

HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION MINUTES
5:00 P.M., MONDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2023
HABERSHAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE
JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM
295 LLEWELLYN ST
CLARKESVILLE, GA 30523

The Habersham County Commissioner held a work session on Monday, December 18, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. in the Jury Assembly Room of the Habersham County Courthouse located at 295 Llewellyn St, Clarkesville, GA 30523.

Present were Chairman Ty Akins, Vice Chairman Bruce Harkness, Commissioner Bruce Palmer, Commissioner Dustin Mealor, Commissioner Jimmy Tench, County Attorney Donnie Hunt, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, staff, members of the media and the public.

Absent was County Manager Alicia Vaughn.

Chairman Akins called the work session to order at 5:05 p.m.

Chairman Akins lead the invocation.

Chairman Palmer lead the Pledge of Allegiance

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Palmer and voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the agenda as presented.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

a. Discussion Regarding Landfill Operations

Landfill Director Johnnie Vickers addressed the Commission, informing them of his intent to present them with information concerning the need to close the construction and demolition (C&D) cells at the Habersham County Landfill. Mr. Vickers stated that the C&D cells have reached maximum capacity as outlined in the Landfill's Design and Operational Plan. In August 2023 he requested a survey to determine the landfills remaining capacity. The results came back showing only approximately 8 months of remaining life for the C&D cells, which are currently at 98% of their capacity. It is expected that Cell 7 will reach its full capacity on or before March 2024. Mr. Vickers advised that continued usage beyond the designated capacity would risk non-compliance with Environmental Protection Division (EPD) regulations. Continued usage could also lead to potentially incurring penalties as well as posing a threat to the surrounding ecosystem. He informed the Commission whether they wished to reserve space for materials from the demolition of the old County Courthouse should be taken into consideration when considering the timeline for closing the C&D cells, however the bid for the Courthouse project will not be awarded until mid-February 2024. Mr. Vickers feels that, to minimize disruption to the community and vendors, a 60-day notice of intent to close the C&D Cells should be given to citizens and vendors. This would allow them to adjust and plan accordingly. To stay within this timeline the notifications would need to be sent out the last week of December 2023. Mr. Vickers stated that they would make information readily available to the community and vendors regarding alternate sites that are willing to accept C&D

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materials such as Crystal Creek Inert Landfill located in Hall County, Habersham C&D located in Habersham County, and Metro Green Recycling located in Franklin County.

Commissioner Akins informed everyone that Mr. Vickers had last updated them about the landfill at the September Commission meeting. At that meeting, Chief Financial Officer Tim Sims had also presented information regarding the potential revenue loss from closing the C&D cells, however keeping C&D material out of the municipal solid waste (MSW) cells that are intended for household trash would extend the remaining life of the MSW cells to 17 years.

Commission Palmer reminded everyone that these estimated life expectancies for the landfill do not account for population growth, which is why 10 years ago the expected life of the landfill was 2070.

Commissioner Harkness asked if the 17-year life expectancy includes the plans that had been previously discussed for topping the MSW cells and combining them into one large cell to maximize volume? Mr. Vickers informed him that he is correct.

Commissioner Tench asked if his understanding was correct in that they are planning to put the debris from the courthouse demolition into the landfill? Mr. Vickers informed Commissioner Tench that the RFP for the Old Courthouse demolition asks for proposals that include both the options of having the debris hauled off elsewhere or having it brought to the county's own landfill. Commissioner Tench asked why they don't leave the courthouse where it is to keep it out of the C&D cell so that it wouldn't impact the citizens of the county? Mr. Vickers informed that this was not going to make a significant impact on extending the life of the C&D cell and that it will need to close soon regardless of whether they leave room for accepting the courthouse debris or not.

Commissioner Harkness asked if tires and couches go into the MSW cell? Mr. Vickers informed him that couches and furniture do go into the MSW cell, but tires are not allowed to be dumped in landfills. The County must pay to have a trailer come and haul tires off for recycling. Commissioner Harkness asked if the county is charging enough in fees to cover the cost of accepting tires, to which Mr. Vickers informed him that the fees do not entirely cover the cost and that they could look into increasing the fee if it was the desire of the Commission.

Commissioner Tench asked if the tires could be burned? Mr. Vickers informed him that the EPD does not allow for this. Commissioner Tench stated that it was not necessary to ask them, just strike a match and that tires could be buried on one's personal property. Mr. Vickers stated that the county is governed by EPD regulations of the state and the state would not allow tires to be buried.

Commissioner Palmer stated that he feels that a recycling program would be a great way to offset the decreasing lifespan of the landfill resulting from growth within the county. Mr. Vickers agreed that vamping up the current recycling program could offset the increased waste intake. He stated

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that they are in the process of getting plans together to present to the Commission for improving recycling in Habersham County.

Commissioner Harkness stated that he has heard a lot of complaints regarding the issues that people have with driving their personal vehicles down into the landfill. These complaints range from getting nails in their tires, to having to dodge around debris, to getting their vehicles stuck in the deep mud. He would like for the landfill facilities to eventually be set up in such a way that citizens no longer have to drive into the landfill. He stated that other counties like White County have an elevated platform that citizens are able to drive up to and easily throw debris down into an empty roll back trailer. Mr. Vickers stated that White County does not have landfill, they have a transfer station for collecting waste to haul away, and that this model works well for White County because everything is on pavement. The same model would pose difficulty with Habersham County's landfill. Commissioner Harkness wanted to inform everyone that he and Commissioner Akins have been discussing going to Washington, D.C. to meet with officials regarding trying to purchase land from the USFS for expanding the landfill. Commissioner Palmer stated that he and Commissioner Akin had toured the recycling centers in Union County and Rabun County. Both of those counties do not have landfills, they have transfer stations, and the recycling centers are very nice in the fact that you are able to drive up to an elevated and covered location above the rollback and throw garbage in. He stated that Habersham County had tried to apply for a grant for this almost a year ago but it was extremely competitive and they did not get selected.

Commissioner Akins asked how things were going at the landfill in regard to checking for out-of-county license plates? Mr. Vickers stated that they are checking license plates of all vehicles going in and out of the landfill, however the issue is people who have plates from outside of the county that state they own property within Habersham County. There are many instances in which people live outside of the county but have vacation homes within the county. They do not require these individuals to show documentation. Mr. Vickers stated that they do have several people a week they have to turn away with out-of-county trash. Commissioner Harkness asked if it was policy for turning them away or if they can accept the garbage at a higher rate? Mr. Vickers informed him that the policy at this time is no out-of-county garbage allowed. Mr. Vickers stated that this is how most of the surrounding counties operate as well. Commissioner Harkness asked where the surrounding counties with transfer stations are taking garbage once it is sorted out? Commissioner Palmer stated that he thinks that Rabun County takes theirs to Waste Management. He believes that Union County is taking theirs towards somewhere over in Blue Ridge.

Commissioner Harkness asked about what the status and cost of leachate hauling is at this time? Mr. Vickers stated that they haven't had to haul leachate because they have been working to maintain everything onsite through the leachate plant. Commissioner Palmer mentioned that part of the reason why leachate was having to be hauled a couple years ago was because cell 5 was essentially in a hole that caught all of the water when it rained.

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Commissioner Palmer asked if Mr. Vickers thinks that the county can still take landfill for 60 days realistically? He is concerned that 60 days may be too long of a time period and that once the word gets out that the landfill is closing they will get flooded with C&D material. Mr. Vickers stated that he defers to the Commission regarding the timeframe for closing, however he felt that 60 days was fair to the those citizens and businesses who have existing contracts that involve demolitions to adjust and get new bids on projects if needed to account for the cost of hauling the C&D elsewhere.

Commissioner Harkness stated that it is necessary to remember that once the demolition of the old courthouse occurs there will be a lot of debris generated that would potentially go into the landfill. Mr. Sims stated that in the RFP for the demolition of the old courthouse requests bids for hauling the debris elsewhere, however they have an alternate bid for bringing the materials to the landfill. He wants them to keep in mind that some material would potentially be recyclable such as concrete, brick and steel. Public Works Director Jerry Baggett stated that he feels that about 20% of the old courthouse debris would end up in the landfill.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Commissioner Palmer stated that folks need to understand that once they get to the point that they need a transfer station for MSW the cost is going to end up being born by property taxes as there won't be enough material getting brought in to pay for everything that is getting transferred. They need to make the landfill last as long as possible.

Commissioner Mealor stated that they not only need to make the landfill last as long as they can but they need to commit to a timeline to figure out what the next steps are. The landfill is probably an item that would need to be figured out within the next two SPLOST cycles. They can't just say that they are good for 17 years and then not do anything until 17 years later. They need to go ahead and set things in motion.

Commissioner Akins stated that himself, Commissioner Palmer and Commissioner Harkness are trying to bring up discussions with the USFS about purchasing land to use for the landfill. Commissioner Harkness stated that he talked to Andrew Clyde's Office about setting up a meeting with some members of the Habersham County Commission and the USFS regarding this topic. He feels that they need to go straight up the chain to someone with decision making authority.

Commissioner Tench stated that the EPD had been brought up in earlier conversation, and he would like to know why the EPD doesn't do anything about Pea Ridge landfill which has no liner and is leaking leachate and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) within a five-mile radius and causing cancer and respiratory problems? Commissioner Tench stated that he has two friends that live near this landfill that have both died of cancer. Mr. Vickers informed Commissioner Tench that there is a program where landfills can be relined that involves taking all of the material out of the landfill, separate out what can be recycled, placing the remaining debris into an existing landfill, and then removing contaminated dirt prior to relining. While this can be done it is a major operation and extremely

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expensive. Commissioner Akins stated that it was his understanding that the Pea Ridge landfill didn't have those liners because it was not required at the time it was built. Mr. Vickers informed him this is correct. Commissioner Akins stated that it is also his understanding that there are several methane and water monitors that surround the Pea Ridge landfill. Mr. Vickers informed him this is correct as well, and that these monitors must be checked and have the numbers submitted to the EPD quarterly. At this time, they only have one well that is over the allowable limits and they are working to change some pumps out to get this back down within an acceptable range.

Commissioner Palmer asked if the money that is available for Brown Fields could be used towards assisting with landfills or if it was just for HazMat cleanups? Mr. Vickers stated that he couldn't state for sure, but he believes that it is for HazMat only. Commissioner Palmer suggested that methane may be considered a hazardous material and perhaps this is a program that could be looked into.

Commissioner Tench read an opinion article from the Northeast Georgian dated February 21, 2006 that described the U.S. Forest Services plans to sell isolated national forest lands- including a 151-acre tract in Habersham County- to help fund the Secure Rural Schools program for another five years. This article informs that the program is part of the Secure Rural School and Community Self Determination Act of 2000, more commonly known as Payments to States, that addresses the decline in revenue from timber harvest on federal land in recent years, which had been historically shared with counties for schools and roads. The proposal at that time was to sell 4,500 acres of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest as part of a nationwide initiative encompassing 35 states that included 310,000 acres proposed for sale in total. The article went on to say that in 2005, Georgia received almost \$1.3 million from the initiative for its 865,266 acres of forest land. It was the opinion of the editor that while the effort provides roads and school funding, it is important that the tracts proposed for sale not significantly impact the national forest's recreation opportunities and aesthetic value. The article ended by saying the newspaper would be monitoring this process closely and encouraged area residents to do the same, stating that once national forest land is sold for development, there's no returning it to its previous condition.

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Harkness, seconded by Commissioner Mealor and voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn the work session at 5:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

By: _____
Commission Chairman Ty Akins

Attest: _____
County Clerk Brandalin Carnes