

Minutes  
Historic Courthouse, Board Chambers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
225 North Board Street  
August 25, 2020

The Thomas County Board of Commissioners met on the above date in a regular scheduled meeting at 6:00 p.m. at the Historic Courthouse, Commission Chambers, with the following board members present:

**Phillip V. Brown, Chairman, Dist. 7**  
Rev. Jeremy G. Rich, Dist. 1 (absent)  
Kenneth E. Hickey, District 3  
Donnie L. Baggett, Dist. 5

**Wiley E. Grady, Vice-Chair, Dist. 6**  
Moses Gross, Dist. 2  
Mark NeSmith, Dist. 4  
Zippy T. Vonier, Dist. 8

Staff present was County Manager Michael J. Stephenson, County Attorney Bruce Warren, Planning Director Ken Gay, Zoning Administrator Donna Holbert, Public Works Department Tony Bodiford, Tax Commissioner Alicia Hester, Sheriff Carlton Powell, and County Clerk Celeste Tyler.

News/Media present: none

Others present: Dr. Gary Elmore of 1445 15<sup>th</sup> St. Cairo, Georgia and Mr. John Wheeler of 883 Ozell Rd., Boston, Georgia

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order, and Commissioner NeSmith gave the invocation.

Chairman Brown recognized Commissioner Baggett who made a motion to approve the minutes of the August 11, 2020 Board Meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Vonier. The motion was approved unanimously with Chairman Brown and Commissioners Baggett, Grady, Gross, Hickey, NeSmith, and Vonier voting aye.

Chairman Brown declared a Public Hearing.

Donna Holbert, Zoning Administrator introduced Re-Zoning application 20-8-1 from Kelstone, Inc. on property located on Southridge Road Map 72, Parcel 51 from R-2 (Residential) to Ag (Agriculture). This would allow the owner to construct a produce stand and sell produce grown on this property. Dr. Gary Elmore of 1445 15<sup>th</sup> St. NW, Cairo, Georgia and representing Kelstone gave an overview of the citrus farm and supplied pictures to the Board. He is currently trying to brand the new trademark Georgia Gems. Five to six homes in the nearby subdivision tie into the property; however, the farm is not visible to most of the neighbors. The fruit stand would not be a permanent structure. Blue sapphires were planted and provide a good natural border. The produce is picked 3 to 4 times a year. Whenever chemicals/insecticides are sprayed, someone always mows the fence.

In opposition and in attendance was Mr. Rob Millings of 143 Riverwind Trail, Meigs, Georgia and HOA President for the subdivision. The neighborhood is concerned with safety. During this COVID-19 Pandemic, more young teens are home while everyone is trying to navigate the school situation. The concern comes with strangers, in close proximity to their backyards, picking fruit. He also stated that the County ordinance addresses the border between properties and Dr. Elmore's trees should be 6ft apart not 12ft.

In rebuttal, Dr. Elmore stated that he would plant additional trees every 6 ft if that would satisfy them however, the 12ft space is not only more aesthetic but healthier for the trees. The trees are 4 years old.

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Donna Holbert introduced Conditional Use application 20-8-2 from John Wheeler on property located on Ga. Hwy. 122 Map 45, Parcel 62 from CG (Commercial General) to CG C.U. (Commercial General, Conditional Use). This would allow storage of recreational vehicles, boats, and special equipment. Mr. John Wheeler of 8833 Ozell Road, Boston, Georgia was present and answered questions from the Board. He anticipates 6 months to 12 months rental contracts for storing boats, RV's, and motor homes. Planning Director, Ken Gay also stated that Conditional Use had been on the property before, but it had expired.

Chairman Brown closed the Public Hearing.

Chairman Brown recognized Commissioner Baggett who made a motion to approve Re-Zoning application 20-8-1. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Grady. Commissioner Hickey recused himself stating a business relationship with the applicant. The motion carried 6-0-1 with Chairman Brown and Commissioners Baggett, Grady, Gross, NeSmith, and Vonier voting aye.

Chairman Brown recognized Commissioner Grady who made a motion to approve Conditional Use application 20-8-2. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Baggett. Commissioner Vonier recused himself stating a recent business transaction with the applicant. The motion carried 6-0-1 with Chairman Brown and Commissioners Baggett, Grady, Gross, Hickey, and NeSmith voting aye.

Under presentations, Chairman Brown recognized Wally Van Heiningen of 208 Tall Pines Drive, Thomasville, Georgia. Mr. Van Heiningen addressed the increase of school traffic (Brookwood School) in the Tall Pines neighborhood and hopes there can be a collaboration between Tall Pines and the Board of Commissioners. Mr. Van Heiningen described the neighborhood as very diverse—with young and old along with the presence of assisted living. He stated concern over the delayed response time with 1<sup>st</sup> responders that could occur with the high volume of traffic. He also commented that there is a need for additional law enforcement. He thanked Commissioner Rich for coming out to the area on the first day of school and talking to the residents. Brookwood School established an additional route this year, but according to Mr. Heiningen it does little to address the traffic at the 4-way stop at Tall Pines and Green Leaf. He proposed the following solutions: 1) Brookwood School creating a private drive to 319 South, 2) creating additional access to Cindy Drive, and 3) establishing access at Baytree Drive at the two locked gates that are currently used for commercial use only by the school. Commissioner Hickey asked if a traffic study had ever been done. Public Works Director Tony Bodiford stated that there was a traffic signalization assessment done, and the timing of the traffic lights was adjusted. Upon the recommendation of Commissioner Grady, the Board agreed to send this matter to the Public Works Committee for review.

Chairman Brown recognized County Manager Stephenson who introduced his recommendation for the 2020 Millage Rates. He pointed out that the recommended rates were at or below the Rollback rate. The Thomas County Board of Education set the property tax millage for 2020 at the rate of 14.139 mills for the maintenance and operation of county schools.

Chairman Brown recognized Commissioner Grady who made a motion to approve the Resolution of the 2020 Millage Rates as presented. Commissioner NeSmith seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously with Chairman Brown and Commissioners Baggett, Grady, Gross, Hickey, NeSmith, and Vonier voting aye.

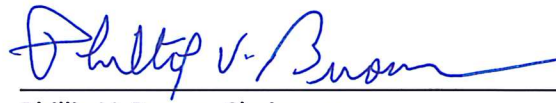
Chairman Brown recognized County Manager Stephenson who reported the following: the Cares Act Relief Act Funding for Phase 1, totaling approximately \$345,000, was approved today (August 25, 2020); the LMIG (GDOT Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant) was approved for \$755,008.21—a 13% drop

from last year; the Citizens' Academy has been postponed tentatively to the middle of January 2021; there has been no confirmation from the hospital regarding the County's Health Fair; and due to state budget cuts, the Medical Examiner's Office in Macon is closing, the autopsies for this area will be done in Atlanta.

The upcoming committee meetings were announced. The Personnel Committee will meet at the Historic Courthouse on August 26, 2020 at 8:30 a.m. The Purchasing Committee will meet at the Historic Courthouse on September 1, 2020 at 8:30 a.m.

Chairman Brown recognized Commissioner Gross who strongly expressed to the County Manager his dissatisfaction with the way the issue with the Tall Pines /Brookwood School traffic has been addressed.

Chairman Brown recognized Commissioner NeSmith who made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Baggett. The motion was approved unanimously with Chairman Brown and Commissioners Baggett, Grady, Gross, Hickey, NeSmith, and Vonier voting aye. The meeting adjourned at 7:12 p.m.



Phillip V. Brown, Chairman

ATTEST:

  
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Celeste C. Tyler, County Clerk