

County Meeting
January 16, 2025, 6:00pm
Minutes
Union County Courthouse

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Harold Collins at 6:01pm. The invocation was given by Fire Chief, David Dyer, and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Bill Walker. The minutes for the December 19, 2024 County Meeting were approved as presented.

Commissioner Collins approved the minutes from the December 19, 2024 County Meeting stating that this meeting was conducted by the previous Commissioner. Several items on the previous agenda and contained within the minutes did not meet the minimum legal requirements for acceptance by Union County. A footnote is contained within the minutes pertaining to these items. The Commissioner stated that he would take the appropriate action on the actionable items.

Commissioner Collins asked Sid Turner from the Sons of the American Revolution to come up for the presentation of awards to Firefighters and Sheriff's Deputies that were unable to attend the December 19, 2024 County Meeting.

Mr. Sid Turner's presentations and comments are summarized as follows: Mr. Turner introduced himself along with Jared Ogden who is the current president of the Sons of the American Revolution. Mr. Ogden stated he always enjoys honoring active patriotism and acts of heroism. The SAR is a historical, educational and patriotic organization as well as non-profit and non-partisan. The SAR work on educating the youth and letting citizens know about patriotic acts. In order to be a member of the Sons of the American Revolution a person must be able to trace their ancestry back to someone that served in the American Revolution. Generally, that is six generations back. Mr. Ogden closed his comments by saying that in joining their organization they could help you trace your ancestry and would welcome you. Mr. Turner asked Lt. Ernie Pruitt and Lt. Doug Pruitt to come up. On September 25, 2024 there was a big propane gas cloud that was forming over Suches. It was in a big area and it was getting really dangerous. It was noticed by Ernie Pruitt, who is the career firefighter in Suches that commands 25 volunteer firefighters. Ernie took control of the situation and he was in and out of this dangerous cloud evacuating people, establishing a perimeter and figuring out the correct form of action. He got with his son, Lt. Doug Pruitt and they decided that Doug was going into the cloud at ground zero where the leak actually occurred. When this gas comes out it is almost zero temperature and his turnout gear was freezing. It was hard for him to move, it was clouding up and he was blinded by the cloud of gas. He continued trying to get to the leak that was under a propane truck. He worked on it putting himself in extreme danger. He finally got to the automatic shut off valve and was able to get it shut off. Both firefighters were presented a Medal for Heroism from the Sons of the American Revolution. Mr. Turner then called up Sgt. Brandon Hogsed and Sgt. Allan Patton from the Union County Sheriff's Office. On September 3, 2024 these officers ended up in a situation where a gentleman was committing suicide. He had already stabbed himself in the wrist and the neck and was still wielding the knife. They had to assess the situation quickly and also handle emergency first aid. Both Sgt. Hogsed and Sgt. Patton had to think on their feet. When dealing with someone wielding a knife you have to make sure they are not using it on you. They were able to restrain him and keep him from doing more harm to

himself while also performing first aid. They were able to save this man's life. Both officers were presented a Medal for Lifesaving.

Commissioner Collins adopted the Local Emergency Operations Plan to provide a comprehensive framework for county-wide emergency management during the event of a period of major emergency. Fire Chief, David Dyer stated this plan is the base plan for any kind of disaster that would happen in Union County. Every county has one and it is updated every year. With the new Commissioner we updated it with him.

The Commissioner approved an Affidavit of Appointment of Elizabeth Stevens to the Union County Board of Elections for the term of January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2028. This is the one appointment to this board that is made by the governing body.

Commissioner Collins accepted an agreement between Union County and the Blairsville/Union County Chamber of Commerce for the distribution of 40% of funds received from the Hotel-Motel Excise Tax. This agreement is effective from January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025. An agreement was accepted at the December 19, 2025 County Meeting committing 70% of the funds received from the Hotel-Motel Excise Tax to the Chamber of Commerce. The Commissioner said he had committed to lowering this amount during his administration and this agreement fulfills that.

The Commissioner accepted an Agreement Amendment between CorrectHealth Union, LLC and Union County for inmate health service at the Union County Jail. This is a renewal of a 12-month contract effective January 1, 2025, for a contract total of \$192,431.60. This is only a 2% increase from the 2024 agreement, which is an acceptable increase to provide the required medical treatment for inmates.

Everyone has been provided a copy of the list of Business Licenses issued in Union County from December 16, 2024 to January 15, 2025 for the purpose of operating a Short-term Rental in Union County. Commissioner Collins approved all Business Licenses contained on the list provided and this will be made a part of the minutes.

The Commissioner accepted the Accountability Courts Grant K25-8-014 for Local Law Enforcement in the amount \$5,135.00. The grant period is from January 1, 2025 to June 30, 2025.

Commissioner Collins accepted a Lease Agreement between Union County Hospital Authority and Union County, a Political Subdivision of the State of Georgia for the 2.0 acres of real property and the facility as shown in Deed Book 189, page 584 with the address of 683 Ledford Road, Blairsville, GA 30512. The cost of this lease is \$1.00 per year with an effective date of January 1, 2025. This facility is being utilized as a childcare facility operated by Union County Hospital Authority. This facility is necessary for the citizens of Union County and is operated by the hospital at no cost to the county.

The Commissioner accepted a Lease Agreement between Medlink, Georgia, Inc. and Union County for the use of the commercial building and premises located at 56 Firewater Lane, Suches, Georgia in the amount of \$100.00 per month. The duration of this lease is from January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025. This is a critical facility to the citizens of Suches.

Commissioner Collins asked William Mercer, Assistant County Attorney, to complete the 1st Reading of the revisions to the Construction Board of Adjustment and Appeals in the Union County Code of Ordinances. Mr. Mercer's comments are summarized as follows: We are making a few changes to the ordinance related to the Construction Board of Adjustment and Appeals. If the Building Department says that you cannot do something you would appeal to this board. It covers other sections such as Chapter 44, 46, 62, and 78. In the packet you were provided additions to the ordinance are in red and if something was removed it has a line through it. The first addition to the ordinance reads as "All variance requests shall be filed in the Union County Commissioner's Office. After filing of the variance request the Commissioner's Office will determine if a public hearing is needed prior to sending the variance request to the Construction Board of Adjustment and Appeals within 10 business days". Also changed under Rules and Regulations it is added that "unless the nature of the variance requested should be explored in a public hearing where the citizens of Union County have a right to be heard and express their opinions before the Construction Board of Adjustment and Appeals hears the appeal. The public hearing, if needed, shall be set in a reasonable time complying with the Open Meetings Act of Georgia. Under the Decisions section we are also adding "Every decision of the construction board will be in writing and that decision will work as a recommendation for the Commissioner of Union County. The Commissioner of Union County will approve or disapprove the recommendation for variance of the ordinance. That final decision will be made within 15 business days of the recommendation being presented to the Commissioner of Union County, the final decision will be filed in the office of the Building Official and be open to public inspection. This replaces "Every decision shall be promptly filed in writing in the office of the building official and shall be open to public inspection." In the last sentence we are also replacing "board" with "Commissioner". This is considered a 1st Reading. The procedure for an ordinance change is that the changes are read on the record in the 1st reading and then we will have a public hearing that will be noticed in the paper. Everyone come to the public hearing and share your opinions or you can also contact the Commissioner's Office. After the public hearing we will have a 2nd reading and then the final adoption. Does anyone have any questions?

Question 1: Sounds like the bottom line is that the Board does not make decisions no more. They just make recommendations, and the Commissioner makes the decision.

Attorney Response: Yes, the Board will be making a recommendation to the Commissioner

Question 2: The Board used to make decisions. Now they make recommendations.

Attorney Response: Correct.

Mr. Mercer asked if there were any other questions, and there were none.

The Commissioner adopted Resolution R-2024-01 re-appointing Dr. Elizabeth Wiles to the Union County Board of Health for a term of six years set to begin on January 1, 2025 and expire on December 31, 2030.

Commissioner Collins adopted Resolution R-2025-02 re-appointing William Stone to the Union County Board of Health for a term of six years set to begin on January 1, 2025 and expire on December 31, 2030.

The Commissioner adopted Resolution R-2025-03 to adopt an emergency moratorium on all applications for variances under Chapter 18, Article IV, Division 2, Section 18-105 for a period of one hundred twenty (120) days. This moratorium goes into effect tonight, January 16, 2025, at 8:00pm.

Commissioner Collins adopted Resolution R-2025-04 removing Courtney Waller from the Union County Development Authority Board of Directors effective today, January 16, 2025 and appointing Wesley Hopgood to said board. Mr. Hopgood's appointment will be from January 16, 2025 to December 30, 2028.

Tony Hughes, County Manager, provided attendees with an update on County operations. His comments are summarized as follows: I came on board last Tuesday and the snowstorm took place two days after I started. I took some photos of the snow and put them on social media. I feel like this is a part of my job. I don't feel like it is the Commissioner's job to get out and do that. I feel like Mr. Collins has more important things to do. They hired me as the County Manager, and I have different departments that I work under and I am a hands-on person. The Road Department did an extremely great job, and I am proud of them. I want to be out and see what everyone is doing. On the salt situation; we ran a little low on salt and we were getting a little nervous about it. We did sell to some individuals that were working in subdivisions to clear the ice and snow. None of our salt left Union County. That being said, the State actually furnishes salt to Suches and it comes out of Hall County. The State can come get salt if they need it on that side of the mountain. We have another front coming in and we had a little trouble finding some salt, but 250 tons should be delivered by tomorrow afternoon. Salt cannot be put on a gravel road, only 89 gravels, which is small gravel. You also cannot put salt on a tar and gravel road as it ruins it. There are a lot of county miles of road. We have not had an ice storm like this since 2010 or 2011. We ran into another thing that I was unaware of. The recycling center is grinding glass, one of which is very fine and then the other being bigger. The past administration let the Road Department mix it in with the sand and salt in place of using the 89 gravel. After looking at it, the glass is not dangerous, but from a profit standpoint it is better to sell the glass for \$130 per ton and we can buy the 89 gravel for \$30 per ton. Moving forward we are going to sell the glass and purchase and use the 89 gravel in the sand and salt mixture. At Deaver's boat ramp they are having trouble with enough area to dock boats. We are waiting on the permits from TVA to install the boat ramp extension. For Parks and Recreation we are looking at doing a lot of things for the kids. I want to get some stuff going for the big, big kids. I have got some information that I would like Susan Stalcup from the Recreation Department to present to you all. Going forward, if you have any questions just give me a call as I look forward to serving Union County.

Athletic Director, Susan Stalcup's comments are summarized as follows: This year the current administration gave us the opportunity to bid out the uniforms for Recreation sports. This is a big deal in Parks and Recreation to control costs. Getting bids for uniforms this year we were able to reduce the cost of uniforms by \$13,509.75. For reference, basketball uniforms were going to cost \$93 and the fee for a child to play is \$65. We were saying that next year the fee for a child to play would have to go up to \$100. Other numbers for reference are T-ball registration is \$80 per child, and we were projected to have to raise that fee to \$110. The first quote for uniforms was \$78.50 and the second quote was \$57.50. For softball the first quote was \$105.25 and the second quote was \$70.00. For baseball the first quote was \$104 and the second quote was \$67.00. So, without bidding out for uniforms, we are not getting the best for our kids.

These uniforms are still the same quality. We are also already looking at Football and working on keeping the cost down. With the current administration we are already cutting the cost and for that the Recreation Department is thankful. We want every kid to be able to play Recreation sports and to also be able to afford it. We are thankful to Commissioner Collins and Mr. Hughes to be able to do that.

Commissioner Collins closed the meeting with a few comments as follows: I will be doing a review of all board appointments and will determine in the coming months some of these appointments. In the two weeks or so that I have been here... it is overwhelming as to what is going on. We got a report the other day that there are 988 culverts that are at a level 3 that need to be worked on. There is a bridge in Suches that needs immediate attention. I am not bashing the previous administration, but our infrastructure is dwindling down. We have got two miles over on Town Creek School Road that is going to be paved. Two miles on Pat Colwell Road, and two miles over on Gaddistown. That is priority now. We are just now turning the rocks over. I really think we are going to be able to cut wasteful spending. I encourage you all to come to our next meeting. Our county manager is doing a great job, and he is wide open. We have the best staff in the United States in my opinion. I could not have come into this job without this staff over here. They need a big hand for what they do.

There being no other business the meeting was adjourned at 6:33pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Jennifer Mahan
Jennifer Mahan, County Clerk

Approved this 20th day of February, 2025

Harold Collins
Harold Collins, Sole Commissioner



**New Union County Short-term Rental Licensees
December 16, 2024 – January 15, 2025**

MOUNT CRUMPIT, LLC

775 Stennes Gap
Blairsville, Ga 30512

**MARCHANT, SAMANTHA & THOMASON,
MICHAEL**

645 Stennes Gap
Blairsville, Ga 30512

MARINELLO, JOHN

125 Berta Rd
Morganton, Ga 30560

MILLER, KERRY

67 Timber Grace Ct
Blairsville, Ga 30512

ZOLLINGER, DAVID & SUSAN

235 Opossum Rd
Blairsville, GA 30512