

HEARD COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION
May 21, 2024 – 2:00 P.M.

The Heard County Board of Commissioners held a work session on May 21, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. in the Commission Chamber of the Heard County Administration Building. In attendance at the meeting were Chairman Lee Boone, District 2 Commissioner James Perry, District 3 Commissioner Iris Harris, District 4 Commissioner Larry Hammond, District 5 Commissioner David Walls and Finance Director, Felicia Adams. District 1 Commissioner Larry Hooks was unable to attend.

Chairman Boone welcomed invited guest, Laura Todd, Assistant District Attorney from Carroll County. It was announced that starting January 1, 2025, the areas of Heard County and Carroll County will merge to form the West Georgia Judicial Circuit. This merger has resulted in a vacancy for the position of District Attorney within the newly established circuit. Governor Kemp will be responsible for appointing a suitable candidate for this role later in the year. During the meeting, Ms. Todd shared her impressive background, highlighting her eleven years of experience as both a prosecutor and assistant district attorney. She expressed her intention to submit her candidacy for consideration.

Mickey Cook, representing the Heard County FFA Alumni, addressed the Board, requesting a reduced rental rate for the Heard County Covered Arena during the Bulls, Broncs, and Barrels Event. The event is a fundraiser to help sponsor kids in various animal showings. The applicant was receiving a twenty percent (20%) discount and the Board concluded this was sufficient.

Greg Harris, serving as the Acting Public Works Director, addressed the Board regarding the necessity of acquiring a mini excavator. He presented quotes from various brands, with a Kubota priced at \$83,000, Bobcat at \$86,500, and Caterpillar exceeding \$100,000. The Chairman

informed the Board that these purchases would be eligible under SPLOST. The Board requested Mr. Harris to return in June with a variety of quotes for the mini excavator.

Additionally, Mr. Harris advocated for a pay increase for drivers and operators within his department, citing difficulties in retaining employees who often leave for higher-paying positions in neighboring areas. Commissioner Harris mentioned discussions with Mr. Harris about comparing wages with surrounding counties to gauge the disparity and determine appropriate adjustments to help resolve the issue.

Chairman Boone addressed the Public Works budget concerning the overspending on stone expenditures. Vulcan's pricing has been consistently increasing every six months, compounded by the CDBG project on North and South River Circle, resulting in a budgetary overage. Mr. Harris noted that an unusually high number of storms in the past year had caused several roads to wash out. Additionally, he explained that the repair budget had exceeded expectations due to significant repairs required. Two older farm tractors necessitated rebuilt transmissions, costing \$20,000 and \$30,000 respectively, while a rebuilt motor was purchased for an International dump truck at \$30,000. The Board requested quotes for a new skid steer from Mr. Harris. Despite these expenses, the department remained well within budget, and no adjustments were made.

Caleb Pike, the Arena Director, spoke before the Board, commending Mr. Greg Harris for his strong work ethic and deep understanding of departmental operations. Mr. Pike highlighted the necessity of acquiring bucking chutes with preloading lanes for the arena. Currently, the arena rents bucking chutes from Say Rodeo, which lack preloaded lanes. Mr. Pike has reached out to Aubrey Floyd for a quote to purchase three left side and three right side bucking chutes with preloading lanes, and Priefert will also provide a quote. The anticipated price range is around

\$25,000. The Chairman confirmed that the purchase could be funded through SPLOST. The Board expressed agreement with the purchase and requested Mr. Pike to return once all quotes are received.

Joe Jones, Director of the Recreation Department, addressed the Board regarding various improvements and maintenance that needed to be done in the recreation department. The Board agreed that most of the projects could be completed with SPLOST.

Fire Chief, Jim Short, provided the Board with an update on staffing levels and recent equipment acquisitions within the fire department. Discussion ensued regarding several budget line items; however, no changes were made during the meeting.

Sheriff Ross Henry addressed the Board regarding the budget requirements for the Sheriff's Department. He confirmed that the department was currently fully staffed but emphasized the need for three additional deputy positions to effectively manage the increased call volume, population, and court services demands. The estimated cost for adding these deputies amounts to \$195,000. Additionally, Sheriff Henry proposed that the Board consider contributing \$35 per employee per month towards the Peace Officers' Annuity and Benefit Fund of Georgia (POAB Fund), with an estimated annual cost of \$15,000. Sheriff Henry's last request was for five Flock cameras. The cost for the cameras average to be about \$3,500 each per year. He explained how the cameras help locate missing people and criminals. The Sheriff thanked the Board for all of their help.

The meeting transitioned to further discuss budget considerations for the remaining departments. Specifically, the Board revisited the prior conversation regarding the Sheriff's departmental needs. A consensus was reached to augment the budget to accommodate the addition of three deputy positions, installation of flock cameras, and the allocation of funds towards the POAB

Fund. Additionally, the Board deliberated on the renewal cost for group healthcare. Cigna, the current group healthcare provider, had raised the group cost by 27% last year and indicated a further increase of 30% for the upcoming renewal term. The County has opted to explore an alternative approach to address the ongoing rise in healthcare rates. Through the Individualized Covered Healthcare Reimbursement Agreement (ICHRA), employees will have the opportunity to shop for individual healthcare plans on the market. The County will provide a predetermined fixed dollar amount towards the premium, offering employees more flexibility and control over their healthcare choices.

The work session ended after the budget was concluded.

End time 6:22 p.m.

Katrina Billingsley

County Clerk

Date 06/18/2024



Lee Boone

Chairman