

**NEWTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING
February 5, 2008
MINUTES**

Present: Chairman Aaron Varner, Commissioners Mort Ewing, Earnest Simmons, Ester Fleming, Jr., J.C. Henderson, and Monty Laster, Administrative Officer John Middleton, Attorney's Tommy Craig, James Griffin, & County Clerk Jackie Smith

Newspaper: Covington News – Rachel Oswald
Newton Citizen - Crystal Tatum
Large group of citizens

Chairman Varner called the meeting to order, extended a welcome and read the thought for the day. Reverend Ronnie Brannen gave the invocation and Chairman Varner led the Pledge of Allegiance to our great Flag.

APPROVAL OF BOC W/S MINUTES DATED JANUARY 15, 2008

Motion: To approve the Work Session Minutes dated January 15, 2008 as written.

Proposed: Commissioner Monty Laster, District Five

Second: Commissioner Mort Ewing, District One

Motion Carried

APPROVAL OF BOC MINUTES DATED JANUARY 15, 2008

Motion: To approve the BOC Minutes dated January 15, 2008 as written.

Proposed: Commissioner Mort Ewing, District One

Second: Commissioner Monty Laster, District Five

Motion Carried

APPROVAL OF BOC W/S MINUTES DATED JANUARY 31, 2008

Motion: To approve the Work Session Minutes dated January 31, 2008 as written.

Proposed: Commissioner Mort Ewing, District One

Second: Commissioner Monty Laster, District Five

Motion Carried

KIDS NET GEORGIA

Chairman Varner recognized Micki Smith, Project Coordinator for KidsNet Newton. Ms. Smith appeared before the board to express appreciation for the use of the property on Elm Street (formerly Extension Office) for KidsNet Newton. She thanked the chairman, board, Mr. Middleton for working with them to make this happen. She also offered thanks to Jason Johnson & Billy Stanley for all their assistance with their workspace, etc.

- Great opportunity to work with families and children who need assistance.
- Service agencies working together.

- Helps to keep children from falling through the proverbial crack.
- Juvenile Court is well pleased with program.
- Agencies involved with System Care are: DFACS, Juvenile Justice System, Board of Education, Juvenile Court, Kids Net Staff
- Gets all agencies talking and working together for the common goal of the child.

The board expressed appreciation to Ms. Smith for all she and others are doing to help the children and families of Newton County.

NELSON MULLINS LOBBYIST SERVICES

Did not attend meeting.

SENIOR HOMESTEAD EXEMPTIONS

Chairman noted that the board invited Chief Appraiser Tommy Knight to address the board regarding numbers as it relates to our present homestead exemptions and proposed exemptions as well as the effect on the Tax Digest.

Mr. Knight presented the attached information for the board's consideration.

- Compiled numbers for current exemptions
- Compiled numbers for proposed exemptions (used same exemption as Board of Education)
- Current Savings to Senior Citizens: \$496,308.00
- Proposed Savings to Senior Citizens: \$806,500.00
- Minimal Loss to county if proposal passes: \$310,192.00
- Effects of possible new applicants – used 500 new qualifying parcels – Additional Loss of \$126,490.00
- Provided memorandum from Vicki K. Lambert, Director GA Dept. of Revenue
- Commissioner Henderson's request for total exemption would have an impact of \$1,629,812 in Loss Revenue to the county.

Commissioner Henderson

- Seeking to get more relief for the seniors in our county.
- Seniors worked hard all their lives and need some help with tax relief.
- Lives on fixed income and some with social security only.
- Requested that Mr. Knight provide the board numbers regarding a homestead exemption that would allow all senior property owners total exemption from County M&O taxes. A copy of results made part of these minutes.
- If we can't give it all right now, we could phase it in over 3 years.
- Don't have to vote tonight, but wants to move forward.
- Requested other members to comment.

Commissioner Ewing

- Oldest member of board.
- Been working for seniors a long time and agrees tax relief is needed.
- Suggested no action taken until the GA General Assembly finishes their 40 days of work.

- Let's see if the state provides any tax relief before taking action.
- Noted that at that time we would have all the numbers we have asked Tommy Knight to provide and could make an intelligent decision.
- Beginning budget meetings soon and will be involved with that as well.
- Suggested to keep it on the table to study until Assembly adjourns in April.

Commissioner Simmons

- Likes the phase in process.
- Place on ballot in November and make sure there is a choice between phasing in over a 3-year period or all at one time.
- Should be decision of the citizens.

Commissioner Fleming

- Looked at this for a long time and many counties within the state are moving forward with this.
- As far as total exemption, I can't support that, as it would devastate the county budget.
- I can support increasing the senior exemption to \$26,000.00; the way school board placed it on the ballot today.

Commissioner Laster

- We have been very fortunate to keep the milage rate at 9.73 over the past eight years.
- Need to go through the budget process, which ends June 30th, and make a decision then.
- Cannot support total exemption. We already have shortfalls this year and if we voted this in for total exemption that would mean an extra debt of \$1.6 million dollars.

Commissioner Henderson

- Recognized Mr. M.A. Turner who noted the following:
- Frank Davis & Mr. Turner has been working on this since the inception.
- Started out wanting to get a freeze on assessments.
- We would like to have immediate relief.
- Understands the county has to have money to run the county.
- Asking for just a little help and to place on ballot in November.

Chairman Varner

- Questioned the latest date we could get something done to get this on the ballot.
- Probably eight weeks in advance of the election
- Need to get printing deadline clarified. County Attorney will research this.

Motion: To place the following on the ballot for November election. (Read aloud question for ballot)

“Shall the Act be approved which provides a homestead exemption from Newton County ad valorem taxes for maintenance and operations purposes in the amount of \$30,000.00

of the assess value of the homestead for residents of that county who are 65 years age or over and whose annual adjusted net income does not exceed \$25,000.00.

Proposed by: Commissioner J.C. Henderson, District Four

Second by: Commissioner Earnest Simmons, District Two

Further Discussion

Commissioner Ewing

- Thought we were not going to vote on this tonight, but leave it on the table for further study and information.
- Not in a position to vote on a motion I got ten minutes ago.
- Hopes Commissioner Henderson will withdraw his motion for further study.

Commissioner Henderson

- Feels this has gone on a long time and board has not addressed this issue.
- Researched this and really things it is a very intelligent decision.

Commissioner Fleming

- This issue has gone on for several years in Newton and other counties.
- Has not received 3-5 phone calls over this issue the last 5-6 years.
- Since school board is placing on referendum and other counties give senior exemptions (some more, some less). Don't have a problem with supporting it to be placed on July or November ballot. Whichever date county attorney's office researches and approves.
- Effective 2009 Tax Digest

Commissioner Laster

- Doesn't feel we are ready to do this.
- Putting this off until June 30 is not that big of a deal.
- Reiterated that he feels we need to get through the budget process first and then look at this issue with more knowledge and information.
- Feels Commissioner Henderson is rushing into this without further study.

Chairman called for the vote

Motion Approve 3 to 2 with Commissioner Ewing and Commissioner Laster voting in opposition to the motion.

GIS-PHOTO SCIENCE, INC.-PROPOSAL FOR DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Lynn Parham, GIS Manager appeared before the board and presented this request.

- Cost: \$198,000.00 with county paying 40% = \$79,200.00
- County: 40% of cost; City of Covington: 30% of cost & NCW&SA: 30% of cost
- Complete fly over of entire county – DMC color digital photography
- Flight dates: February to March 2008 – no leaves on trees.
- Deliver dates: May & June 2008
- Full fly over every 2 – 4 years
- Partial every year

- Driven by growth

Board expressed thanks to Ms. Parham and congratulated her on her promotion.

Motion: To approve the proposal from Photo Science, Inc. for Digital Photography for Newton County with a cost to the county not to exceed \$79,200.00 which is 40% of total cost.

Proposed by: Commissioner Monty Laster, District Five

Second by: Commissioner J.C. Henderson, District Four

Motion Carried

DECLARATION OF SURPLUS PROPERTY

Administrative Officer John Middleton presented this for the board's approval.

- 16 items as presented by Mr. Middleton
- Post items on Gov Deals to be sold
- GOV Deals.com is government EBay
- If property is not sold we will keep it and sell it for scrap.

Motion: To approve the list of items as presented by Mr. Middleton and recommended by Purchasing Director to be declared and sold as Surplus Property.

Proposed by: Commissioner Mort Ewing, District One

Second by: Commissioner J.C. Henderson, District Four

Motion Carried

LAW ENFORCEMENT CENTER-PROPOSAL FOR 400 TON-AIR CHILLER

Contract Engineer Ray McFadden appeared before the board with this request.

- Failure of chiller a year and half ago created problems for Sheriff Department
- When failed, 600 inmates with no cooling system during the hot summertime.
- At the time of failure we got a temporary unit to save the day and made necessary repairs to chiller.
- Chairman Varner & Sheriff Nichols requested a look at a "spare" chiller.
- Trane equipment - Trane saved the day.
- Recommendation: to proceed with purchase of spare chiller
- Trane can have this done within 12 weeks.

Mr. Middleton

- Financing: Jail fund
- Sheriff agreed to fund this entire project out of the jail fund
- 1/5 amount over next 5 years.
- Don't want to use entire fund – spread out over 5 years

Commissioner Simmons

- Questioned if was under warranty at time of failure? No, but new cooler will be under a five year warranty.
- On call 24/day if cooler were to fail

Motion: To uphold the recommendation of Contract Engineer Ray McFadden and approve the purchase of a 400-Ton-Air Chiller for the Newton County Law Enforcement Center. This unit will be purchased from Trane with a total cost not to exceed \$453,670.00. As presented by Administrative Assistant John Middleton the unit will be funded out of the Jail Fund.

Proposed by: Commissioner Mort Ewing, District One

Second by: Commissioner J.C. Henderson, District Four

Motion Carried

COUSINS GYM ARCHITECT AGREEMENT

Motion: To defer action on this request until February 19th meeting.

Proposed by: Commissioner J.C. Henderson, District Four

Second by: Commissioner Monty Laster, District Five

Motion Carried

COUNTY CHECKS:

Motion: To approve the county checks as printed and read by the chairman.

Proposed by: Commissioner Mort Ewing, District One

Second by: Commissioner J.C. Henderson, District Four

Motion Carried

STREETLIGHTS:

BAILEY GLYNN SUBDIVISION

DISTRICT TWO

Motion: To approve the streetlight petition for Bailey Glynn Subdivision located in district two as requested.

Proposed by: Commissioner Earnest Simmons, District Two

Second by: Commissioner J.C. Henderson, District Four

Motion Carried

IRIS BROOK SUBDIVISION

HIGHGROVE SUBDIVISION

DISTRICT FIVE

Motion: To approve the streetlight petition for Iris Brook Subdivision and Highgrove Subdivision which are located in district five as requested.

Proposed by: Commissioner Monty Laster, District Five

Second by: Commissioner Earnest Simmons, District Two

Motion Carried

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Time: 8:10 p.m.

Motion: To enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing personnel and threatened and pending litigation.

Proposed by: Commissioner Mort Ewing, District One

Second by: Commissioner Monty Laster, District Five

Motion Carried

REGULAR SESSION

Time: 9:10 p.m.

Motion: To enter into Regular Session.

Proposed by: Commissioner Mort Ewing, District One

Second by: Commissioner Earnest Simmons, District Two

Motion Carried

ADJOURN

Time: 9:11 p.m.

Motion: To adjourn the meeting.

Proposed by: Commissioner Mort Ewing, District One

Second by: Commissioner Monty Laster, District Five

Motion Carried

Respectfully Submitted,

Jackie B. Smith
County Clerk