



LEE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

T. PAGE THARP GOVERNMENTAL BUILDING

102 STARKSVILLE AVENUE NORTH, LEESBURG, GEORGIA 31763

Tuesday, March 25, 2025 AT 6:00 PM

T. PAGE THARP BUILDING

OPAL CANNON AUDITORIUM

WWW.LEE.GA.US

MEETING MINUTES

Voting Session

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 met in a voting session on Tuesday, March 25, 2025. The meeting was held in the Opal Cannon Auditorium of the Lee County T. Page Tharp Governmental Building in Leesburg, Georgia. Those present were Chairman Luke Singletary, Vice-Chairman Chris Guarnieri, Commissioner Dennis Roland, Commissioner Billy Mathis, and Commissioner George Walls. Staff in attendance was County Manager Christi Dockery. County Clerk Kaitlyn Good and County Attorney Jimmy Skipper were absent. The meeting was also streamed on Facebook Live. Chairman Singletary called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

2. **INVOCATION**

Chairman Luke Singletary led the invocation.

3. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

4. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A) Consideration to approve the minutes from the January 2, 2025 CDBG Public Hearing.

Commissioner Roland made the **MOTION** to approve the minutes from the January 2, 2025 CDBG Public Hearing. Commissioner Walls seconded the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** was unanimous with Commissioner Guarnieri and Commissioner Mathis voting yea.

B) Consideration to approve the minutes from the March 11, 2025 Board of Commissioners meeting.

Commissioner Roland made the **MOTION** to approve the minutes from the March 11, 2025 Board of Commissioners meeting. Commissioner Walls seconded the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** was unanimous with Commissioner Guarnieri and Commissioner Mathis voting yea.

5. **CONSENT AGENDA**

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

A) Recognition of County employee's years of service.

Chairman Singletary recognized the following employee for their years of service:
5 years: Chris Owens

7. **PUBLIC HEARING**

8. **DEPARTMENTAL MATTERS**

A) **Public Works - Consideration to award the bid for a Wheeled Excavator.**

County Manager Christi Dockery stated that this is to replace the current lease for a wheeled excavator. Yancey Brothers was the lowest bid at \$4,188.50 per month.

Commissioner Roland made the **MOTION** to award the bid for a Wheeled Excavator to Yancey Brothers for \$4,188.50 per month from TSPLOST funds. Commissioner Guarnieri seconded the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** was unanimous with Commissioner Mathis and Commissioner Walls voting yea.

9. **CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS & GOVERNMENTAL BOARDS/AUTHORITIES**

A) **Consideration to appoint one (1) member to the Community Foundation Board of Trustees for a term of two (2) years. Current term expires 03/25/2025. New term expires 03/25/2027. Letter of interest in appointment received from Elaine Ruckel (reappointment).**

Commissioner Mathis made the **MOTION** to reappoint Elaine Ruckel to the Community Foundation Board of Trustees. Commissioner Walls seconded the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** was unanimous with Commissioner Guarnieri and Commissioner Roland voting yea.

B) **Sheriff's Office - Consideration to approve a quote for Door/Intercom Access Control Program and PCs.**

County Manager Christi Dockery stated that there is money in the budget to get this project done with facilities funds. Jail Administrator Joe Clark, Sheriff's Office, stated that SWC originally had to put the system in. This is not replacing the system that they currently have, it is just the computer part. It was installed from 2009 to 2010. The computer that runs this program is outdated and several parts have been replaced. This would give them two new PCs and touch-screen monitors. The intercom system is important to have due to possible emergencies. The proposed price is \$19,932.00. Commissioner Guarnieri asked if SWC was the only vendor that could do this project. Mr. Clark stated they are not. There are a few more in Alabama that can but SWC put in the original program. If they went with another company, then they would have to rebuild the program and map it to the facility.

Commissioner Mathis made the **MOTION** to approve a quote with SWC for Door/Intercom Access Control Program and PCs for \$19,932.00. Commissioner Roland seconded the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** was unanimous with Commissioner Guarnieri and Commissioner Walls voting yea.

C) **Sheriff's Office - Consideration to approve the purchase of two Ford F-150 Police Responders.**

County Manager Christi Dockery stated that the Sheriff's Office just purchased five vehicles, but they are currently working with Public Works and have sold eight vehicles. They have revenue that they need to spend before June. Ford has two trucks that can go ahead and be purchased, then they can outfit the two vehicles. To outfit them would cost approximately \$28,000.00 using GovDeals funds and the purchase cost for both would be \$110,000.00 using SPLOST funds.

Commissioner Mathis made the **MOTION** to approve the purchase of two Ford F-150 Police Responders. Commissioner Roland seconded the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** was unanimous with Commissioner Guarnieri and Commissioner Walls voting yea.

10. COUNTY MANAGER'S MATTERS

A) Update on County projects.

County Manager Christi Dockery discussed the following updates to County projects: (1) the Smithville tower equipment is expected by next week and plans are to have everything installed by the first week of April; (2) WJ Kirksey is currently working on the Public Works projects; and (3) Georgia Department of Transportation has opened the Smithville bridge following completion project.

B) Discussion of the Lee County Courthouse addition.

Judge Sizemore addressed the Board regarding the Courthouse addition. He stated that they last discussed the phase two contract with the architect, which is the design and the most expensive portion of this process. Judge Sizemore stated that the cost estimate that was provided by Parrish Construction was \$4.4 million, which is more than SPLOST includes. There are certain things not in the bid, such as furniture, IT, audio, and visual components. Judge Sizemore said that there was discussion about speaking with the architect about how to get this project back within the budget. Judge Sizemore stated that his hesitancy with that is that they won't know any bids until they get the design work and put it out for bids. He is hopeful that if any local companies bid, it will be lower than \$4.4 million, but it could be more. He would like to go ahead and get a set of plans to put out for bid. Then, once they receive a bid, they can see where they can cut back to be within budget.

Chairman Singletary stated that his only concern is the architects' percentage pay is a percentage of the estimated cost, with the estimated cost already being outside the budget. However, if they were to cut back, then it would lower the cost. Judge Sizemore stated that he reads the contract as a percentage of the actual cost, but the fee schedule can be based on the estimated cost. If the cost comes in less, then it will be reduced. Judge Sizemore stated that he could see if he would base it off of the budgeted cost of \$4 million and adjust as needed. Commissioner Mathis stated that this is a project needed in Lee County as it will save money by being able to try two cases at one time in the Courthouse. Judge Sizemore stated that this would also add an office for a Superior Court judge. Commissioner Roland asked if Lee County would ever be big enough to have their own judge to serve. Commissioner Mathis stated that is up to the state. Judge Sizemore said that generally those counties are generally in the population range of 75,000 to 80,000.

Judge Sizemore stated that this addition would have an additional courtroom, office, holding cell, and elevator. Commissioner Mathis stated that they need to move ahead with doing this as it is long overdue. He discussed only having one courtroom and many cases that will not be tried for a period of time due to this. He asked Judge Sizemore how efficient it would be to be able to hold two trials at once. Judge Sizemore said it would be doubled because each term, the lawyers would know two cases would be tried. They can start resolving other cases while the larger case is being tried. Judge Sizemore asked the Board if he can ask the architect to price it on the initial draws until they know what the bids are. Chairman Singletary asked as long as he has it in there that he would take less if the bid comes in lower than the estimate.

Commissioner Mathis made the **MOTION** to approve a contract with Jericho Designs for the Lee County Courthouse addition. Commissioner Roland seconded the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** was unanimous with Commissioner Guarnieri and Commissioner Walls voting yea.

C) Consideration to approve submitting an application for 2025 Local Road Assistance Administration funds (LRA).

County Manager Christi Dockery stated that the Governor and Legislature approved local road

assistance funds again this year. There is no match required from the County and Lee County's portion is \$864,247.96. They can go ahead and apply for these funds; the road can always be changed in the future if needed. Chairman Singletary asked about road suggestions for the next meeting. Commissioner Mathis stated that Ledo Road is going to cost more than that. Chairman Singletary asked if Ledo Road could be put down since it was put for LMIG. Ms. Dockery said that she believes it can, since it will cost approximately \$1.6 million. Commissioner Guarnieri asked if the City of Albany was committed to doing their portion of Ledo Road. Ms. Dockery stated that she has a meeting with them in a few weeks and that is one of the projects being discussed.

Commissioner Mathis made the **MOTION** to approve submitting an application for 2025 Local Road Assistance Administration funds for Ledo Road. Commissioner Guarnieri seconded the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** was unanimous with Commissioner Roland and Commissioner Walls voting yea.

11. COMMISSIONER'S MATTERS

A) Discussion of Old Leslie Road.

County Manager Christi Dockery stated that Mr. Sam Johnson brought a deed showing a 60-foot right-of-way for his property. She said that Public Works Director Mike Sistrunk gave an estimate of \$855,000.00 for this road to be paved. Commissioner Mathis asked if they had all the right-of-way. Ms. Dockery said that they are still working on obtaining that and County Attorney Jimmy Skipper will review.

B) Discussion of Coston Road.

Commissioner Walls stated that he spoke with the engineer who stated that he has a little more drainage to do, then he will be finished. He is discussing draining to the lower end where the road curves. County Manager Christi Dockery said that there are three ponds in the area, but they did not want to go ask the residents for deeds without the drainage issue being resolved. Commissioner Mathis asked if they had a right-of-way for this road. Ms. Dockery stated that they did not. Chairman Singletary stated they are still waiting on the engineering plans. Ms. Dockery said that they are waiting for the engineer to finish, and then they will send it all to the County Attorney, Jimmy Skipper, for review.

12. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

13. COUNTY ATTORNEY'S MATTERS

A) Discussion of a Hookah Ordinance within the County.

Captain Eddie Burgess, Sheriff's Office, addressed the Board. He stated that there was a criminal case involving a smoke shop in Lee County a few months ago which brought up this ordinance. The store was closed for the day but then immediately opened back up. The Sheriff's Office received many calls from concerned citizens. There are many who are under the assumption that if a business is under investigation for illegal activity, then their business license is either under review or revoked; however, there is no ordinance in the County to address anything like this. Mr. Burgess stated that after looking, there are possibly vulnerable spots that could lead to potential problems in the County.

The suggestion of this ordinance would be to create regulations for the sale of paraphernalia items for non-traditional tobacco products. These are categorized as grinders, storage devices that are manufactured to be hidden, weighing devices, and torch lighters. The ordinance would require those

who want to sell these products to pay an additional application fee, let the Board review their application more strictly, and the Sheriff's Office would do a more extensive background check, and if there is a violation, the Board will then review the license. Mr. Burgess stated that if the ordinance is passed in its current form, then businesses that want to sell these defined items will need to place them in a nonpublic room. He said that convenience stores and smoke shops primarily sell these items. They did a public view walk through of thirteen gas stations, two smoke shops, and two liquor stores. They found these items in the two smoke shops and five gas stations. Mr. Burgess showed the Board examples of paraphernalia items used for illegal narcotics.

Mr. Burgess stated that, individually, the items are not illegal, but once you combine them with illegal narcotics, then it becomes a misdemeanor drug-related object, or they could even be a felony possession of tools for the commission of a crime. Routinely, when they do narcotic crimes and find these items, they charge felonies. Those items not being out in the open in stores would be positive for the County. It would require the business to have an investment to sell these items with the added application fee, but he does not believe that it will hurt any business to not sell these items. Commissioner Walls asked if they would be able to close the business under this ordinance. Mr. Burgess stated that the ordinance allows for review of the business license. If they have any sort of violation, then they can review it and make a collective decision.

Commissioner Mathis stated that they do not have an ordinance to revoke a business license if there is any illegal activity. He said that he thinks it is important to implement an ordinance to allow them to revoke a business license in these types of cases. Chairman Singletary stated that that is something that they need to look into. However, there are certain things they need to work out, such as if it is an employee conducting an illegal activity separate from the business. Mr. Burgess stated that it is a complicated factor when looking into these businesses to determine if it is the employee that should be held responsible or the business owner. Commissioner Mathis said it would be helpful to the Sheriff's Office for the Board to revoke business license. Mr. Burgess stated that it would be helpful. The ultimate goal of bringing this ordinance to the Board is to get hold of it before it becomes a widespread problem. Commissioner Mathis asked about the Georgia law regarding paraphernalia. Mr. Burgess stated that Georgia law defines certain items as paraphernalia under OCGA 16-13-32.1 and 32.2. Section 32.1 covers anyone who is distributing or producing anything that qualifies as a drug-related object and 32.2 covers the possession of such. An example of possession would be if you arrested a narcotic user who had a pipe but is not distributing then they are just a user in possession of drug-related objects. Mr. Burgess read out the law that identifies these objects.

Commissioner Mathis stated an issue he had was where they should stop. You can purchase a scale from the hardware store but not the convenience store. Mr. Burgess stated that he has not seen anyone not involved in illegal activity in possession of paraphernalia. They are not trying to make anything illegal that is not currently legal. Commissioner Mathis stated that there is no doubt in their minds that the objects shown in the presentation are drug-related objects, but the concern is the objects that are legal. Commissioner Guarnieri clarified that they are not trying to restrict the sale of these items but take them to where they are not as visible to the public. Mr. Burgess said that was correct. When they have objects such as these in public view, then those stores become associated with knowing that those items can be purchased there for criminal activity. This ordinance would not do anything but keep those items out of public view. Chairman Singletary stated that this would make it to where you have to go in and ask for the items instead of them being right on the counter. Mr. Burgess said that one thing this ordinance would do is help when they receive calls from concerned parents calling and stating that their children have these items, they can then state that they have added steps to make it harder for underage people to get. Commissioner Mathis asked that they meet and discuss this ordinance. Chairman Singletary stated that they are on the right path, and

they should go ahead and work on the ordinance to revoke a business license. Commissioner Mathis stated that he would like to do some research to determine which illegal activity revokes a business license. Mr. Burgess suggested a grading level of enforcement, such as suspending or revoking.

B) Consideration to approve a Quit Claim Deed with Artesian Holdings LLC.

Commissioner Mathis made the **MOTION** to approve a Quit Claim Deed with Artesian Holdings LLC. Commissioner Guarnieri seconded the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** was unanimous with Commissioner Roland and Commissioner Walls voting yea.

C) Consideration to approve an Intergovernmental Agreement with the City of Leesburg.

County Manager Christi Dockery stated that the City of Leesburg wanted to handle their own Building Inspection and Planning services. Commissioner Mathis asked if the County was no longer helping them in any regard. Ms. Dockery stated that they would help to train them. Commissioner Mathis asked if they would still come before the joint Planning Commission. Planning Director Amanda Nava-Estill stated that they will and the City will handle their own presentations. Ms. Dockery said that they will still do a joint advertising process. Ms. Nava-Estill added that when they get the major transition out of the way, she will transition to separate advertising.

Commissioner Mathis made the **MOTION** to approve an Intergovernmental Agreement with the City of Leesburg. Commissioner Roland seconded the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** was unanimous with Commissioner Guarnieri and Commissioner Walls voting yea.

14. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

15. **PUBLIC FORUM**

Chairman Singletary asked if anyone would like to speak.

With no comments or questions from the audience, the Public Forum was closed.

16. **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

A) The next meeting of the Lee County Board of Commissioners will be April 8, 2025.

B) This year's **Annual Great American Cleanup**, Amnesty Day at the Landfill, and Prescription Drug Take Back event will be held **Saturday, April 5, 2025** beginning at 10:00am and ending at 12:00pm.

17. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 7:05PM.

CHAIRMAN

ATTEST:

COUNTY CLERK