

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
PLANNING SESSION**

July 26, 2021

4:30 PM

Impact 360 South Campus, 5565 GA Hwy 354, Pine Mountain

Commissioners Present: Andrew Zuerner, Susan Andrews, Rob Grant, Bobby Irions, Becky Langston. Staff Present: Randy Dowling, County Manager; Clint Chastain, CFO; Nancy McMichael, County Clerk.

CALL TO ORDER. Chairman Zuerner called the meeting to order.

ARP Funding & Projects (\$3.4 million). Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that the county has received its Phase I of ARP funding in the amount of \$3.4 million and that Phase II, if it comes in, will be in May 2022.

Mercer Medical Clinic. Regarding the Mercer Medical project, Commissioner Langston said that she was not in favor of giving \$82,000 to the Mercer Medical project; that she feels certain the fund-raising committee will be able to raise the needed funds; Chairman Zuerner said that he would like to provide some funding because the project will benefit the entire county; and Commissioner Grant said the \$82,000 was before the County received the additional funding from Tifton/ABAC toward the project and that the amount will more than likely be closer to \$42,000.

Riverstone Water Project. Mr. Dowling explained the Riverstone Project, which will benefit the Airport and the citizens in Sky Meadow Subdivision, and the fact that negotiations failed, but “Plan B” will be put into motion upon approval by the EPD to take over the system.

Broadband. Regarding Phase II, Commissioner Irions said there needs to be a way to navigate broadband; that some radio communications went down on the weekend; that there needs to be redundancy on 911 system. Discussion included that broadband should start in the under-served areas; that giving tax payers money to a private company is not something the Board wants to do; that kicking it down the road will not provide an answer; that while the public wants broadband, it doesn't want growth, which will result from broadband; that everyone wants the County to be brought up to this century, but there is no broadband; that while the County could develop its own broadband, there is no way to sustain it; that there is a gray area regarding giving funds to a private company, although it appears that some counties and cities are ignoring that possibility and are doing such; that \$1.4 million could perhaps provide internet to 5,000 homes; and that while there is going to be a broadband summit on August 12, it may not be effective because companies will not provide proprietary information to others. Commissioner Andrews suggested that Monroe County be contacted to determine what process they used and how they were able to work with a provider for broadband services.

Mulberry Grove Water Tank. Regarding the elevated water tower for Mulberry Grove, discussion included that if Phase II funds do not come in, then a GEFA grant should be applied for, which can be paid back over a 20-year period; and that this project could possibly be applied for under the State Fiscal Recovery Fund (see following paragraph).

Water Works Building. Regarding the Water Works building, discussion included that it should be removed from the list.

There was no consensus on the proposed list of projects for the ARP Funding.

State Fiscal Recovery Fund. Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that he just found out about another grant, through the Governor's Office of Planning & Budget, for which application must be made between August 1 and August 31, which is open to county and city governments, industry trade associations and business, trade/professional, and non-profit organizations; that it can only be used for water/sewer infrastructure, broadband infrastructure, and negative economic impact projects; that needed for an application are project design, schedule, and data. Discussion included that application(s) can be made for funding to be used for the Riverstone Project, the Water Tower at The Grove, and the Mercer Medical Clinic project.

GDOT's 5311 Rural Public Transportation Program. Randy Dowling, County Manager, said the 5311 Rural Transportation Program is administered by GDOT with annual contracts with local governments and regional transit authorities to provide travel assistance to and from various points; that most counties in the state have some type of rural public transit operation; that there is no income or age restrictions to use this program; that the program in this area is operated by the Lower Chattahoochee Regional Transit Authority (LCRTA) with assistance from

the RVRC; that a citizen would call a number at least 24 hours in advance to arrange for transportation for a very nominal fee; that service is usually Monday-Friday, 8 AM to 5 PM; that the estimated annual cost is well under \$50,000 for the County to participate in this program and can be funded by T-SPLOST; and that the application process must be completed by December 2021. Jim Livingston of the RVRC, Carrie Anderson of GDOT, and Amy and Scott Bryan with Direct Services were in attendance to discuss this issue. Discussion included that the LCRTA currently consists of Quitman, Stewart and Randolph counties and discussions are underway with Chattahoochee County; that more than likely, if the County applied to be part of the program, its application would be approved; that the attorney for the LCRTA is Tommy Coleman; and that there are about 25 people at the Senior Center who could benefit from the program, in addition to any citizen in the County. There were no objections to moving forward with the 5311 application process, which will require an authorizing resolution that would need to be approved by the Board.

T-SPLOST Referendum & Projects. Regarding the upcoming T-SPLOST referendum, the RVRC Round Table will be meeting in October to narrow down the various projects submitted by the regional counties; that more than likely all of Harris County's five projects will be approved; and that the County needs to push the passage of the referendum.

Speed Table Program. Randy Dowling, County Manager, said this program results from a recent UDC meeting; that speed tables are traffic calming devices which are generally a raised elongated device made of rubber or asphalt; that they are usually spaced 200 to 500 feet apart; and that they would meet GDOT standards. Discussion included that perhaps the device could be portable; that maybe a speed detection device with solar panels is a possibility to deter speeding; that this program would be citizen driven, require an evaluation, design, petition, and would be paid for by the citizens; that such would be located on roads within subdivision neighborhoods; and that kids might be tempted to jump their bikes on the device. Consensus was to get cost estimates of various materials that can be used for speed tables as well as the solar panel speed detection device.

Acres of Shade. Discussion took place regarding the condition of the road known as Acres of Shade. Mrs. McMichael is to notify Public Works to check on the road to determine what needs to be done and to check on the conditions attached to the approval of the inert landfill that is on the road (is to pay a portion of the road repairs/resurfacing).

Broadband Incentive Program for Developers. Discussion included that some type of incentive should be given to developers if they install the proper broadband equipment. Nothing decided.

Underground Diesel Storage Tank. Randy Dowling, County Manager, brought the Board up to date regarding the underground diesel storage tank which failed all EPD tests and has to be pulled out by February 2022; that a request has been made to the Board of Education to allow the County use of their diesel pumps for a short time; that the tank will be replaced with an above-ground diesel tank with the location yet to be determined.

Personnel Policy & Handbook. Commissioner Langston asked that the employee personnel policy and handbook be updated, to include any additional policies that are part of same.

Animal Control Ordinance. Commissioner Grant asked that the Animal Control Ordinance be updated to coincide with the State regulations.

Retirement Plan. Commissioner Langston asked that the County's retirement plan be reviewed.

Recess for Dinner. Chairman Zuerner recessed discussion in order to have dinner with the local legislative delegation (Richard Smith, Vance Smith, Debbie Buckner, and Randy Robertson). Various discussions took place during dinner to include the request (again) that the Impact Fee Act be amended to add "broadband".

ADJOURNMENT.