

A Town Hall Meeting of the Oconee County Board of Commissioners was held on Tuesday, April 16, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. in the Community Room of the Oconee Veterans Park Community Center.

Members Present: Chairman John Daniell
Commissioner Mark Thomas
Commissioner Chuck Horton
Commissioner William E. "Bubber" Wilkes
Commissioner Mark Saxon

Other Elected Officials Present: Mayor Dave Shearon, City of Watkinsville
Councilman Dan Matthews, City of Watkinsville

Staff Present: Justin Kirouac, County Administrator
Kathy Hayes, County Clerk
Lisa Davol, Parks & Recreation Director
Diane Baggett, Communications Officer
Tracye Bailey, Administrative Assistant/Deputy Clerk

Media Present: Michael Prochaska, Editor, *The Oconee Enterprise*

Chairman John Daniell called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. and welcomed citizens to the meeting.

Purpose and Procedure of the Meeting:

Chairman Daniell stated that the purpose of the Town Hall Meeting is for the citizens to ask questions of the Board.

Question and Answer Session:

Chairman Daniell comments:

- New County logos are located in the back of the room and the Board welcomes citizen comments.
- Property known as the Land Application System (LAS) consists of 238 Acres and could be used for additional park space in the future. A rendering of the property as a park was placed at the Town Hall Meeting. Again, the Board welcomes citizen comments.
- Tree planting is completed on the Mars Hill Road Widening Project. Several local vendors were used for the pricing, placing and installation of the trees resulting in 85% of beautification funds remaining in the County.
- The County has recognized the problems with the availability of Broadband. A study has been done and available options reviewed, including visiting other counties. The next step is to create a "middle mile ring" in the County, which will cover the north end and south end. A Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for partners has been issued and a solution is hopefully on the way for those unable to access internet.
- Applications are being taken for the Tourism & Visitors Bureau.
- Roundabouts are coming to Oconee County. GDOT shows a good safety record using the roundabouts with a drop in property damage and speed. Areas targeted for roundabouts include Mars Hill/Malcolm Bridge Roads and bus entrance to Middle/Elementary Schools. The roundabout at Lenru Road and Malcolm Bridge Road is not going to be installed.
- The Board is working with Northeast Georgia Regional Commission and Oconee Schools with a program to develop safe walking routes to schools.
- The Bishop Farms Parkway Project will be underway soon, and Oconee will be working with GDOT and the University of North Georgia (UNG). The road will cross over wetlands with a bridge and should take pressure off the intersection on Experiment Station Road. Approximately 2,500 students are enrolled at UNG and travel through the intersection. Maria Caudill asked about funding for the project and Chairman Daniell responded that the project will require \$1.2 million to \$1.6 million with \$600,000 coming from GDOT.
- The Bogart Library has reopened after its expansion project. Chairman Daniell invited the audience to visit the Library. Currently, the Watkinsville Library is seeking a grant for improvements.
- The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for the Senior Center Expansion Project has been submitted.
- The State of the County presentation is on Dr. Becker's website.
- Contract was awarded for the Animal Services Shelter Project.
- Oconee County Fire Rescue received a 4/4X ISO rating, which is highly unusual with a volunteer Fire Department.
- A partnership was started with the Sheriff's Office for litter pickup using community service workers.

Commissioner Comments:

- Commissioner Horton – The vision for Oconee's future is happening now with needed infrastructure; investment in Parks & Recreation; SPLOST funds are being expended as allocated; and new Fire Station. A TSPLOST could be forthcoming on a ballot. Roadway maintenance is behind due to the recession and funding.
- Commissioner Thomas – The paving timeline has been changed to allow for paving prior to the winter months.

Citizen Comments:

Maria Caudill asked about the capacity of Calls Creek Wastewater Plant since capacity has been transferred from other areas of the county. Chairman Daniell responded that Calls Creek has a 3.0 mgd

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capacity, but is currently approved for 1.5 mgd discharge into the Oconee River. The County purchased 70 acres behind Ivywood on the Middle Oconee River for future discharge capacity. Also of note is that the Rocky Branch Force Main has been decommissioned.

As Chair of the Land Use & Transportation Planning Committee, Ms. Caudill thanked the Commissioners for attending meetings. She invited the public to attend the May meeting and Dr. Carol Ludwig will speak on Farmland Preservation. Several topics are discussed at the meetings including planning, planning processes, maps, statistics, etc.

Ms. Caudill asked for the projects that have been accomplished with SPLOST dollars. Chairman Daniell responded that an update is given each quarter of the fiscal year during a Board meeting.

Councilman Dan Mathews asked if there are plan for aquatic recreation and Chairman Daniell responded there is no plans for aquatic recreation. However, the YWCO is considering again building on its property on Highway 53/Hog Mountain Road.

Greg Hayes asked if the Mars Hill Road Widening Project is complete and stated that transfer trucks are causing traffic problems when merging with traffic at the light at Highway 53. Chairman Daniell responded that the road is not complete and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) will be contacted regarding additional signage.

Dan McGee stated that it is good to see Parks & Recreation funding; concerned regarding the Boswell Electric development on 316, because it does not follow the innovation corridor; Oconee has a strong school system; asked that the Board look at smart development; and asked about the rezone by William Jones at Highway 78 and Mars Hill Road. Chairman Daniell stated that the rezone cannot be discussed, but Mr. McGee can come speak at the Public Hearing when the rezone comes before the Board.

Mr. McGee asked about traffic turning left out of Veterans Park. Chairman Daniell responded that there will be an additional park access through Parkside Subdivision.

Mr. McGee asked if a Costco is coming to the Epps Bridge area.

Lee Becker asked that citizen advisory committee applications be placed on the website when an agenda is posted for an Agenda Setting Meeting. Chairman Daniell responded that was an oversight and it will be corrected.

Michael Prochaska, The Oconee Enterprise, asked if the Groundbreaking for the Courthouse Expansion Project would memorialize the victims of lynching. Chairman Daniell responded that this would be done with the project.

Additional citizen comments included the widening of Experiment Station Road; Virgil Langford Road crossing Highway 316; intersection modification of an island at the Oconee Connector and Highway 316; Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development; update on House Bill 302 (regulation of building design); projection of Oconee County in the year 2030; helicopters and landing pads; update on intersection at Rocky Branch/Mars Hill/Virgil Langford Roads; Costco coming to Oconee County; lighting for roundabouts; road from KOHLS to Hobby Lobby has help alleviate traffic issues; and adding pedestrian and bike-friendly areas on roadways.

Chairman Daniell thanked the citizens for attending the Town Hall Meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Chairman

County Clerk

Date: _____