

Minutes
Historic Courthouse, Board Chambers, 3rd Floor
225 North Board Street
October 10, 2023

The Thomas County Board of Commissioners met on the above date in a regular scheduled meeting at 9:00 a.m. at the Historic Courthouse, Commission Chambers, with the following board members present:

Zippy Vonier, Chairman, Dist. 8

Rev. Jeremy G. Rich, Dist. 1 (absent)

Kenneth E. Hickey, District 3

Wiley Grady, District 6

Donnie Baggett, Vice-Chair, Dist. 5

Moses Gross, District 2

Mark NeSmith, District 4

Phillip V. Brown, District 7 (absent)

Staff present was County Manager Michael J. Stephenson, County Attorney Bruce Warren, and County Clerk Celeste Tyler.

News/Media present: Jill Holloway Thomasville Times Enterprise
Chris Hurst, WPAX Radio

Others present: Todd Milam, Georgia Forestry Commission
Dan May, Nate Tyler, & Chris Marsh with Fountain of Life Rescue, Inc.

Chairman Vonier called the meeting to order, and Fr. Will Brown with All Saints Episcopal Church gave the invocation.

Chairman Vonier recognized Commissioner Baggett who made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 26, 2023 Board Meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hickey. The motion was approved unanimously with Chairman Vonier and Commissioners Baggett, Grady, Gross, Hickey, and NeSmith voting aye.

Chairman Vonier recognized Commissioner Grady who made a motion to approve the October 10, 2023 agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Baggett. The motion was approved unanimously with Chairman Vonier and Commissioners Baggett, Grady, Gross, Hickey, and NeSmith voting aye.

Chairman Vonier recognized Ranger Todd Milam who presented the 2023 Georgia Forestry Commission Annual Report for Thomas County to the Commissioners. Thomas County contributed \$7464.00 to the Georgia Forestry Commission during the 2023 fiscal year toward the cost of protecting the forest land in the County. There was a total of 21 fires with the average fire size 1.39 acres. In FY2023 the Thomas County Unit issued 2290 permits. In other projects, they worked with the tree board and recertified Thomasville for Tree City USA—now 28 years running. Commissioner Hickey expressed appreciation for all they do to protect Thomas County.

Chairman Vonier recognized Mr. Dan May, Mrs. Chris Marsh, and Mr. Nate Tyler all representing the Fountain of Life Rescue. Mr. May spoke on their behalf and began with an overview of the current status of their shelter on 612 E. Clay Street. Since January, the shelter has provided resources and overnight stays to 733 individuals. The hours of operation have expanded from 3 nights to 4 nights and include women and men. Those in need are offered shelter, meals, hot showers, laundry services, snacks for the next day, and community resources. Mrs. Marsh, answering Commissioner NeSmith's question, stated

that they are seeing great things. They have 21 beds, and as long as they are doing what they need to be doing they can stay. Mr. Tyler added that he is using his contacts with the community to help clients remove barriers and solve problems. The overall goal would be to get individuals to a place where they no longer need Fountain of Life services. They would greatly appreciate any consideration for funding that the Commissioners could provide.

Open Meeting to Citizens: Chairman Vonier recognized Shirley Jackson of 727 Crowley Rd., Thomasville, Georgia. she asked the Board to serve the community that is in the most need by considering the development of additional housing in Thomasville and Thomas County.

Reports: Chairman Vonier recognized County Manager Stephenson who reminded the Board that he will be attending the ACCG Fall Legislative Conference and will be out of the office for the remainder of the week.

Chairman Vonier recognized Commissioner Baggett who by recommendation from the Public Property Committee made a motion to adopt a Resolution supporting efforts to reform and improve mental health services. The motion was seconded by Commissioner NeSmith. The motion was approved unanimously with Chairman Vonier and Commissioners Baggett, Grady, Gross, Hickey, and NeSmith voting aye.

RESOLUTION URGING THE GOVERNOR AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA TO CONTINUE EFFORTS TO REFORM AND IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR THE CITIZENS OF GEORGIA

WHEREAS, being the constitutional level of government closest to their constituents, Georgia counties are on the front lines of responding to mental health issues within the community as well as the development of mental health reform efforts; and

WHEREAS, the Thomas County Board of Commissioners supports efforts designed to provide every citizen in need to have accessible, affordable, and adequate mental health services; and

WHEREAS, the Thomas County Board of Commissioners is grateful for the efforts of Georgia’s executive, legislative, and judicial branches in working towards mental health reform in recent years, such as the passage of HB 1013 (2022) and introduction of HB 520 (2023), Chief Justice Boggs’s work on jail diversion initiatives, and Governor Kemp’s commitment to expanding mental health resources in schools for children and young adults; and

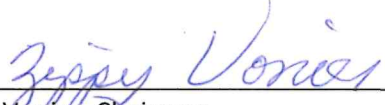
WHEREAS, despite these prior steps and successes, the [Blank] County Board of Commissioners recognizes that there is still a tremendous amount of work for the citizens of Thomas County and other citizens across Georgia to receive adequate healthcare for mental health and substance abuse disorders; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Thomas County Board of Commissioners that Thomas County government reaffirms its commitment to reforming and improving mental health services for its citizens and all citizens of the state of Georgia.

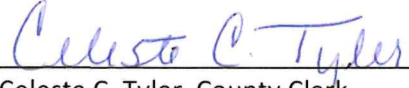
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thomas County Board of Commissioners specifically urges the Governor and General Assembly to continue efforts in the 2024 Session of the Georgia General Assembly to enhance Georgia citizens’ access to vital mental health services, including the provision of state budgetary funding for additional behavioral health crisis centers across the state, additional co-responder units, and other resources to assist those with mental health and substance abuse disorders.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk to the Board of Commissioners is hereby directed to provide an executed copy of this Resolution to each member of the Thomas County delegation to the Georgia Senate and Georgia House of Representatives and to the Association County Commissioners of Georgia.

Chairman Vonier recognized Commissioner Baggett who made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hickey. The motion was approved unanimously with Chairman Vonier and Commissioners Baggett, Grady, Gross, Hickey, and NeSmith voting aye. The meeting adjourned at 9:24 a.m.



Zippy Vonier, Chairman

ATTEST: 

Celeste C. Tyler, County Clerk