

County Meeting
February 16, 2023, 6:00pm
Minutes
Union County Courthouse

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Lamar Paris at 6:00 pm. The Commissioner welcomed everyone to the meeting. The invocation was then given by Mitch Griggs and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Bill Walker. The minutes from the January 19, 2023 County Meeting were approved as presented and attendees were provided copies.

Commissioner Paris announced to everyone as a reminder that the next County Meeting was being moved from March 16, 2023 to March 9, 2023 due to traveling and other things.

The Commissioner asked representatives from the Navy Seabees to come forward for the reading of the Proclamation honoring the Navy SEABEES. He then read the proclamation.

The Proclamation read as follows: In December of 1941, following the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States' entrance into World War II, Admiral Ben Moreell was authorized to establish the "Naval Construction Battalions" on March 5, 1942. Also, on this day in 1942 all personnel of the Naval Construction Battalions were officially given the nickname of "SEABEES" by the Department of the Navy which was derived from the initial letters of the Construction Battalion. The earliest Seabees were recruited from civilian construction trades and placed under the leadership of the Naval Civil Engineer Corps with an emphasis on experience and skill. The Seabees have built bases, bulldozed and paved thousands of miles of roadway and air strips, constructed camps, built and maintained supply causeways, erected hospitals, and aided in untold emergency recoveries. The Seabees construction projects were all completed while fending off enemy forces alongside Marine, Army and Navy Colleagues. Their knowledge and skill were utilized in World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait and countries throughout the world. For 80 years the Seabees have repeatedly demonstrated their skills as fighters and builders, building and fighting for freedom, and in peace time being Good Will Ambassadors all while living by the Seabee motto "Can Do!". Now, be it resolved that I, Commissioner of Union County hereby proclaim Sunday, March 5, 2023 as the United States Navy Seabees 81st Birthday and ask all citizens to join me in recognizing the service, skill, and determination the Seabees have shown their country and its citizens.

The representative from the Navy SEABEES spoke briefly stating this proclamation was a big honor for their organization and that the SEABEES have hosted a ball for the past few years. This year the tickets for the ball have already sold out. He closed saying it was a honor to accept this proclamation.

Commissioner Paris accepted an agreement between Union County and Hussey Gay Bell for ground water and methane monitoring of the old Union County Landfill in the amount of \$101,650.00 for the years 2023 and 2024. The scope of services includes spring and fall ground water assessments along with quarterly methane compliance monitoring. The Commissioner

said that some may not be aware but the Transfer Station used to be the Union County Landfill approximately 25 to 30 years ago. The county is required by the state to continue ground water monitoring and methane monitoring until the State of Georgia says they can stop. Commissioner Paris approached the state a few years ago to see if they could stop monitoring after 20 years. The state said they would go and check and then it went to 25 years, even though they have never really found anything. A couple of years ago the county did gain approval from the state to stop monitoring two groundwater well locations out of 14, so only 12 wells are monitored now.

The Commissioner accepted an Agreement between Union County and Pictometry International Corporation for new traditional ortho imagery and oblique imagery of Union County. The cost of the agreement will be \$126,120. Ortho imagery is the traditional aerial imagery (photography) taken with an airplane that is used for GIS Mapping, Q-public and other county functions. Oblique imagery is images that are captured from north, south, east and west directions to provide a 360-degree view of every property and parcel. There is a lot of software that the county already utilizes for property identification where this photography is used. While this agreement is for \$126,120 it contains two separate projects. Project 1 consists of the above imagery and the cost is \$63,060, which is broken down into 3 payments over three years. Project 2 would include ortho and oblique imagery at a neighborhood level and the cost would be \$63,060. Union County currently has no plans to have Project 2 completed and there is an opt out clause for that part of the contract. This contract comes from the GIS Department and every five years or so the county has to have this done.

Commissioner Paris accepted an Agreement between Union County and the Blairsville/Union County Chamber of Commerce for the distribution of 90% of the funds received from the Hotel-Motel Excise Tax. While the revenue has increased over the past couple of years, fairly significantly, so have the Chamber expenses. Once and if the amount levels out in the next couple of years, these amounts may be changed.

The Commissioner stated that some may question the Chamber's role during good times, but it is not something that you can turn on and turn off. The Chamber's job is to promote businesses in the county and whether you think there is too much business or too little business, whatever your opinion is, it is not something that can be turned off and turned on. There are 750 businesses that are members of the Chamber and about another 750 businesses in the county that are not members that rely on the publicity and information from the chamber. Commissioner Paris said he is well aware that some people want to close the gates, however, that is something that can be done, or that needs to be done. There are still a lot of businesses and a lot of people who work: a lot of young, middle aged and elderly people working and needing to make a living.

Commissioner Paris listed a few projects that the Blairsville/Union County Chamber has been working on for the city and the county. Their main function is to help the county and the city with promoting tourism. The Commissioner stated that himself, his staff and the Chamber came up with a list of things the Chamber of Commerce does. Currently they are working with the City of Blairsville on the downtown Welcome Center at the Old Ben Carr Law Office. The city is in the process of restoring and remodeling that building so it can be utilized and open to the

public for tours. The Chamber is helping the city get a level 3 EV Car Charger for downtown as well. The Chamber is also working with the school on revamping their Youth Leadership Program, expanding the school's Entrepreneurship Program, and they have worked continuously with the school's College and Career Academy. The Chamber promoted seven festivals in Union County and the City of Blairsville in 2022 at no charge to those organizations. In 2022 the Chamber also helped with the parades and the prizes for those parades. They sponsored and organized the hometown Halloween at Meeks Park. The last two years that has been one of the biggest events we have had Meeks Park, not including the Sorghum Festival and the Scottish Festival. The sponsor the 4th of July Fireworks, and the Holly Jolly Christmas and the Tour of Trees at the Community Center. The Chamber is currently working with members of my staff to organize a spring litter clean up contest to help the county get a jump start on spring litter clean up along our roadways. While doing all of the above the chamber staff are always working on helping people that come in for a visit to give them information on the town and let them know what is available. They maintain community guides, and other advertising opportunities locally and regionally. Chamber President, Steve Rowe, will be at either the March or April County meeting to give us an update on what the Chamber is doing.

The Commissioner accepted a Build Agreement between Union County and Windstream Standard, LLC to set the terms and understanding between both parties to confer funds from the State of Georgia for the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds for Union County Broadband Expansion. This Build Agreement has an effective date of November 11th, 2022 and will allow the county to distribute funds that come from the State for the grant on behalf of Windstream Standard, LLC. This agreement correlates with the grant that was awarded at the March 29, 2022 County Meeting in the amount of \$11,162,231.00. This is a really significant grant and hopefully this will get the internet out to some of those that don't have it. At the same time the EMC is working on expanding their broadband themselves as well. The Commissioner thanked Governor Brian Kemp, the Georgia Legislature and especially Senator Steve Gooch and Representative Stan Gunter, for their assistance. While it has taken a while for this project to get started, hopefully progress will happen soon. If you have any questions on this, the county does not have a map per say, so they don't know when they are doing or what they are doing. Windstream has said they might have a public information session at some point in the future. This is what they said, but the Commissioner did not guarantee that.

Commissioner Paris accepted a contract between Winkler and Winkler and Union County for the construction of the Union County Elections Facility in the amount of \$1,853,816.00 with an effective date of January 23, 2023. Work shall be substantially complete by December 31, of this year. This project will be adjacent to the Sports Center (double gym) and will include an office complex and a multi-use gymnasium, designed for use during elections and for recreation the rest of the time. They are doing some initial grading now, but they should get moving once it dries out some.

Commissioner Paris accepted the FY22 Local First Responders Grant which has been awarded to Union County from the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council in the amount of \$12,761.00 to be applied to the purchase of a LUCAS Chest Compression device to be utilized by our new Fire Station 13 that is under construction on the Gainesville Highway (Commissioner Paris miss

spoke and Fire Station 13 is on the Murphy Highway. The grant period is from January 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023. This piece of equipment manually compresses a patient's heart as CPR would.

Commissioner Paris then completed the 2nd Reading of the Union County Ordinance related to Short-term Rentals. This has been publicized numerous times including three public meetings and then the Chamber held a meeting as well. There were tons of questions and comments, and some people liked it and others didn't throughout the process. The Commissioner stated they are close to being done because the longer it takes to get this ordinance done, the longer it will be before people can get their licenses for their short-term rentals. It is coming up on the season for people to be making reservations at these short-term rentals and he would like to get this done. A few copies of the 5th draft were available at the meeting and the Commissioner said it would be on the website the following day. This ordinance is in the final draft and it will be adopted at the March 9th County Meeting.

The Commissioner adopted Resolution R-2023-04 appointing Patricia Parker to the Union County Board of Tax Assessors to serve the remainder of the term being vacated by Jeff Carlin. A special thanks to Jeff for serving this position for many years. He is now having to care for his wife. This appointment will be from March 1, 2023 to December 31, 2025. The Commissioner appreciates Mrs. Parker's agreeing to do this because it is a big commitment of her time.

Commissioner Paris adopted Resolution R-2023-05 to close the bank account with South State Bank referred to as the Debt Service Account. This account was opened on July 13, 2004 when South State Bank was the Bank of Blairsville. This account has remained open through the various ownership changes of the bank. The county has not used this account since 2015 when the General Obligation Bonds were paid off. Since the bonds have been paid off this account is no longer being used, therefore the account will be closed.

The Commissioner adopted Resolution R-2023-06 for the Disposition of Property, with said property containing a house and 3.38 acres, more or less, located at 1159 River Bend Farm Road known as the Hill House, or the Hill Property, in the amount of \$750,000. Commissioner Paris then read the Resolution as follows:

WHEREAS, O.C.G.A. §36-9-3 authorizes a county governing authority to sell and convey real property to abutting property owners; and

WHEREAS, O.C.G.A. §36-9-3(h) specifically authorizes certain conveyances without the process of an auction or the solicitation of sealed bids; and

WHEREAS, Union County acquired that certain tract or parcel of land located at 1159 River Bend Farm Road and being designated as tax parcel No. 087001A consisting of 3.38 acres +/- as per deed recorded in Deed Book 1204, Page 75 in the Office of the Clerk of the Superior Court of Union County, Georgia; and

WHEREAS, said tract is (1) burdened by a life estate, (2) is entirely surrounded by a tract of land of 581 acres +/- owned by Hangar One Investors LLC, (3) is not accessed by a public road, (4) is so shaped as to be incapable of being used independently for a subdivision, other development or land use, or for use as a street or easement, and (5) such tract being sold and conveyed to the abutting property owner will facilitate the enjoyment of the highest and best use of the abutting owner's property; and

WHEREAS, the governing authority will sell and convey the real property to the abutting property owner for the same purchase price as the County governing authority paid for said property and determine that this Resolution is in the best interest of the residents of Union County, Georgia.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AND IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, that the sole commissioner of Union County, Georgia, constituting the governing authority is authorized to sell and convey said tract or parcel consisting of 3.38 acres +/- to the abutting property owner Hangar One Investors, LLC, in the amount of \$750,000.00 (seven-hundred and fifty thousand dollars and zero cents) and is further authorized and directed to sign documents to effect such sale and conveyance, the proceeds of such sale to be deposited to the general fund of Union County, Georgia. So resolved this 16th day of February 2023.

The Commissioner went on to explain that this is the Hill Property. The hospital had the large tract and then they put it on the market for sale. In the meantime, the county purchased the property in the middle, which is 2.38 acres and a house, to work with the Hospital. At the time it was unknown if the county was going to try and buy the whole acreage or if the Hospital was going to use the whole acreage. At the time the county felt it was the best opportunity to buy that property and felt it was for the betterment of the property for its future use. The Commissioner said that everyone who approached him about buying the properties, he told he would sell it for what was in it, which was \$750,000.

Commissioner Paris accepted a Quitclaim Deed from the Urban Redevelopment Agency of Union County, Georgia to Union County, Georgia, a political subdivision of the State of Georgia for all that tract or parcel of land lying in Land Lot 274, 9th District, 1st Section of Union County containing 7.20 acres, more or less. This is the property where the Community Center (at the Butternut Creek Golf Course) is located. Union County bonded money for the construction of the Union County Community Center in 2010/2011. As a part of this financing process Union County Government had to transfer this property to the Urban Redevelopment Agency of Union County. Once the bonds were paid off the property was supposed to be transferred back to Union County Government, but a closing attorney missed this. The Urban Redevelopment Agency's Board was appointed, and they met on January 30, 2023 and voted to transfer this property back to Union County Government, where it had effectively been all along. The Chairman signed the Quit Claim Deed to Union County Government.

The Commissioner stated that there was someone during this time that accused the Commissioner of putting this property in his name and effectively being his property. The Commissioner went on to say that anything can be said about anyone and some will believe it. Commissioner Paris said that this many years later, he still does not own the Community Center, the County does.

Commissioner Paris made the following closing comments:


In 2023, the county has several projects going on. They started grading in the last couple of weeks and the EMC is putting the power in for the Gun Range. Hopefully this will be completed this year. Fire Station 13 construction is moving along great, and it should be finished early in the summer. It will be a great asset to the people in that area. It will be staffed 24/7 and set up for police down there as long as well as an ambulance can be stationed there. The new Elections Facility was awarded to Winkler and Winkler and should be done by the end of this year. The single gym will have a multipurpose floor and will be used for elections during election time but used for recreation purposes when not being used by elections. The Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant is where the state helps the county fund six to eight miles of paving county-maintained roads. The county is going to be doing a lot of striping this year also. People who don't want growth don't want the county to fix the roads so people won't want to travel our roads but the county is going to keep the roads safe. Unfortunately, there were those that pushed against getting an additional penny of funding for our roads. Commissioner Paris stated that was fine, but the roads have to be paved and kept safe. At some point down the road it might be looked at again. The roundabout project at Pat Haralson Drive and Deep South Farm Road is nearing the final design phase and every utility in the world goes through there. The County received a million dollar grant from GDOT already for this project.

The youth sports program has been amazing this year. The basketball program has almost doubled in size. It is amazing to go over and watch the games. A new thing going on at school is the kids are building fish attractors. These kids put these together so the little fish will be attracted to this area and then they are spread out in the lake. This increases the density of the fish in the lake. They have put eighteen out already and have about eighteen more to put out. The fishermen are very happy about this.

Union County has zero debt and has all the money in house for the projects that are being done.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:46 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:


Jennifer Mahan, County Clerk

Approved this 9th day of March, 2023


Lamar Paris, Commissioner