

County Meeting  
June 21, 2018  
Minutes  
Union County Courthouse

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Paris at 6:00 pm. The invocation was given by Gary Radcliff and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Bill Walker. The minutes from the May 17, 2018 County Meeting and the June 1, 2018 Called Meeting were approved as read.

The Commissioner proclaimed June 23, 2018 as Appalachian Trail Day in Union County. Benton MacKaye proposed the Appalachian Trail project in October of 1921 and by March of 1925 had generated enough support to organize the Appalachian Trail Conference, which later became the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and began work on more specific plans. Through lots of hard work by numerous individuals, including Judge Arthur Perkins and Myron Avery the footpath from Maine to Georgia was completed in August of 1937. President Johnson signed the Nation Trail System Act in 1968 which made the Appalachian Trail the first national scenic trail that was under federal protection. Commissioner Paris encouraged all citizens to show appreciation and support the efforts of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and all they have contributed to the portion of the Appalachian Trail that goes through Union County. He stated he had attended a meeting at 1:30 with the Blairsville/Union County Chamber of Commerce, Appalachian Trail members and the new Director of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

Commissioner Paris approved a Lease Agreement between Union County and the State Properties Commission for use by the Department of Juvenile Justice for 185 square feet of office space located at 76B Hunt Martin Street in the amount of \$1.00 annually. The term of this agreement will be from July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019.

The Commissioner approved a Lease Agreement between Union County and the State Properties Commission for use by the Office of the Governor Division of Georgia Emergency Management Agency for 200 square feet of office space located at 46 Hughes Street, Suite A, Blairsville in the amount of \$1.00 annually. The term of this agreement will be from July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019.

Commissioner Paris approved Resolution R-2018-04 to amend the FY 2017 Budget. With the new Finance Director, Laura Driskell, and the auditors working with our accounting software company, the auditors have asked the county to adopt this resolution.

In the past the County has always amended the budgeted amount to the actual budget, but the auditors have asked us to do it differently for FY2017. The Commissioner announced that the County was over budget more than average. Next month the auditors will be at the County Meeting to present the audit. The Budget was amended from \$15,219,885 to \$17,528,152. This is an increase of a little over two million dollars and these additional funds will be coming out of the fund balance. While it is never pleasant to go over budget, it is explainable and hopefully easy to prevent in the future. The Commissioner went on to explain the reasons for the County being over budget.

First, the County was under on revenue projections by \$286,576 for the receipt of property taxes. The Commissioner said they are not exactly sure yet what this was about but feel comfortable that the numbers will improve this current year to help make up for this revenue shortfall. Second, The Sheriff's Office, Jail Operations and School Resource Officers costs were up \$263,000 which was mostly due to housing inmates out of town. Our court system kept bogging down in 2017, but county officials have been making improvements. Thanks to our Sheriff, District Attorney, Judges, and Larry Garrett, all working together, this number has been drastically reduced for the current year. They are way under budget already. Cases are being processed quicker and there is now an employee overseeing Community Service which should help get things moving along. Third, was the County's Risk Management expense, which can be due to the drastic increase in the cost of healthcare for employees. The County is partially self-insured, which has always saved the county a tremendous amount of money over the years. The first \$30,000 of each claim is paid by the county, and once it goes over that there is a reinsurance company that takes over at that time. There were a large number of employees who had major health issues and then our reinsurance company had to raise their rates due to this also. The Commissioner did not have the exact numbers but should have them at the next meeting. The insurance people feel confident that many of these issues will not resurface and expect this to go down this coming year, but there is no guarantee.

Finally, the capital outlay was over budget by \$570,000. The Commissioner and staff knew this would be an issue, so they were prepared for this in the current year. This increase could have been eliminated by using SPLOST funds since it was real estate and project related, but Commissioner Paris felt comfortable that the County would be able to make up much of this by next year and be able to reduce the amount completely. It was made up of expenditures that came up that were not anticipated, but that were felt necessary to make sure the future of Union County was sound. The first was an expense of over \$100,000 for the new Drug Court Building which is the new triple trailer facility across from the Union County Library. It was not anticipated they would run out of space at their previous location so this was not an anticipated cost that had been budgeted for. Drug Court is one of the best programs as of now going on in the Court System and is helping a lot of people. Another expense that was not anticipated was the \$58,000 to reconstruct the Hunter/England Cabin at the Farmers Market. This was to preserve the history of the oldest home in Union County and it had needed to be done for a long time. Most of all, \$681,415 was for the Davenport Property that the County purchased along Highway 515 in front of the Farmers Market. The opportunity to purchase this property at a reduced price came along unexpectedly and the Commissioner had to make the hard choice of purchasing it or letting it go. Commissioner Paris knew that the front acreage, across from the new Sears building, if utilized as commercial property in the future, would probably cover the entire property cost. The plan for this property, in addition to building the new access road into the Farmers Market, is to build a sports complex for smaller kids to include T- Ball, Coaches Pitch and 8 and under ball fields and a playground since there is no more room at Meeks Park for additional ball fields. The money that the county is over budget is in reserves to cover the costs, so it will all balance and the goal is to not raise taxes.

The Commissioner accepted a Sanitary Sewer Line Easement given to the City of Blairsville by Union County for a permanent 20-foot easement for the right to construct, operate and maintain underground sanitation sewer lines across property owned by Union County. The Easement area is 0.134 acres located along the edge of Butternut Creek Golf Course. This is for the purpose of

the City providing sewer access to the new apartment complex and church addition along Pat Haralson Drive.

Commissioner Paris accepted the Fireworks Tax Grant awarded to Union County from the Georgia Firefighter Standards and Training Council in the amount of \$2,997.00 with the county providing a 10% match of \$333.00. This grant will be used to purchase one Task Force Monitor Nozzle for the Union County Fire Department. A monitor nozzle is a firefighting apparatus that can be left unmanned to continue spraying water while firefighters do other things to contain a fire.

The Commissioner accepted the Recreation Trails Program Grant awarded to Union County for improvements to the Helton Creek Falls Trail in the amount of \$100,000 with a minimum local match of \$25,000, which can include labor provided by Union County. These improvements will include repairs to the steps leading down to the falls, minor trail re-routing, new boardwalks, raising existing boardwalks, handrails, signage and removal of dead trees. The County realized what a hazard this area was last year when a lady fell at the falls, breaking her hip and arm. Our rescue personnel had a heck of a time getting the lady out of the area. It will also help beautify the Helton Creek Falls area and make future access safe for adults and kids.

Commissioner Paris accepted an Agreement between the Georgia Department of Corrections and Union County for 6 work details for the period July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019. 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, repairs to facilities, trash pickup, golf course maintenance or Meeks Park maintenance. The Commissioner extended a special thanks to the Carlton Colwell Detention Center, staff and detainees, who are all dedicated to their jobs within Union County.

The Commissioner accepted an Agreement between Paragon Consulting Group, Inc. and Union County for engineering and project management services related to road upgrades and maintenance. The cost of this agreement is \$35,000 per year and automatically renews on July 1 of each year unless one party notifies the other. They provide an important link between Union County and GDOT.

Commissioner Paris accepted a Real Estate Sales Contract between Mary Patricia W. Betts and Union County for the purchase of 1.847 acres, more or less, lying in land lots 43 & 44, 16<sup>th</sup> District, 1<sup>st</sup> Section with 420 feet on Wolf Creek in the amount of \$33,000.

The Commissioner accepted a Settlement Statement and Warranty Deed between Union County and Patricia W. Betts for the purchase of 1.847 acres, more or less, in the amount of \$33,000. These two items are for a small tract the County has been trying to purchase for four years that is the last remaining piece connected to the Byron Herbert Reece Farm and Heritage Center. The property owner has been asking \$54,000 and would not budge off the price. Although we needed the parcel for future use, we could not justify the price. Finally, when the price became reasonable, the County made the purchase.

Commissioner Paris abandoned Old Deyton Drive due to the fact it no longer serves a purpose for the County or the citizens. It will officially be removed from the county-maintained road system.

The Commissioner accepted a Quit Claim Deed for Union County to abandon Old Deyton Drive located in Land Lost 260, 9<sup>th</sup> District, 1<sup>st</sup> Section of Union County and relinquish any prescriptive easement right that was previously given. Old Deyton Drive is located along a section of the old county road just outside the entrance to the Thirteen Hundred Development. The developers changed the direction of part of the road, making this section no longer useful or needed by the county.

Commissioner Paris approved a Business License for Vacasa, LLC. This is the only type of Business License issued in Union County for the purpose of collecting the Hotel/Motel Tax.

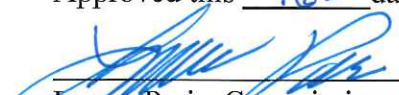
The Commissioner only had brief comments related to the Road Department. They are mowing and working on patching roads. They have also been working on the new entrance to the Farmers Market.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 6:45.

Respectfully submitted by:

  
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Jennifer Queen, County Clerk

Approved this 16<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2018

  
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Lamar Paris, Commissioner