

**OCONEE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TOWN HALL MEETING
June 16, 2021 – 6:00 p.m.
Oconee Civic Center**

Members Present:

Chairman John Daniell
Commissioner Chuck Horton
Commissioner Amrey Harden
Commissioner Mark Saxon
Commissioner Mark Thomas

Staff Present:

Justin Kirouac, County Administrator
Holly Stephenson, County Clerk
Alex Newell, Internal Services Director
Diane Baggett, Communications Manager
Shawn Wheeler, Civic Center Director

Call to Order: 6:00 p.m.

Chairman John Daniell welcomed citizens to the Town Hall Meeting and asked that those attending via Zoom use the raised-hand feature for comments.

Chairman Daniell gave brief updates regarding several items:

- Board of Commissioners just adopted budget last week of \$32.7 million general fund budget.
- With this budget, there will be a millage rate rollback, anticipated to be 6.65 for unincorporated and 7.59 for incorporated.
 - Will move us from 7th lowest in the state to 6th lowest rate in the state.
 - Roughly 5.8 % increase over last year which is the lowest increase since 2013.
 - Very proud of this budget and being able to reduce the millage rate.
- Design firm was awarded for the administrative building last week.
- Water restrictions for outdoor watering are in place due to spike in water usage. Odd number address can water on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays; Even addresses can water on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. Drip irrigation and hand watering allowed any day.
- Calls Creek design is underway, going from 1.5 million gallons per day to 3 million gallons per day. Looking at gray water for outdoor watering and composting for solids as part of the study.
- New air and light truck under design from 2021 SPLOST project. Donation of \$100,000 from Presbyterian Homes to help with this project.
- New engine for Station #2 in Farmington should be delivered in September or October.
- Animal Services Unleashing provided a good tour of the renovated facility. Public invited to call and schedule a visit.

- This week will finish paving for the year, which is earliest that the program has been completed. Hog Mountain Road is completed with lane widening and paving. Next to begin will be Phase 2 multi-use path from Butlers Crossing to Lake Wellbrook Road.

Public Comment Period was opened.

Citizen Questions:

Jeff Hood, Julian Court,

- Based on comments at the debate with the Watkinsville mayor and city council a few weeks ago, Brian Broderick thinks we will need by-pass around Bishop before there is by-pass around Watkinsville. Also, widening of 441 in Morgan County has begun. What is the latest on widening 441 in Oconee and the Bishop bypass? *Chairman Daniell* – By-pass of Bishop has not yet been decided on, and there is still time for discussion on many factors before construction reaches that area.
- Can you give an update on the coming roundabouts for Hog Mountain Road, still in engineering phase? *Chairman Daniell* – Yes. Those at Snows Mill and Rocky Branch are final concept and plans are developing for Rays Church Road. Should see activity in the next month. There is an anticipated recommendation for the permanent closing of Cole Springs Road due to safety concerns, but final decision will not be made until further along with the roundabouts.
- Some of the barrels at the closed Cole Springs Road have been moved and some people are cutting through. *Chairman Daniell* – We will get out soon and put those back in correct spot.
- Several years ago, a home partially burned on Malcom Bridge Road and the rubble is still standing. What is the County's policy on something like that? *Chairman Daniell* – We have made attempts to locate the property owner. This will probably fall under property maintenance code, and we will be taking another look at it.
- On the Eagle Tavern project, are we close to it being finalized? *Chairman Daniell* - Yes. We are finished with foundation work and cosmetic wood issues are being addressed.
- The Oconee Enterprise has reported that Costco is coming to Oconee County. Is there anything you can tell us or update us on about Costco? *Chairman Daniell* – There's no comment on economic development projects either inactive or active, but it is not new news that they have possible interest in Oconee County.
- A Dollar General has been talked about in Bishop. Is that a City of Bishop item or does that fall under the County? *Chairman Daniell* – That is totally under the purview of the City Council of Bishop.

Chairman Daniell gave further brief updates:

- A joint project between Department of Transportation and Oconee County at Union Church Road and Highway 53 should get underway soon.
- An active project study on 441 and La Vista Road is underway.
- A technical rating on our roads as far as depth and quality of asphalt to get true data for paving preparation will begin soon.
- TSPLOST will be instrumental in how quickly we can handle road problems.

- Outstanding EPD permits have been issued for Phase 2 of Experiment Station from Butlers Crossing to the Highway 441 overpass, so expect clearance for the contractor to start in next 3 weeks. It will be a two-year project.
- Phase 3 will be from the bridge into Watkinsville. The City of Watkinsville might adjust the preliminary plans, and the County plans to assist the City to get construction done quickly.
- The Epps Bridge turn lane project coming off the 10 Loop is complete. There is additional signage to be done, but accidents have already been reduced and traffic is moving better.
- Speed limit data collection has been done on several roads. The Department of Transportation has reviewed the data and it will be reviewed with Sheriff's Office to determine the best method for setting speed limits for County roads in the future.

Chairman Daniell asked for virtual questions and there were none.

Pam Hendricks, Thornwood Drive,

- Thinks the County should be thinking of a new public park in Epps Bridge area. Social Circle has opened the new Friendship Park with a small amphitheater, and something similar would be so good for Epps area due to it being highly commercial. She encourages the County to think about public park in Epps area. *Chairman Daniell*- There has always been a debate as to whether to do smaller public parks vs larger parks, and land prices greatly affect locations. The County is moving toward construction of an Administrative Building with nice green area that can be used by various groups with plenty of parking.

Jeff Hood, Julian Court,

- The Augusta Cornicle reports that Columbia County and Richmond County are planning to split from their judicial circuit. Due to new District Attorney and difference between philosophy of Clarke and Oconee citizens, even though you do not have say so, would you like to comment due to your influence on whether you would like to see us split? *Chairman Daniell* – There are processes through the State legislature that you go through to look at the data and see whether that would make sense. It is definitely in minds of people here. *Commissioner Horton* – The election is complete, and elections are how these concerns should be dealt with. Changing the rules and getting out of a circuit is more difficult that resolving this through an election. Commissioner Horton recommends going to talk directly with Ms. Gonzales like he has done to relay opinions and differences.
- Thanked Commissioner Horton for his response. Stated disappointed that the citizens of this County did not show up for this election. Does like route of having a conversation with Ms. Gonzales and will suggest the Oconee GOP party invite her to meeting instead of going the more difficult route. *Commissioner Horton* – Thanked Mr. Hood for his willingness to ask questions. Understanding the role of the district attorney and talking with elected officials is important to resolve differences. He suggests inviting Ms. Gonzales to talk before he leaves this meeting as she is in attendance.

Dan McGee, Loch Lomond Circle

- Thanked Commissioners for not passing on fees to the school system to use park facilities. Very concerned that low income children will not be able to play sports due to cost. He is volunteering for Oconee Park Foundation and hopes to raise scholarship money to not lose any child from sports due to cost.

- Asked about new economic development news. *Chairman Daniell* – The Economic Development Strategy was adopted a few months ago, so the Chamber of Commerce is actively trying to implement that strategy. There is no announcement we are willing to make at this time; don't really comment on active or inactive economic development. We are in great place and expecting good things to happen. *Commissioner Harden* - Caterpillar type projects are few and far between with many areas vying for them. Agreed with Chairman Daniell that Oconee County is sitting in good position and Highway 316 upgrades will be a benefit. The Orkin tract still there if something large wants to come, but small business is the backbone and where the growth is now.

Mike Griffith, Cold Tree

- Acknowledged the Commissioners for doing a great job in their decisions for controlled, responsible growth and making Oconee County a great place to live.
- He is concerned about increased traffic and speeds in a growing community, especially about speed limits on smaller roads in the County, near schools and near new subdivisions. He feels teen drivers near the schools not being asked to slow down is a recipe for disaster, a major accident is going to occur. Speed is the number one component in safety. He appreciates the signs that have been put up showing drivers their current speed and feels setting lower speed limits will slow people down. *Chairman Daniell* – The official code of Georgia has one code section that says you can not exceed the posted speed limit, but there are 25 to 30 laws that tell you how to enforce that one law. Part of that comes from current speed tracked by markers and the 85th percentile where current traffic patterns are collected. The data is reviewed by the DOT, along with internal discussions with the Sheriff's Office to see how to balance speed limit with enforcement and safety. If the speed limit is dropped without proper study, the Sheriff's Office no longer has the jurisdiction to enforce it. State legislature would need to be involved to reduce the number of code sections at deal with enforcement. Stated that staff is working on it and will have meetings in next few weeks. *Commissioner Harden* – Thanked Mr. Griffith for bringing Union Church Road speed to their attention. He advised there are other roads they are currently looking at also.

Jeff Hood, Julian Court,

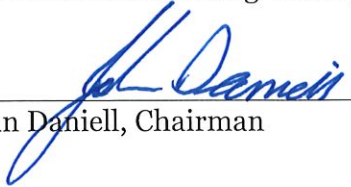
- At last Town Hall, he posed question about the re-zone across from Quick Trip which could not be responded to because it was a current rezone and has since been denied. Since the vote, would anyone be willing to explain the reason for the vote. *Chairman Daniell* – The property owner has put us on notice of a possible Constitutional violation so they have up to 30 days after our minutes are approved to file a lawsuit. It is not to the County's advantage to make a comment right now. After all is settled, we can discuss our thinking.

Chairman Daniell asked for virtual questions and there were none.

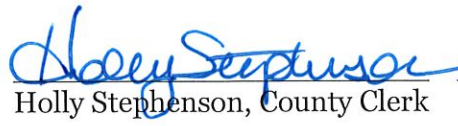
Chairman Daniell thanked all for their attendance.

Adjourn:

The Town Hall Meeting was adjourned at 6:48 p.m.



John Daniell, Chairman

 7-8-21

Holly Stephenson, County Clerk Date