of precinct cards in July that was dated March, April, and May and then the Lamar County Board of Elections office had to go through them. They mail out the ones that they are receiving once they are verified, date and time stamped. Election Superintendent Reid said that the State sells information to the parties including dates of birth and phone numbers. The candidates look at this voter registration information online and think it is live data when in fact it is old data that has not been verified. Commissioner Thrash expressed her concerns with Sunday voting and wished that it could have been different. Election Superintendent Reid stated that Sunday voting has been discussed over the last 4 years. She said that Mr. Kingsley did not tell the Board of Commissioners at their September Regular Business meeting that he wanted to wait to implement Sunday voting until the March 2023 election when the turn out for voting is substantially lower. Election Superintendent Reid and Election Board member Christopher said that they implemented Sunday voting now because the turn out for the November 2022 election would be larger. Election Board member Christopher said that the window for obtaining an absentee ballot is much smaller and the turn out for Sunday voting was a success. He said that 158 people voted which was around 40 people per hour. Commissioner Heiney addressed his concerns regarding voters having the opportunity to take 2 hours off work to vote or vote on Saturday. Board of Election member Christopher gave an example where his grandson is a Pharmacist but he works Saturdays and he also works in another County as a Pharmacist and cannot come vote on Saturday or leave his hometown Pharmacy for 2 hours without a Pharmacist. He said that if they see that Sunday voting is being abused then the Legislation needs to step in. He said that they could see if the number of people taking advantage of other opportunities is greater than the number of people going to the polls on election day or if there is a significant change in the number of people that are early voting or voting by way of absentee ballot. He said that the Federal Government could consider making election day a holiday for essential workers. Election Superintendent Reid suggested that the Legislation review the ballot box process because it has put a damper on people wanting to get an absentee ballot. Board of Elections member Christopher said that they only have 4 weeks to get absentee ballots out and back in via mail and that is a challenge. Chairman Glass and the Board of Elections both recognized that early voting is the biggest expense in any election.

Adjournment

Commissioner Horton made a motion to adjourn the FY 2023 Budget Workshop meeting at approximately 12:11 p.m. Commissioner Thrash seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

THE LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Charles Glass, Chairman

Robert Heiney, Vice-Chairman

Bennie Horton, Commissioner

Nancy Thrash, Commissioner

Attest: _____ Carlette Davidson, County Clerk