

County Meeting
January 19, 2023, 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 Fire Chief/EMA Director, David Dyer and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Bill Walker. The minutes from the December 13, 2022 County Meeting and the January 11, 2023 Called Meeting were approved as presented and attendees were provided copies.

Commissioner Paris started the meeting by stating there were agreements and amendments to contracts that have increased significantly in cost since last year. Only because of the Commissioner's Office staff's hard work and that of all county employees and elected officials, is the county able to cover these increased costs and still keep the property tax mil rate as one of the ten lowest. Commissioner Paris stated it is possible that Union County could end up being in the five lowest in the state, out of 159 counties, once all county's mil rates were reported.

The Commissioner accepted an agreement between Union County and the Georgia Department of Transportation for grant funding in the amount of \$104,864.00 for the period of July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023. Funding in the amount of \$52,432 will be provided by GDOT (Georgia Department of Transportation) and Union County will contribute a match of \$52,432. This funding is for Union County's 5311 Transit System that is operated throughout the county and has been for a long time.

Commissioner Paris accepted an agreement between Rushton and Company and Union County to perform the 2022 Audit of the Union County Financial Statements. The cost of this agreement will not exceed \$69,500.00 for the financial statement audit and \$6,000.00 for the single audit, if necessary. As with almost every other expense of the county this increase is about \$10,000 because of their increased employee costs and the county audit growth. Commissioner Paris stated that just about everything that was going to be talked about in the meeting contained a cost increase and he was proud the county has been able to keep taxes under control with the increases in costs.

The Commissioner accepted an agreement amendment between Union County and CorrectHealth Union, LLC for inmate health services at the Union County Jail. This is a renewal of a 12-month contract effective January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023, for a contract total of \$169,809.14, which is an increase of \$14,235.81 from 2022. Again, this increase was driven mostly by their increased employee costs.

Commissioner Paris accepted an agreement renewal with Correctional Resource Group for the food service at the Union County Jail. The effective date of this contract is January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023. The cost increase for 2023 will be about 8.4%, going from about \$155,000 to \$168,000 for the year.

The Commissioner accepted a Notice of Award of contract dated January 19, 2023 for construction of the Union County Elections Facility to Winkler and Winkler in the amount of

\$1,853,816.00. Only two proposals were received for the election facility project. One was from Laney Construction in the amount of \$1,900,000.00 and one was from Winkler and Winkler in the amount of \$1,853,816.00. The bids came in very close to what was estimated. The election center is going to be over next to the new double gym. The Commissioner stated this site was chosen because, number one, there is a large, paved parking lot at the Sports Center that will work great for early voting or any kind of voting that is moved there. Number two, this allows the county to be able to build a voting facility that will also be used as a gymnasium. The kids and adults will be able to use it for basketball and other events, but it will also be used for elections. Early voting can be held there which would get it out of the courthouse. Also, at some point in time the county might be able to consolidate two or three precincts over there. That is not known yet as the county will have to work with the state regarding that. The single multi-purpose gym that was originally included in this election facility project RFP (Request for Proposal) will be put out in a separate RFP, hopefully in February. Commissioner Paris did not have the date for when that RFP would go out.

The next item was the first reading of the revised Union County Ordinance, Chapter 44, Land Use. Commissioner Paris stated that most people probably had not heard much on these ordinance revisions, and that is why there is the first reading to present the proposed changes to the public. A few copies of the first draft were available as attendees left and the Commissioner announced the draft would be posted on the Union County website the following morning. He also said copies would be available in the Commissioner's Office. He then encouraged everyone to review the draft ordinance and to contact the Commissioner's Office either by email, phone or in person with any questions.

The Commissioner went on to explain the Building Department brought the needed changes to him explaining they had some issues with the ordinance. This is how any new ordinance or amended ordinance happens. Ordinance revisions happen because there is an issue or a problem that needs to be corrected and there were several in the case of this ordinance. Commissioner Paris reiterated that this was the first reading, and it is known that after the first reading there will be things that need to be changed or corrected. The County wanted to go ahead and get the first reading complete since a moratorium must be done with these things and Union County Government does not want to delay people from being able to do something any longer than necessary.

The Commissioner asked Gavin King, Chief Building Inspector, to come up and speak regarding the proposed changes to the ordinance. Commissioner Paris advised attendees that Mr. King would be available after the meeting for questions.

A summary of Mr. Gavin King's comments are as follows: Mr. King stated he has been employed in the Building Inspection and Development Office for 17 years and is currently the Chief Building Inspector. Chapter 44 is the Land Use Ordinance or sometimes referred to as the Park Ordinance. This ordinance was originally implemented in 2004, so of course 19 years later some revisions are needed. One of these needs is to add some additional terms and trends that there is currently a lot of interest in, such as yurts, geodomes, and shipping containers converted into dwellings. Mr. King said they also looked at surrounding counties to see what issues they had been facing related to land use and alternative dwellings. Last year Mr. King was asked to attend a meeting of North Georgia Commissioners, that had many county commissioners and county managers there and they were facing a lot of the same issues that Union County is related

to alternative dwellings. Mr. King went on to say that this ordinance was not saying that people cannot utilize these alternative dwellings, but some things need to be figured out. Things related to how many can be put on a lot and what the spacing of the units should be. These are things the Building and Development Office has not been faced with in the past. This is a big reason that the updates to the ordinance need to be done in order to incorporate these modern terms and different types of dwellings. Mr. King went on to explain that safety is also a big concern with the revisions to the Land Use Ordinance. For example, people are buying property and want to build tree houses to be used as homes. There are the same issues such as how many can be put on a piece of property, but also are they built safe and adequate to be used as a permanent dwelling. This brought up safety concerns from Union County EMA. Emergency vehicles need to be able to access these areas and how will these alternative structures be reached, especially if there is limited parking. Another concern is the concentration of these structures in one area. There are a lot of things to consider such as setbacks, buffers, and green space to allow room for emergency service vehicles as well as safety concerns to keep fires from spreading. Mr. King stated the time to think about these safety concerns is before an emergency happens. There was a study done by the National Park Service and FEMA from 2018 to 2020 and there were over 2,000 fires per year associated with RVs. Mr. King reminded everyone that a county ordinance cannot supersede any state or federal guidelines, and the Georgia Department of Public Health also has guidelines for how many dwellings can be tied to a septic system. One of their other goals was to maintain the natural beauty of the area. The staff of the Building Inspection and Development Office have worked for many months on these ordinance revisions with the hope of maintaining the hometown feeling, while managing healthy growth.

Commissioner Paris then announced that the Public Hearing on this particular ordinance would be on February 21st, 2023 from 5pm to 7pm, in Courtroom B.

Commissioner Paris adopted an Emergency Moratorium on applications for the development or expansion of campgrounds, mobile home parks, manufactured home parks, recreational vehicle parks, tiny home parks, park model parks or any other similar type of development that was enacted on March 29, 2022, extended on August 4, 2022 and extended on January 11, 2023. It is important to try and protect the county and that is the goal.

The Commissioner adopted Resolution R-2023-03 extending the emergency moratorium on applications for a Business License for Short-term Rentals that was enacted on June 16, 2022 with an effective date of August 16, 2022. The Emergency Moratorium will be extended for an additional ninety (90) days from February 10, 2023 or until repealed by the adoption of new regulations or ordinances. The Public Hearing was held on December 5, 2022 and the county felt it would be appropriate to have a second Public Hearing. The only downside to this is that issuing permits would have to be delayed. Commissioner Paris stated this will be one of those things that certainly everyone is not going to agree on, but they are going to try and make it the best ordinance possible. This additional Public Hearing regarding the Short-term Rental Ordinance is scheduled for February 9, 2023 from 5 – 7 pm in the Union County Courthouse. The Commissioner advised everyone to please be prepared as this Public Hearing will operate in the same manner as the previous one other than participants or speakers will be given two minutes to speak instead of one.

Commissioner Paris had a few closing comments. First, he stated the county is thrilled with the new Convenience Center behind Poteetes Store on the Murphy Highway. The county is also

making improvements to the convenience center located next to the horse arena. The public has been very receptive to both convenience centers. Several counties have come and visited the recycling centers. They are excited to see the centers and are eager to get information on how the county is doing it, where they are getting the money from, how the county is financing the new centers and how they made the decisions to do it. They are eager to replicate what Union County staff have done at the recycle and convenience centers. Commissioner Paris said Union County has great employees at these facilities and Pam Hawkins and Larry Garrett have helped make these improvements possible. Second, the Commissioner went to a two-day meeting with ATVG. This is the Association of Tennessee Valley Governments made up of members from the following states: Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi. Commissioner Paris was elected Chairman for 2023. ATVG works closely with TVA to try to make sure local governments are properly represented. At the meeting they discussed the rolling blackouts and TVA explained what happened. The weather changed so quickly that it dropped 44 degrees in a short period of time and this had never been seen in the history of TVA. So, that caused a lot of the equipment and valves and things to freeze instantly, and it cut power they had never lost before. Now they are spending a lot of time and money to repair and fix these things and make them better. This organization of local government makes sure we have a voice in this and it is my honor to serve this year.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:


Jennifer Mahan, County Clerk

Approved this 16th day of February, 2023

Lamar Paris, Commissioner

