
WASHINGTON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commission Board Room

1331 South Blvd., Chipley, FL 32428

DISTRICT 1	DISTRICT 2	DISTRICT 3	DISTRICT 4	DISTRICT
Alan T Bush	David Pettis, Jr. Chairman	Tray Hawkins	Wesley Griffin	David Corbin Vice-Chairman

1. PROCLAMATION

- 1.1 Call to Order – Chairman Pettis
- 1.2 Invocation – Chairman Pettis
- 1.3 Pledge

Present – Commissioners Bush, Pettis, Hawkins, Griffin, and Corbin. Also attending – Deputy Clerk Brantley, Clerk of Court, Lora Bell, County Administrator, Jeff Massey, and County Attorney Fuqua, Fuqua & Milton, P.A.

2. Agenda Items -

- 2.1 Home Buyout Program Discussion
- 2.2 FEMA Update - Kevan Parker, FEMA Coordinator said the program was to help with repetitive flood losses. There were two buyouts through Hurricane Michael.

There is an EMS Station wind retrofit for hardening the building. The safe rooms will be located at the EMS Station, Washington County Sheriff's Office, and Washington County Emergency Operations Center. Eleven homes remain for demolition in the Hurricane Michael Buyout for which a time extension was approved last month to January 25th. Seven of those homes are complete. The last four homes have asbestos and must be wet demoed, or abated. The asbestos contractor will be onsite working today. Both projects are scheduled to be completed by the 25th. There are three or four homes that fit in the historic category and the others are newer.

When COVID-19 occurred, the guidelines provided funding for hazard mitigation with the intent to help lessen any loss in case of a future event. The Buyout Program was not able to be completed due to flooding in the county. There were around forty to forty-five houses that were not included in Hurricane Michael. In November 2019, a public meeting was held at the annex where residents could sign up regarding flooding. The process is two to three years.

COVID-19 funding was given in a lump sum to the state because every county

was impacted by COVID-19. They created a formula based on population and size. Each county received a certain amount of Hazard Mitigation Funds. part. Kevan Guthrie, Director of DEM contacted staff to discuss COVID-19 and the Buyout Program. During the call, they were asked to put together a Buyout Program for COVID-19. \$220,000.00 would not cover the project. Kevan Guthrie committed to moving unused funds from other counties to Washington County to help with a larger project. They came up with \$5.2 million in buyouts, of which \$3.5 million has been funded.

Hurricane Ian hit. Typically, when hazard mitigation is done, Tier 1 follows, which is for counties that are affected by that event. For example, there were nine counties affected, which were eligible for Tier 1, which means the first in line to receive funding. With Ian, they had a tremendous amount of hazard mitigation money. The state decided to divide the money between all the counties, saying everyone would be under Tier 1. There was around \$3 million of acquisition and demolition and \$1 million +/- drainage flood risk reduction, which is mainly paved ditches throughout the county. COVID-19 and Hurricane Ian are in the review step.

Included with the buyout is a survey, appraisal, closing cost, demolition of the structure and grounds, materials abatement, and testing (lead paint and asbestos testing), closing and title work, permits, and disposal of property/debris. The program is 75/25 split and is voluntary. The property owners will be offered 75% of the appraisal. It is the board's choice to do the program.

County Administrator Massey said the state offered help and the county took the project on to help residents who were in a bad position. There have been a few successes but the project has mainly been a nightmare. Moving forward, there needs to be a thorough discussion to decide if the board would like to do it. There are not enough staff to handle it. There is a lot attached to it, and staff receive terrible grief from people they are trying to help.

Commissioner Pettis asked if the county does not administrate that, what avenue does the property owner have with the state? Can they take part in the program in any other way?

Kevan Parker said it would be gone.

Commissioner Corbin questioned how this works related to insurance.

Kevan Parker said they cannot receive insurance and the appraised value (no double payments). The county would take over the house for demolition to make green space.

Commissioner Griffin asked if 25% funding was available to fund the rest of the demolition.

Commissioner Hawkins said 75% is being offered.

Kevan Parker said the county will pick up 25% of the appraisals, closings, etc. In the Hurricane Ian Buyout, there are fifteen to sixteen houses, totaling an estimated \$2.8 million. The estimated cost of the property is \$2.3 million.

Within the last week, the design engineering fees of around \$1 million have been pushed. Only a small portion is linked to asphalt thickness. The consultant working on the process sent his recommendation to the state for approval.

There has been no other information from FEMA.

Chairman Pettis said that he has sent emails but has not received a reply at this time.

County Administrator Massey said that he has reached out to FEMA and has not received a return call. He has spoken with the congressman, state representative, and senator. There is a misinterpretation of some items.

Chairman Pettis said that an in-person meeting has been requested with DEM, but a response has not been received at this time. Some of the monies that are not tied to line items about the thickness of asphalt and rock hauling are beginning to be released.

Clerk Bell said that the funds are in the payment step. Once the funds are received, the intent is to disburse those to the loan principal.

Chairman Pettis said around \$2.5 million has been released.

Commissioner Bush asked if everything that FEMA had released to DEM had been released to the county.

Kevan Parker said no. DEM has all their FEMA money. DEM stopped reimbursing the request for reimbursements. When they asked for scope changes on the two projects that were approved, they did an engineering side of it to design it according to the best engineers' practice and then figure out what those dimensions are for all of it. The scope of work says when it finishes that it will be designed by a Florida-registered P.E. If he dictates a change in the asphalt from what the Florida-registered P.E. has, then he accepts the liability. DEM says that they have deviated from the scope of work, however, it is not seen that way when they are following a registered P.E.

The pilot program the county is working under has a statement that any scope of work changes must be done in 12 months. Their stance is it was not done at that time so they cannot approve the scope change.

Commissioner Bush suggested that Chairman Pettis reach out to the governor's office or the governor to let him know the impact that DEM is causing Washington County. They are costing the county a significant amount of money because they are not accepting what a professional engineer has designed.

Kevan Parker said the Williams Road Bridge Project is being worked on and an advance of \$680,000.00 has been received to fund the project for 90 days. An added advance request will be made further in the project.

Worley Road is out for bid. The pre-bid scheduled for yesterday had to be canceled due to the project manager's home being affected by the recent storm. The bids are due at the beginning of next month and will be addressed at the February workshop.

They still have a problem with side drains that go into driveways. Once the property owner puts a culvert in, in the future if it must be replaced it is the responsibility of the county. More money has been spent going back and forth about the approval than the cost of the pipes.

Commissioner Corbin said if that is the only battle then they need to take the task on.

2.3 Public Relations Services RFP Award – Heather Lopez, TDC Director requested approval to award the public relations services RFP to Lori Rowe and Company who scored the highest by the ranking committee. This item will be listed on the consent agenda.

2.4 Sheriff Office Grant Overage Request – Lynne Abel, Public Safety Director supplied an update about the recent storm. There may be a chance to recover Category B expenses for all emergency protective measures work if a Category B declaration is received. Employees who worked due to the storm should complete a 214 Form. Any equipment bought for storm preparation or response would also be a Category B expense. There have been some reports of property damage. There were no reports of injuries, or anyone being displaced due to damages. It is important to acknowledge the tremendous job and selfless commitment of local law enforcement, fire personnel, public works, and utility crews who responded to reports of down trees and power lines. The citizens are commended for refraining from using the roads until assessments can be made and roads cleared. Forty-five roads were closed due to obstructions during the storms, which are now all cleared for travel, thanks to the personnel listed above. Tuesday morning, the three utility companies servicing the county reported 4,042 customers who were without power in Washington County. The following morning there were 907 and this morning there were 52.

In 2019, the Washington County Sheriff's Office received a 2-year grant totaling \$600,000.00 to construct and outfit the new Holmes Valley Road Emergency Communications Tower. The project would supply a communications system for all emergency response agencies, which includes the Chipley Police Department and Washington County Public Works. COVID-19 caused manufacturing and delivery delays, which caused multiple time extensions. The cost of materials increased during that period, causing the sheriff's office to have an overage of \$9,618.60. The Communications Committee met on December 27, 2023, and voted to pay the overage for the Holmes Valley Emergency Communications Tower. In compliance with resolution 17-14 and on behalf of the Washington County Communications Committee Board approval is requested for the expenditure.

Commissioner Hawkins said Dickey Smith had emailed County Administrator Massey and contacted him about the property swap regarding the above-referenced tower. The agreement included language that a fence would be put around the property he received. County Attorney Milton has reviewed it.

Agenda item 2.4 will be added to the consent agenda.

2.5 Communications Committee – EOC Emergency Generator Repairs – Lynne Abel, Public Safety Director addressed the board for informational purposes as required by resolution 15-23. The board is being advised of emergency repairs to the EOC generator replacing the voltage regulator and the optic LED board. The cost for parts and labor is \$2,445.54. There is no board action needed.

3. MSBU ADVISOR COMMITTEE UPDATE – Gary Hartman told the board there is no update at this time. The next meeting is February 7.

4. PUBLIC WORKS SUPERVISOR

Johnny Evans commended Lynne Abel/staff for keeping up with the roads that were affected by the recent storm.

4.1 Purchase of CAT 950G Loader – Johnny Evans requested board approval to buy a loader from CAT for \$306,433.00. There are issues with the front chunk/gearbox, which has been replaced before. The old one will be ready for surplus. The purchase can be covered by cash carried forward.

Approval is requested to buy one trailer from Rolls Rite for \$30,400.00. Three quotes were obtained, and Rolls Rite was the lowest. Both of the current trailers in inventory are not currently in a usable condition, however, one is being worked on.

Approval is also requested to surplus an old woodchipper.

The purchase of the loader, trailer, and the surplus of the old loader and a woodchipper will be listed on the consent agenda.

5. PARKS UPDATE – None

6. ENGINEERING PROJECT UPDATE

6.1 2022 – 25 Final Change Order – HMB Professional Engineers – Donald Stanley, presented a change order 2022 – 25 for a decrease of \$430,391.45, which accounts for overruns and underruns on the project, and the extension of the pavement on Roche Road.

This item will be listed on the consent agenda.

6.2 ITB 2023 – 16 – Jason Crenshaw, HMB Professional Engineers, Inc. said the bid was good for 60 days, which expired last month. The contractor seems to be okay with holding their price, but they do not want to be subject to a 90-day suspension. The recommendation before the board is to see if the contractor will hold the price once things start back. If they are not willing to, then the project will have to be rebid. This item is for informational purposes, therefore no action is needed.

6.3 Pine Bluff Subdivision Discussion – Option 1 – repair the areas with base failure for \$73,675.00 construction cost and CEI cost of \$5,000.00, totaling \$78,675.00. Option 2 includes the repair in Option 1 and overlay of the entire subdivision for \$173,836.88 construction cost, and CEI cost for \$10,000.00, totaling \$183,836.88 minus \$15,000.00 that the community will contribute to the project only if option 2 is selected. The prices are given under the 5-year contract.

The consensus of the board is to select Option 2. County Administrator Massey will come back before the board regarding this item after reviewing the budget.

7. COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

7.1 Public Works Director Position – Jeff Massey requested approval to transfer \$126,000.00 from cash carried forward in transportation, which will be a recurring line item in the budget. The transfer is for items related to salary line items; however, it is on the high side. The position is needed before the budget is done this year. This has been an ongoing discussion with Johnny Evans for some time. It would be nice to make the transition during Johnny Evans's employment with the county.

Commissioner Bush asked what positions would report to the position. Building Maintenance?

Jeff Massy said the public works department and parks. Building maintenance runs separately. It would remain the same as it is now.

The addition of the FTE and the transfer of \$126,360.32 will be listed on the consent agenda.

Wildstar Update – Jeff Massey supplied an update. There are over 200 people on the service, which will double once Chipley is complete. UnitiFiber has delayed Chipley, however, things should be complete in the next couple of days which will satisfy the deliverables in the first grant allowing it to be closed out and access added funds to add more towers and fiber where there are weak points. The owner has pledged to add more new equipment. Once Walton County is complete, that workforce will be added to Washington County. Residents are encouraged to access the county site and sign up ahead of time. It was impossible to know where the weak points would be at the beginning of the project. Crystal Lake, Caryville, Wausau, Chipley, Vernon, and Sunny Hills have access points. A tower is up in Ebro at the old Sandpit. Wildstar entered an agreement with Bay County to access their communications tower on Highway 20 toward Singer Road. The Holmes Valley Tower that Lynne discussed earlier will service many on that side of the county. Something more may need to be looked at between Ebro and Vernon. There is a tower at Whitehead which is between Vernon and Caryville. Dupris is up and there are two to three operational towers on private property.

8. CLERK – Lora Bell
 - 8.1 December Vouchers Totaling \$3,026,857.35
9. COUNTY ATTORNEY
10. ADJOURN