

County Meeting
June 20, 2019
Minutes
Union County Courthouse

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Paris at 6:10 pm. The invocation was given by Pat Malone and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Bill Walker. The minutes from the May 16, 2019 County Meeting were approved as presented.

The Commissioner approved Resolution R-2019-02 transferring surplus property located at 5048 Highway 515 to the Union County Development Authority for the purpose of being sold. This is the property where the proposed 4-H Shotgun range was going to be located. The site was not large enough to accommodate a shotgun range and in the time it took Union County to do all the studies required by the Department of Natural Resources a subdivision had been built on the property just above the proposed Shotgun Range site. At this point Union County has no use and cannot see a use for this property in the near future. Commissioner Paris had one other comment about this. At the last county meeting he may have confused some when talking about this very resolution. He stated that it was illegal for the county to sell the property and that was why they were transferring the property to the Development Authority. Commissioner Paris clarified it is not illegal for the county to sell any surplus property, but if the County sells it they must sell either to the highest bidder or the highest sealed bid. This all requires a lot of preliminary work including advertising, appraisals, and sales methods. This all takes time and experience that office staff simply does not have. By allowing the Development Authority the ability to sell the property, it removes any potential conflict with the Commissioner's Office and the County will pay a fee to the Development Authority to sell the property. They can negotiate with any potential purchasers and sell to whom they feel will offer the best enhancement to the county.

Commissioner Paris approved Resolution R-2019-04 approving the sale of Right of Way to the Georgia Department of Transportation of Union County Property located in Land Lots 269 & 270, 9th District, 1st Section for the widening of Highway 515/76 from Blairsville to Young Harris. The Georgia Department of Transportation will be purchasing 1.264 acres along Highway 515 across from Sears. This is the road frontage of the property that the County purchased from the Leon Davenport Family and where the new ballfield complex will be constructed in the future.

The Commissioner approved Resolution R-2019-05 to approve the sale of Right of Way to the Georgia Department of Transportation of Union County Property located in Land Lot 269, 9th District, 1st Section for the Widening of Highway 515/76 from Blairsville to Young Harris. The amount of this Right of Way purchase is being considered a donation of 0.076 acres at the intersection of the Glenn Gooch By-Pass, Highway 515, and Farmers Market Way.

Commissioner Paris approved Resolution R-2019-06 to Amend the FY2018 Budget from \$16,614,592 to \$18,908,000 which is roughly 2.2 million dollars. The county Auditors will be giving the report on the county audit next month and this budget amendment is required. A general breakdown of these numbers is as follows. Revenues from property taxes exceeded the budget by \$150,000, charges for services exceeded the budget by \$277,000, and sale of Capital Assets exceeded the budget by \$423,000. The county had to use 1.5 million out of fund balance

to balance the expenses over revenues, which was less than had to be used last year to balance the budget. The Commissioner gave a summary of the expenditures for 2018 that were over budget. General Administration was over budget by \$167,390. This included Repairs and Maintenance being over budget by \$37,503 and Contract Labor being over by \$19,000. The County has to have dual internet in case one goes down and the cost for this was over budget by \$22,000. Supplies and Materials were over by \$16,000 and Vehicles were over budget by \$29,250 due to having to purchase a vehicle for Community Service that was not budgeted for.

The Sheriff's Office was over budget by \$563,000, with \$173,000 being for salaries for the deputies. Due to salary increases all over the state, the county had to increase the deputy's salaries in order to keep them from leaving and going to counties that were paying higher salaries. Uniforms for the deputies were over budget by \$20,000 and professional services related to the Sheriff's Office, including data backup and copiers was over by \$19,000. Vehicle repairs and maintenance for the Sheriff's Office was over by \$16,000 and gas and oil was over by \$34,000. Vehicle purchases made by the Sheriff's Office was over by \$268,530, but the sale of capital assets covered some of this and some was paid for by SPLOST. There was a need this year for more vehicles for the Sheriff's Office than was anticipated.

The Jail was over budget by \$143,000 which included salaries going over by \$82,000 for the same reason the salaries for the Sheriff's Office Deputies was over budget. Overtime for the jail was over by a little under \$10,000 and health coverage for the inmates was \$17,000 over budget. Repairs and maintenance at the jail was over by \$41,000 since most repairs cannot be paid for by SPLOST.

The Fire Department was over budget by \$172,950, which included salaries being over by \$14,000 and vehicles being over by \$93,669. The vehicles for the Fire Department were over budget due to purchasing a ladder truck that was not budgeted for. The Commissioner stated this was a much-needed purchase and Fire Department employees did an excellent job of finding an excellent used ladder truck for a very reasonable price. A brand-new ladder truck can be 1.2 million to 1.5 million and they found a used one, in excellent condition for \$93,000. Site improvements for the Fire Department were over budget by \$59,000 due to the construction of a new training facility. The cost for this was offset by selling an old fire truck for \$60,000.

Community Service was over budget by \$59,000 since this was a new program started in 2018 and was not budgeted for. The District Attorney went over budget by \$53,989, and the County has no control over this. The County did hire a part-time Public Defender for \$20,000 per year to get inmates processed and out of the Jail faster to decrease inmate and jail costs in the future. So far this is working since so far this year the cost is around \$19,000 which is way lower than it has been in the past.

Building Inspections was over budget by \$53,000, but their revenues more than made up for that. Their vehicle costs were \$29,850 over budget and salaries and benefits was over by \$18,000 due to hiring an additional employee. Supplies and materials was over by \$3,100.

Employee Health Insurance was over budget by \$569,000. The Commissioner said this was just a high loss year with a lot of employees and family members having health issues. He said the county is working with employees to decrease these costs this year by focusing on healthy habits and the employees cost for insurance went up. Through insurance the county has also hired a

doctor by phone company that will allow employees to call a doctor 24/7 for treatment for certain things. This will hopefully eliminate unnecessary trips to the emergency room that can increase costs.

Commissioner Paris accepted an Agreement between Union County and Air Methods Corporation for emergency air medical transportation services for the County's residents and their household members from June 1, 2019 to May 31, 2020. The amount of this agreement is not to exceed \$76,765.00 and the county will only be responsible for half that amount, with Union General Hospital covering the other half. The Commissioner thanked everyone involved with this decision, especially Air Methods and Union General Hospital, without who's assistance this program to assist our citizens would not be possible.

The Commissioner accepted an Agreement between the Georgia Department of Corrections and Union County for six work details for the period July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020. The cost for these details is \$39,500 per detail for the term of this agreement totaling \$237,000.00. Without these details, the County could not even begin to perform the construction, repair, trash pickup, golf course maintenance, Meeks Park maintenance, and road maintenance. A special thanks to the Carlton Colwell Detention Center, detention officers and the detainees, who are all dedicated to their jobs in the county.

Commissioner Paris accepted a Consulting Agreement between Patrick Malone and Union County for coordinating the awareness of the 2020 United States Census in Towns and Union Counties for the period of June 1, 2019 to May 31, 2020. The cost for this Agreement will be \$1,000 paid monthly for a total of \$12,000, plus any additional required services if needed by the governments. This expense will be paid by the following: Union County Government \$ 7,500, City of Blairsville \$500, Towns County \$3,500, City of Hiawassee \$500 and the City of Young Harris \$500. The Commissioner stated that all local governments realize the importance of having a full and proper count of our citizens and publicizing this will be a high priority. Union County is working with the State of Georgia, as well as the Census Bureau to encourage and educate the public on the importance of the census, especially to local governments. For the next ten years, funding and grants are almost all made available based on population numbers. In order to save taxpayers future cost, accurately completing the 2020 census will be critical for the county's future.

The Commissioner accepted an Agreement between Union County and Legacy Link for the required local share during FY-2020 in the amount of \$95,000. This is the amount Union County has committed in local funds to operate the Senior Center from July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020. The Senior Center is a huge asset to our community that provides numerous services and activities to the Senior Citizens including exercise programs, quilting, crafts, games, and the Meals on Wheels Program. They also provide transportation to and from the center as well as trips to the grocery store and drug store for those senior citizens who are no longer able to drive. The Director, Kathy Hill, and the employees and volunteers do an amazing job and the Commissioner is proud of their service and dedication to the Senior Citizens in our community.

Commissioner Paris agreed to a Commitment Letter between Union County and Legacy Link for the required local share during FY-2020 in the amount of \$11,450.00. These funds are used by the Area Agency on Aging as match to draw down the federal and state monies for

administration, coordination, information and referral, employment and training of older workers and volunteer programs at the Union County Senior Center

Commissioner Paris accepted a Contract between Georgia Mass Appraisal Solutions and Service, Inc. (GMASS) and Union County for the purpose of reevaluating property values in Union County. The contract has an effective date of April 24, 2019 and the amount of this contract is \$620,000. GMASS will provide Union County updated pricing schedules and inventories of real property by performing field inspections of all parcels.

This is all being necessitated by the fact that gradually over the past few years, and continuing today, sales of homes and property is in many cases far outpacing the appraised values. Each year the State of Georgia does a sales ratio study of each county in Georgia, which compares the appraised values (assessed is 40%) against what the property actually sold for. If a county stays at or near 40%, the state considers this adequate. As this percentage gets lower, you are penalized when it drops below 38% and if the percentage gets below 36% over a three-year period, there are heavy financial penalties. Fannin County has gone through this in the past few years and Union County does not want to get in that position. It is impossible for staff to keep up with all the sales and values. While the cost of this service is high, Union County has not had to have one of these in about 16 years. This study ensures that all values of property are fair so that everyone pays a fair portion of their property tax without it being too low or too high. This has nothing to do with property taxes going up or down but will impact the millage rate once completed and usually the mil rate will decrease. In 2015 the ratio was 40.63%, which was very good. By 2018, it was down to 37.85% and it is anticipated to be lower next year. Once the ratio drops below 38%, the county is unable to collect full value on utilities. This has already cost the county \$ 35,297 in the past two years and that amount will only increase.

The Commissioner approved a Rental Agreement between the State Properties Commission on behalf of the Department of Driver Services and Union County for office space located at 149 Chase Drive, Blairsville. The amount of this agreement is \$1.00 per year and renews each year for five successive one-year periods. This rental agreement is for the time period of July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020.

The Commissioner combined a couple of items on the Agenda to keep from repeating himself. Items 12 and 13 on the Agenda are both additional Accountability Courts Sub-Grants for the current grant cycle. Commissioner Paris approved these Accountability Courts Grants for the Enotah Family Treatment Court in the amount of \$316.00 and for the Enotah Felony Drug Court – South in the amount of \$4,710.00. The Grant period for both of these is from May 1, 2019 to June 30, 2019.

Commissioner Paris then combined items 14-17 on the Agenda since they are all Accountability Court Grants for the Enotah Judicial Circuit. The Commissioner stated that he appreciated that the Governor and the Legislature have set up the Drug Court program and provide state funds to operate them. The positive outcomes for the individuals who have addiction problems and complete this program is incredible. The Grant period is from July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020 on all the following grant approvals. Commissioner Paris approved the following four grants:

Enotah Adult Felony Drug Courts South in the amount of \$319,084.00.

Enotah Adult Felony Drug Courts North in the amount of \$248,976.00.

Enotah Family Treatment Court in the amount of \$163,789.00.

Enotah Mental Health Court in the amount of \$102,029.00.

The Commissioner accepted a Quitclaim Deed between the Downtown Development Authority of Blairsville and Union County for the property located in Land Lots 273 and 274, 9th District, 1st Section of Union County and being tract two containing 1.391 acres, more or less, and tract three containing 0.003 acres, more or less. This is the gravel lot down in front of the Courthouse next to Highway 515 and a portion of the pond on the golf course. The City and the DDA have no use for this property and since it adjoins county owned property it made more sense for Union County to own it. Back in 2015 Union County provided a total of \$275,000 for the construction of Bob Head Street in the City of Blairsville. Part of this was from SPLOST funds and part was from LMIG State Funds. Union County got approval from the Georgia Department of Transportation to use LMIG money for this project. Then in exchange the City of Blairsville and the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority was to deed the County this property.

Commissioner Paris approved the Business License for Richard Buck Rental located at 1133 Garrett Circle. This is the only type of Business License issued for the purpose of collecting the Hotel/Motel Tax.

The Commissioner gave a brief update on some of the projects going on in the county. The first is that the new road to the Farmers Market is complete and open. The new red light and intersection all seems to be working well so far. The grading for the new gym is complete and ready for construction to start. The company that has the contract is delayed currently and should start construction in the next month or so. Improvements to sight distance on Pat Colwell road are currently under way in the first curve after you cross the bridge. The county has been working on grading the bank back for the past two weeks to help greatly with sight distance in this area. The new pavilion at Meeks Park is almost complete except for the parking lot.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 7:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:



Jennifer Mahan, County Clerk

Approved this 18th day of July, 2019


Lamar Paris, Commissioner