

County Meeting
November 17, 2022, 6:00pm
Minutes
Union County Courthouse

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Lamar Paris at 6:00pm. The Commissioner welcomed everyone to the meeting. The invocation was then given by Bill Schakat and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Bill Walker. The minutes from the October 20, 2022 County Meeting were approved as presented.

Commissioner Paris started the meeting by stating that at the previous meeting he announced that a representative from Enotah CASA would be attending this meeting to speak regarding the Sorghum Festival and how it benefits CASA and their programs. The Executive Director was scheduled to be on the agenda but due to unforeseen complications from surgery she will not be able to attend. She will be placed on the agenda as quickly as her health will allow it.

County Attorney, William Mercer, read the first Proclamation for National Family Caregivers Month. Everyday millions of Americans provide regular care and assistance to a family member or friend who needs help with daily activities and care including doctor's appointments, medication administering, personal hygiene, meal preparation, and other daily activities. Caregivers are diverse in their circumstances and the opportunity to care for a loved one can be a blessing and a source of connection, but it often requires sacrifice. Caregiving is an extremely challenging commitment that can often last for many years and while the physical burden is difficult there are also difficulties related to worrying about finances and the worsening condition of the loved one. Caregivers share the common goal of enabling their family member or friend to remain active in the community and know they will be taken care of, but caregivers should benefit from assurances that they can call upon their employer along with medical professionals, human service communities, and formal services when needed for support in their caregiving duties. Employers are realizing the value in providing support to employees who are family caregivers because caregiving often comes with great personal sacrifice in terms of financial security, social supports, and physical and emotional health. Supporting Union County's Family Caregivers is something that all citizens can do to help those who are taking on the responsibility of caring for a loved one. Union County encourages citizens to acknowledge and support family, friends, and neighbors who are helping those with long term care needs by way of emotional support, encouragement, and offering assistance when possible.

Lamar was invited by Rebecca Collins Redeemer Baptist Church where they had a meeting for family caregivers. Bill Schakat, the Pastor, came up and said a few words regarding their organization, what family caregivers do, and how their organization helps and supports the caregivers.

Bill Schakat's statements are summarized as follows: At Redeemer Baptist Church they have a group called We Care that was started 10 years ago to minister and support caregivers that are all throughout our community. There are a lot of them and they have a hard road. Caregiving can be very challenging and discouraging and often they have no support. It has been wonderful to have

the caregivers come together monthly at Redeemer Baptist Church. The church caters a meal for them while they encourage each other by sharing different supports and others in the community that can help them with various challenges. Mr. Schakat said it was wonderful that the Commissioner would recognize caregivers and thanked the entire community for the support given to those caring for spouses, children and grandchildren. It is such an important segment of the community that often gets overlooked.

Commissioner Paris then proclaimed November 2022 as National Family Caregivers Month here in Union County.

Mr. Mercer then read the next proclamation on the agenda honoring Sergeant First Class Pat Phillips United States Army (Retired). The Proclamation reads as followed: It is with great honor that Union County recognizes Mr. Pat Phillips for his many years of dedicated service and commitment to our county, our community and the Veterans of Georgia. Pat Phillips' career of service to our country began in 1954 when he enlisted in the United States Army, courageously serving for more than 20 years as a guardian of our Nation's freedom during three combat tours in Vietnam and culminating in his assignment at Headquarters, Department of the Army at the Pentagon. Following his military service, with great compassion and zeal, Pat Phillips worked tirelessly to champion better health care for all Georgia Veterans, ultimately helping secure the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Blairsville, Georgia. Throughout his distinguished career, he demonstrated a deep personal commitment to protecting democracy and a willingness to sacrifice his own personal safety and comfort to ensure the well-being of others. Pat Phillips selfless and heroic actions stand as a shining tribute to the strength of human spirit, and it is abundantly fitting and proper that the outstanding service and accomplishments of this remarkable and distinguished American be appropriately recognized.

Commissioner Paris said there was a program at the Union County Nursing Home the previous week to present the proclamation to Pat Phillips. The Commissioner then proclaimed November 2, 2022 as "Pat Phillips Day" in Union County and urged local residents to recognize the tremendous contributions made by Mr. Pat Phillips to our nation, state, and community.

Mr. Mercer read the final proclamation proclaiming Sunday, November 6, 2022 as Retired Educators Day. There are more than 141,000 retired educators in Georgia, 32,000 plus of whom are members of the Georgia Retired Educators Association. The retired educators of Georgia donate thousands of hours of volunteer service and make invaluable contributions to the welfare of the respective communities across the state. It is appropriate that a day be designated for citizens to express their appreciation for the contributions that retired educators have made and continue to make for the betterment of human lives and for society. Local churches will recognize those lasting contributions made by retired educators in this community.

Libby Stevens, audience member, asked those retired educators who were present at the meeting to stand up and applause was given to those standing. The Commissioner proclaimed November 6, 2022 as "Retired Educators Day in Union County and asked citizens to observe that day in an appropriate manner honoring retired educators. This proclamation was signed in the Commissioner's Office on the 1st day of November 2022.

The 1st Reading of the Amplified Sound Ordinance was on August 4, 2022. This ordinance will go along with the Short-term Rental Ordinance, but it is a separate ordinance. A Public Hearing was held on September 13, 2022 and the 2nd Reading of the Amplified Sound Ordinance, Section 48-04 was on October 20, 2022 (Commissioner misstated as November 20, 2022). After the 2nd Reading two minor changes were made. One was to include that any Georgia Law Enforcement agency can enforce the ordinance and the other was to add the maximum penalties. The Commissioner then adopted the Union County Amplified Sound Ordinance, Section 48-04.

Commissioner Paris accepted an agreement between Union County and Carter Engineering Consultants, Inc. to provide engineering and surveying services for parcels located on Airport Terminal Road in the amount of \$18,000.00 with an effective date of October 21, 2022. The purpose is to provide a grading plan for future industrial sites. There are some industrial sites out there that have never been graded, and since most of the other sites are being taken these will need to be graded.

The Commissioner accepted an agreement between Republic Services, Inc. and Union County for transportation and disposal of solid waste for the Union County Transfer Station. The cost of this agreement will be a fee of \$47.48 per ton of solid waste hauled from the Union County Transfer Station. This agreement has an effective date of November 23, 2022. This is a price increase from last year from \$45.50 but the county, at this time, is NOT increasing the fee for garbage disposal at the Transfer Station or the Convenience Centers.

Commissioner Paris accepted an agreement between Geo-Hydro Engineers, Inc. and Union County for construction materials testing and special inspection services for the Union County Shooting Range. This agreement has an effective date of November 15, 2022 and the cost shall not exceed \$42,950.00. These services are referred to as third party testing for both this agreement and the agreement that follows. These agreements are for any services that are needed on these two projects based on their estimated costs, which include things like concrete, foundation, reinforcing steel, structural wood, masonry, and pavement testing that are needed during construction. The Commissioner went on to state that this project has been talked about for years, the gun range out on Highway 180. Construction was held up for three months by a bat that might be out there, and they had to make sure there were none of these bats. Then Union County had to mark the trees that were going to be cut for the project, which there were not many. The USFS then came to measure the trees to determine how much Union County would owe the federal government for cutting these trees. Then Union County was advised by the USFS that some of the trees were in the stream buffer and changes had to be made. Then Blue Ridge Mountain EMC was ready to come and run the phone and the cable lines, but the insurance Blue Ridge Mountain EMC had was not adequate for the USFS required. This is being adjusted now, and hopefully progress will be made soon.

The Commissioner accepted an agreement between Geo-Hydro Engineers, Inc. and Union County for construction materials testing and special inspection services for the Union County Fire Station 13. Fire Station 13 has been started on the Murphy Highway. Construction of the building should start before too long. This agreement has an effective date of November 15, 2022 and the cost shall not exceed \$28,285.00. Chief Dyer stated that the pad has been poured for the station. The next step is getting the materials for the actual construction of the building.

Commissioner Paris accepted the Employee Safety Grant in the amount of \$6,000 from ACCG – Group Self-Insurance Workers’ Compensation Fund. ACCG offers this grant to counties each year out of excess funds not used by the membership toward claims. This year we used the funds to purchase 7 fire helmets, 4 pairs of fire boots, 16 fire hoods (Commissioner Paris misstated as two) and 15 pairs of fire armor gloves.

The Commissioner accepted a Lease Agreement between Positive Pathways, Inc., and Union County for the use of office and meeting space located at 243 Hunt Martin Street, Blairsville, Georgia in the amount of \$0.00 per month. This organization is providing assistance to those with addiction problems, and they are doing a great job. The duration of this lease will be from December 1, 2022 to November 30, 2022.

Commissioner Paris approved Resolution R-2022-23 authorizing the filing of an application with the Georgia Department of Transportation and the United States Department of Transportation for a grant for public transportation assistance under Title 49 U.S.C., Section 5311. This grant application will be for the FY2024 for the Union County Transit Busses.

Ashley Holland, Transportation Director, stated that a lot of people may not know about Union County Transportation. It is a service here in Union County that provides transportation for anyone to doctor’s appointments, hair appointments, or grocery shopping; anywhere a person needs to go within the county limits of Union County. The fee for this service is \$3.00 for the first mile and \$0.50 per mile after that. This program is funded through the Georgia Department of Transportation and Union County matches those funds. This is a wonderful service if you need transportation anywhere in Union County.

Commissioner Paris stated this constitutes as the 1st Reading of the Union County Short-term Rental Ordinance. The ordinance as drafted is quite lengthy so there were a few copies on the table for attendees to take as they left. The Commissioner asked attendees to only take a printed copy if they really needed it, because the draft would be available on the county website the next morning. He announced that December 5, 2022 is the date of the Public Hearing on the Short-term Rental Ordinance. He asked citizens that between now and then they read the ordinance and get in contact with Renee Deibert for questions and concerns they have. She could then get those questions and concerns to the committee. Renee was able to get a group of ten volunteers to work on this ordinance and they have been working extremely hard for three months. They have been trying to figure out a way to be fair and reasonable with this ordinance. The purpose of the ordinance is to make it to where people do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That is the basis for the ordinance. It is not meant to keep short-term rentals away, but it is designed to have someone responsible if people renting the short-term rentals abuse it. The Amplified Sound Ordinance comes into play also. It is a new phenomenon, short term rentals, in Union County. Big companies are coming in and paying close to double for homes to put them in the rental market. Commissioner Paris stated that the rental market is going to slow up a lot anyway, but in the meantime Union County felt like they had to get an ordinance that is going to protect the people and the public. He went on to say that he appreciates everyone that has worked on this ordinance. As a 1st reading, the county does not actually read the ordinance, but it is presented to the public. Again, December 5th, from 5:00 to 7:00 is when the public can attend and make comments, suggestions, and complaints. If there are problems or concerns, citizens are asked to try and call the county office so the issue or concern can be taken to the committee.

Commissioner Paris approved the Schedule of County Meetings for the year 2023. As usual the County Meetings will be held on the third Thursday of each month at 6:00pm in Courtroom A.

The Commissioner had a few comments. Union County is working on designing plans for the new voting facility that will also be a gym next to the new Sports Center. The two voting offices will be moved into this new building; the one that is in the Courthouse and the one that is in the old nursing home. Hopefully it will be ready before this time next year. Early voting will also be held there and some of the precincts may be able to be closed. The Budget Hearing was held prior to this meeting and the budget went up 12%. All elected officials have done a great job coming up with a budget and staying within that budget. The county still plans on being in the top five lowest millage rates in the State of Georgia.

Commissioner Paris thanked all those involved with voting. Union County had the largest percentage of voters voting in this election. The Board of Elections even did a test recount of a couple of elections. After 14,000 votes there was one vote difference between the machine count and the hand count. Libby Stevens, Board of Elections, then interjected and that is summarized as follows: Union County had the highest voter turnout with 70.84 percent. That is phenomenal for the midterm election. For it to run as smoothly as it did and for us to do a hand count. Eight republicans and eight democrats worked together and counted 14,000 votes in an 8 hour day.

The Commissioner closed by speaking briefly on the runoff election. Stating that from the county perspective, having to spend thousands of dollars to come in and have another election was not necessary. Whoever wins the vote total should be who wins the election. It is that way in most every state except for a couple maybe. Georgia may be the only state that requires 50% of the vote plus one vote to win. In final closing, Commissioner Paris said that if any citizens feel anything reasonable about these statements, to go and talk to the state representatives because it is just costing the tax payers.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 6:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:


Jennifer Mahan, County Clerk

Approved this 13th day of December, 2022


Lamar Paris, Commissioner