

Minutes  
Historic Courthouse, Board Chambers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
225 North Board Street  
October 22, 2024

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:

**Wiley Grady, Chairman Dist. 6**

Rev. Jeremy G. Rich, Dist. 1  
Kenneth E. Hickey, District 3 (absent)  
Phillip V. Brown, Dist. 7

**Donnie L. Baggett, Vice-Chair Dist. 5**

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, Retirement/Benefits Jessie Winkelman, Sheriff Carlton Powell, and County Clerk Celeste Tyler

Others present: State Court Judge Mark Mitchell

John Taylor and Brittany Stephenson with Taylor Benefit Resource

News/Media present: Jill Holloway, Thomasville Times Enterprise

Chairman Grady called the meeting to order and Commissioner Jeremy Rich gave the invocation.

Chairman Grady recognized Commissioner Baggett who made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 8, 2024 Board Meeting. Commissioner Vonier seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with Chairman Grady, Commissioners Baggett, Brown, Gross, NeSmith, Rich, and Vonier voting aye.

Chairman Grady recognized Commissioner Rich who made a motion to approve the agenda for the October 22, 2024 Board Meeting. Commissioner Brown seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with Chairman Grady, Commissioners Baggett, Brown, Gross, NeSmith, Rich, and Vonier voting aye.

Chairman Grady welcomed and recognized a group of retired educators in attendance. He then recognized Commissioner Rich who read a proclamation proclaiming Sunday, November 3, 2024 as "Retired Educators Day" and called upon the citizens of Thomas County to observe that day in an appropriate manner honoring retired educators. All Commissioners shared their appreciation to those who spent their life's work educating the children and youth of Thomas County.

Chairman Grady stated that a request for a special event permit for the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Kevin's Game Fair (Quail Bash) had been submitted to the County Clerk. The event will take place on November 8, 2024 at Chinquapin Plantation. The plantation has its own security. Chairman Grady recognized Commissioner Baggett who made a motion to approve the special event permit as presented. Commissioner Vonier seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously with Chairman Grady, Commissioners Baggett, Brown, Gross, NeSmith, Rich, and Vonier voting aye.

Chairman Grady recognized Judge Mark Mitchell who made a request to increase the hourly compensation rate for appointed attorneys in our Thomas County Sate Court and Juvenile Court to \$75.00. Retaining and attracting qualified attorneys for required appointments has become increasingly more

difficult. Commissioner NeSmith made a motion to have the request presented at the Budget Work Session next month and added that he doesn't have a problem with the request. Commissioner Baggett seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with Chairman Grady, Commissioners Baggett, Brown, Gross, NeSmith, Rich, and Vonier voting aye.

Chairman Grady recognized John Taylor with Taylor Benefit Resource who presented a Health Plan Cost Summary for 2025. John reported that there are 311 employees on the healthcare plan. Due to higher claims in 2024 our current reinsurance provider, Western Skies, deviated from the bid specs of \$60,000 for Specific Deductible and only wanted to submit a proposal with a Specific Deductible of \$100,000. Two other vendors submitted proposals based on the bid specs. Taylor Benefit Resource recommends going with Liberty Mutual as the reinsurance provider. The total plan cost will increase 6%.

Chairman Grady recognized Commissioner NeSmith who made a motion to approve Liberty Mutual as our reinsurance carrier. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Baggett. The motion was approved unanimously with Chairman Grady and Commissioners Baggett, Brown, Gross, NeSmith, Rich and Vonier voting aye.

**Open Meeting to Citizens:** Chairman Grady recognized Sheriff Carlton Powell who thanked Thomas County Fire for their aid in putting out a grass fire on his property.

**Committee Reports**

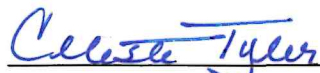
Chairman Grady recognized County Manager Stephenson who presented a compilation of information on 2024 Property Taxes for small towns and its possible effects if House Bill 581 passes in the State of Georgia and Thomas County. The main feature of HB 581 is a Floating Homestead Exemption (FHE). This could provide major tax relief for all property classified as homestead and increases or decreases as the value of a person's homestead property increases. Also discussed was the procedure required for local government to opt out of the program. If HB 581 is approved in November, County Board of Commissioners would be authorized to call a Floating Local Option Sales Tax (FLOST) referendum. However, if the County Board or any one of the small-town City Councils levying a property tax opts out of the Floating Homestead Exemption, the entire County is disqualified from calling the FLOST referendum. Commissioner NeSmith made the recommendation to immediately meet with the small-town Mayors if the referendum passes on November 5<sup>th</sup>.

Chairman Grady recognized Commissioner Baggett who announced the Public Property Committee meeting and the Open House at Five Forks Station will be held at 6:00 p.m. on November 7, 2024. The address is 6150 Five Forks Road, Boston, Georgia.

Chairman Grady recognized Commissioner Baggett who made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Rich seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with Chairman Grady, Commissioners Baggett, Brown, Gross, NeSmith, Rich, and Vonier voting aye. The meeting adjourned at 6:36 p.m.

  
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Wiley Grady, Chairman

ATTEST:

  
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Celeste Tyler, County Clerk