



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

T. PAGE THARP GOVERNMENTAL BUILDING
102 STARKSVILLE AVENUE NORTH, LEESBURG, GEORGIA 31763

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2024 AT 12:00 P.M.
T. PAGE THARP BUILDING
KINCHAFOONEE CONFERENCE ROOM
WWW.LEE.GA.US

JOINT MEETING
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
UTILITES AUTHORITY

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Luke Singletary, Chairman	District 2
Chris Guarnieri, Vice-Chairman	District 4
Dennis Roland, Commissioner	District 1
Billy Mathis, Commissioner	District 3
George Walls, Commissioner	District 5

COUNTY STAFF

Christi Dockery, County Manager
Kaitlyn Good, County Clerk
Jimmy Skipper, County Attorney

The Lee County Board of Commissioners, Development Authority, and Utilities Authority met for a Special Called Joint Meeting on Wednesday, May 8, 2024 at 12:00pm. The meeting was held in the Kinchafoonee Conference Room of the Lee County T. Page Tharp Governmental Building in Leesburg, Georgia. Those present from the Commission were Chairman Luke Singletary, Vice-Chairman Chris Guarnieri, and Commissioner Dennis Roland. Those present for the Development Authority were Greg Crowder, Al Manry, Keith Miller, Tim Davis, Bobby Donley, and David Brokamp. Those present from the Utilities Authority were Amy Addison, Art Ford, and Aaron McCulley. Staff in attendance was County Manager Christi Dockery, County Clerk Kaitlyn Good, Finance Director Heather Jones, Assistant Planning Director Amanda Nava, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Lisa Davis, Chamber of Commerce Director of Operations Lesley Barbosa, Utilities Authority General Manager Chris Boswell, and Utilities Authority Director of Administrative Services Tricia Holmes. Also present was Consulting Engineer Kelvin Seagraves of Hofstadter and Associates.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Development Authority Chairman Greg Crowder led the invocation. Commission Chairman Luke Singletary called the meeting to order at 12:00pm.

2. PRESENTATION: BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

(A) Discussion of Current Projects.

County Manager Christi Dockery discussed current projects happening in Lee County including the 100 acre park, stating that concept plans have been presented and development has discussed. The County is also currently working with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to put a boat ramp/ kayak launch at the park. For the first time in the County's history, over \$5,000,000.00 (funded by LMIG, TSPLOST, and SPLOST) has been invested this year on 21 road resurfacing projects that are currently underway. Another round of resurfacing projects will take place once the 2024 LRA and 2025 LMIG funds are applied for and received. Another project also in the works is the updating of playground equipment at our neighborhood playgrounds as well as the addition of workout equipment at Pirate's Cove.

(B) Discussion of the Windstream Fiber Project.

Ms. Dockery discussed the Windstream project and the expansion of fiber throughout the County. Lee County has issued at least 75 permits for this project. The current estimated completion time is December 2024; although, they are not required to finish until 2026. Windstream may be broadening that expansion in the future, should additional grant funding become available.

(C) **Discussion of the Fund Balance.**

Ms. Dockery provided a summary of the current Fund Balance, stating that it fluctuates, and is higher at the beginning of the year as property taxes are due in December. Additionally, the millage rate is currently the lowest it has been since 2002. County Commission Chairman Luke Singletary added that the County is only able to keep the millage rate low because of commercial growth and development.

(D) **Discussion of TSPLOST and SPLOST.**

Ms. Dockery stated that TSPLOST II passed on the March 2024 ballot and SPLOST VIII also passed and will begin collection in October 2025. SPLOST VIII is expected to yield an estimated \$26,800,000.00. Because of a law change allowing the collection of tax on online purchases, the County was able to exceed the originally collection projection; thereby, TSPLOST has reached 109% collection (final) and SPLOST VI has reached 105% of collection. SPLOST VII will continue through September 2025, when SPLOST VIII will take over.

3. **PRESENTATION: DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

(A) **Discussion of Current Projects.**

Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Lisa Davis discussed the growth in Lee County: (1) the Grand Island recreation area is moving forward, which may spur a lot of growth in that area; (2) Stewbos has purchased the old Terry Ho factory to manufacture pizza dough, a business named Chow Chow; (3) there is one (1) 12.5 acre lot left at the industrial park; (4) there is a currently unnamed big development coming on US Hwy 19; and (5) Mavis Tire is currently under construction. Hwy 82 and Hwy 19 are the biggest growth areas right now.

(B) **Discussion of Future Economic Development Plans.**

Ms. Davis explained that sewer and water infrastructure adds interest for companies. Sewer capacity is a big issue as several projects were lost because the infrastructure was not there. Businesses have requirements and the County needs to meet those requirements in order to obtain that business. The community itself is a big attractor for business as Lee County has great schools, roads, and the ISO rating; however, there will always be competition with other communities. Development Authority Greg Crowder added that many companies looking to expand will send people into the communities to research and complete what's called a matrix, in which the community is graded on individual items. If a community scores a certain level, it may be considered for a new business location. These individuals can come back after several years.

The recent Woodgrain Millworks expansion was also discussed. The State economic development team was brought in and kicked in \$400,000.00 and wanted the County to match it. To secure the expansion, the County ran water along Hwy 82, which Woodgrain was able to tie into. This added 150 jobs and the total investment is over \$10,000,000.00. Woodgrain is increasing production of their molding and trim with this expansion. Governor Kemp recognized this project, which is a huge deal.

Utilities Authority member Arthur Ford added that industrial development/manufacturing pays a lot to a community; more so than a retail business. Mr. Crowder added that the County is a service-type business attractive community, but he doesn't know that we will ever get a large manufacturing company; the main issue being land availability and infrastructure. Mr. Kelvin Seagraves stated that he believed it could be possible as long as everyone works together.

(C) **Information on a New Economic Development Tool, Alpha Map.**

Ms. Davis gave a summary regarding the Alpha Map tool, stating that it provides an instant report on any specific property that includes aerial views, demographics, populations, household income, radius, traffic counts, business requirements, and a number of contacts for companies. This information can in turn be sent to the business representative.

4. **PRESENTATION: UTILITIES AUTHORITY**

(A) **Discussion of the Wastewater Treatment Plant.**

Utilities Authority General Manager Chris Boswell began the discussion by stating that the Wastewater

Treatment Plant (WWTP) is 22 years old and it is currently having issues. A new UV light disinfectant system has been installed. The incoming flow is approximately 700,000 gallons and the capacity is 1 million gallons. When the WWTP was taken over in 1996, the incoming flow was at nearly 300,000 gallons. Future development, both residential and commercial will affect this flow and capacity, so that is something the County and the developers need to keep in mind.

Out of the approximate \$9 million received from the bond issuance, approximately \$5 million will go towards the WWTP. The EPD requires additional treatment at the 700,000 gallon threshold. Other major improvements to the plant will include filters, repairs, and painting. Mr. Seagraves added that the initial building of the WWTP took approximately \$4 million, whereas the projected cost of repairs is approximately \$4.6 million. The cost of materials has nearly doubled due to inflation.

Commission Chairman Luke Singletary asked if it was more feasible to expand the current WWTP or build an additional one in a different location. Mr. Seagraves stated there are pros and cons to both. It would be great to have two (2) plants; however, additional personnel will be necessary to man both treatment plants. New operators will soon be needed just for the one (1) plant they have currently. The cost to complete an additional plant would be approximately \$20 million. Most sewer usage is commercial as sewer is not available in most residential areas.

Utilities Authority member Amy Addison added that their system is funded by revenue from the customers as they are not eligible for many grants and have maxed out some grants. If growth is needed in the system, the Utilities Authority is going to need help. Mr. Boswell added that rates increased \$1.00 last year and they will need to be increased again this year. Nearly half of the Utilities Authority departmental budget is dedicated to debt services.

The sewer capacity must be safeguarded for any future commercial or industrial development. A way to do this would be to limit the consumers of sewer. Sewer is located primarily on Hwy 19 and Hwy 82, which conveniently is the location of much commercial development. Commission Chairman Luke Singletary stated that the Board of Commissioners could do a resolution to support this and provide direction. Mr. Boswell stated that the Utilities Authority may need help from the Board of Commissioners in funding the expansion. In the event of a major development, the State would step in and assist if necessary.

(B) **Discussion of Meter Project.**

Mr. Boswell summarized the meter replacement project by stating that the Utilities Authority has been working to replace old meters around the County. While a meter's life is usually around 20 years, the current meters are around 25 years old. Updating the meters has shown major changes in the reported usage and billing in certain areas. These new meters help to give a more accurate reading, which helps customers be accurately billed. The Utilities Authority has spent around \$2 million on this project.

Utilities Authority Director of Administrative Services Tricia Holmes continued discussing the project, adding that to follow State regulations, backflow preventers have also been installed on the meters. There are three (3) phases to this project and Phase I included putting in the infrastructure to go from manual readings (i.e. towers and poles) and will be completed at the end of next month.

Ms. Holmes stated that with the meters come new technology that is proving very beneficial. The Authority is currently less than 200 meters away from having fully electronic meters, which will completely eliminate the need for personnel to physically go around reading meters. The new meters come with a 20 year warranty.

Phase III involves the meters the Utilities Authority already has; about 15 years ago, the Authority implemented a drive by system, thereby, so every meter that is 15 years old or older is accurate on the new system. Only about 2000 meters will require a drive by when the project is done and as soon as funding becomes available they will move into the next phase. Ms. Holmes added that after June 14, approximately half of the County's meters will be new, but stated that second half is less than 10 years old. It would take an approximate additional \$815,435.90 to finish all of the meters.

(C) **Discussion of Five (5) Year Water and Sewer Expansion Project.**

Mr. Boswell and Mr. Seagraves summarized the presented five (5) year plan, which involved expansion of water and sewer lines, a new well, and updates to the WWTP, stating that the amounts required for these projects were staggering.

The Utilities Authority spent \$1 million for the well in 2021 and are currently serving 19,000 people with water. Mr. Boswell stated that they need to put in another well as soon as possible and Mr. Seagraves stated that estimated cost would be around \$3.4 million. The oldest wells were drilled in 1994.

County Manager Christi Dockery added that there is allocated funds available in SPLOST for the Utilities Authority and mentioned the grant from Sanford Bishop's office. Mr. Boswell confirmed a representative from that office had been down. The Utilities Authority can install sewer lines with this grant on Hwy 19. Most water and sewer consumption is on Hwy 82. If a well is placed on the East side of the County, where the water is, additional water lines may be necessary. Mr. Boswell added that Hwy 82 is in good shape and Hwy 19 currently has blind spots.

At the close of the meeting, those present agreed that this type of joint meeting needs to happen more regularly.

PUBLIC FORUM

Citizens will be allowed to address the Board of Commissioners regarding any issues or complaints. Individuals should sign up prior to the start of the meeting.

No citizens took part in the Public Forum.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

(A) The next regularly scheduled County Commission Meeting is **Tuesday, May 14, 2024 at 6:00pm.**

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 1:50 PM.

CHAIRMAN

ATTEST: _____
COUNTY CLERK

Lee County is a thriving vibrant community celebrated for its value of tradition encompassing a safe family oriented community, schools of excellence, and life long opportunities for prosperity and happiness without sacrificing the rural agricultural tapestry.

Persons with special needs relating to handicapped accessibility or foreign language interpretation should contact the ADA Coordinator at (229) 759-6000 or through the Georgia Relay Service (800) 255-0056 (TDD) or (800) 355-0135 (voice). This person can be contacted at the T. Page Tharp Building in Leesburg, Georgia between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays, and will assist citizens with special needs given proper notice of seven (7) working days. The