

A Town Hall Meeting of the Oconee County Board of Commissioners was held on Thursday, August 1, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. at the Oconee County Civic Center.

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

Staff Present: Justin Kirouac, County Administrator
Kathy Hayes, County Clerk
Diane Baggett, Communications Officer
Jody Woodall, Public Works Director
Adam Layfield, Water Resources Engineer
Lisa Davol, Parks & Recreation Director
Wes Geddings, Finance Director

Others Present: Richard Crowe, Georgia Department of Transportation

Call to Order: 7:04 p.m.

Purpose of the Meeting:

Chairman John Daniell welcomed citizens to the Town Hall Meeting and asked if everyone walked through the "roundabout" as they came into the Civic Center. Chairman Daniell asked that anyone wanting to speak, step to the podium and state their name directing questions to the Board. He also stated that any topic may be discussed.

Roundabout Presentation:

Public Works Director Jody Woodall shared with the audience the benefits of roundabouts versus traditional intersections. He directed the audience to the displays regarding how to drive through a roundabout. Richard Crowe from the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) stated that roundabouts decrease fatal accidents by 90%, injury crashes are decreased 76% and a 30%-40% reduction in accidents involving pedestrians.

Mr. Woodall updated the audience regarding the roundabout installation at Mars Hill Road and Malcom Bridge Road. At presents, utility relocation is in progress and the plans are to complete the roundabout at the end of October.

(Video Presentation from GDOT)

Question and Answer Session

Citizen Comments/Questions:

Amrey Harden

- Asked if a cost analysis had been completed for a roundabout versus a signalized intersection? *Chairman Daniell response:* An analysis was not done for the intersection. The Virgil Langford/Mars Hill/Rocky Branch intersection construction costs are \$703,000.00 plus \$100,000.00 for the traffic light, which will be close to \$1 million, and we are spending \$1.2 million at the roundabout. It is difficult to compare due to variables in right-of-way acquisition. Roundabouts have much less long-term maintenance costs since there are no continuing electricity costs for the traffic lights.

Dan Mathews (Watkinsville City Councilman)

- Asked if the intersection improvements at Mars Hill Road and Jimmy Daniel Road will include a roundabout? *Chairman Daniell response:* No, the intersection is signalized.
- Asked if there are plans for sidewalks or bike lanes in association with the roundabout or others in the future. *Chairman Daniell response:* The Board is working with the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission and Board of Education for "Safe Routes to Schools" Program for the whole corridor. A master plan is being developed for the area of Mars Hill Road to the school where Lenru Road comes into Malcom Bridge Road. There is no funding, but will work with future developers to have the infrastructure installed.
- Asked if there are any plans for Experiment Station Road to include sidewalks. *Chairman Daniell response:* Phase II will be the same with bike lanes and sidewalks along that corridor. *Dan Mathews* asked if there will be traffic circles (roundabouts). *Chairman Daniell response:* None at this time.
- Thanked the Department of Transportation and Board of Commissioners. Mr. Mathews is concerned about communication regarding the roundabouts/Board of Education and moving the County Administration Building to a new location. Mr. Mathews stated that the County should have annexed the property six months ago to keep the County Government within the city limits of Watkinsville. *Chairman Daniell response:* The County tried to stay within the city limits. One reason for choosing the property is that it could be annexed into the City in the future. Communication has taken place with the City of Watkinsville's administration. At the appropriate time, annexation may be requested. The County Administration Building property

has been purchased, and the County will work with the Library Board to provide a building to meet the needs of both. Roundabouts have been discussed for over a year with the Board of Education. It was announced that the property has been purchased and the Library in Watkinsville will move to the location, too. *Commissioner Horton response:* The City of Watkinsville has the opportunity to create a nice entrance to Watkinsville after annexation.

- Asked if there is a SPLOST “wish list” for the future. *Chairman Daniell response:* The County will begin to work on it late in 2019 or early 2020.
- Asked who owns the Library building. *Chairman Daniell response:* The County owns the building.
- Asked when the Mars Hill Widening Project will be extended to Watkinsville. *Chairman Daniell response:* Phase II does not extend to the City Limits of Watkinsville but ends at the 441 Bypass. Phase III is inside the Watkinsville City Limits.
- Asked about having guard rails installed at Harris Shoals Park and stated that the VFW Drive and Harris Shoals Park would be prime for a roundabout. *Chairman Daniell response:* The road is a state route and DOT has specific guidelines for the guardrails.

Jeff Hood

- Asked Chairman Daniell to address the timeline of the roundabout construction regarding the start of school next week. *Chairman Daniell response:* Originally, the focus was on another intersection. Construction of a roundabout will be longer than the 60 days that school is out for the summer. The contractor, E.R. Snell, has worked around schools, and Public Works will be monitoring traffic concerns in and around the construction area. The County will send out updates on Social Media and with Operations at the Board of Education. Utilities have been a challenge as well as the Virgil Langford and Mars Hill Road Intersection Project. *Commissioner Horton response:* Construction of the Athens-Clarke County roundabout at the end of South Milledge Avenue moved traffic faster than pre-construction.
- Asked when the traffic light would be operational at Virgil Langford, Mars Hill and Rocky Branch Roads and why was a roundabout not considered for this location. *Chairman Daniell response:* The traffic light should be operating by the end of November. The project was started in 2016, and a roundabout was not considered at that time.
- Asked why the library was being moved. *Chairman Daniell response:* The library needs room for expansion and parking in the current location is not adequate. *Commissioner Thomas response:* The Library is not the Watkinsville Library but part of the Athens Regional Library System.

Tommy Malcom

- Asked if the State will assist communities with additional funding after installing roundabouts. *Chairman Daniell response:* Grants and opportunities are available. The Board works with GDOT to acquire funding. GDOT provided \$300,000 Educational Local Maintenance Improvement Grant (LMIG) for the roundabout construction at the bus entrance on Malcom Bridge Road.
- What is our income and budget expenditures? *Chairman Daniell response:* Budget passed at \$30.5 million with 51% coming from property taxes with 61% coming from homes. Only seven other counties have a millage rate less than Oconee. The Board has been fiscally conservative. Diversification of tax base is important and creating jobs. Chamber of Commerce is working to create an Economic Development Plan. An Economic Development Task Force will be appointed at an upcoming Board Meeting. Citizens will have the opportunity to review the Economic Development Plan. *Commissioner Horton response:* People before us started building the framework for today’s Economic Development, such as the 316 Corridor. All governments are trying to get the high tech jobs, but we need to be diversified.

Rick Garrett

- Asked if a buffer would be considered at the roundabout on Malcom Bridge Road. *Chairman Daniell response:* A buffer would be considered.
- Asked what is the most dangerous intersection in the county and would the Board consider safety upgrades at Clotfelter and Highway 53. Union Church Road and Highway 53 is also dangerous. *Chairman Daniell response:* These intersections are being considered. Since these are State routes, it is a very detailed process. The County is looking at intersections on Highway 53 for possible improvements and providing local funds to make an intersection safer. Regarding the most dangerous, Clotfelter at Highway 53 is a bad intersection; Highway 53 and Snows Mill has more accidents than Clotfelter. Traffic counts have been done on Cole Springs/Snows Mill/Highway 53 and welcomes public comment regarding the area. Land Use Transportation Task Force has been asked to review the County-Wide Transportation Plan (County’s website) and provide comments to the Board.

Nancy Floyd

- Concerned about traffic from Butlers Crossing to Ray’s Corner, because it is difficult to pull out of her driveway. *Chairman Daniell response:* The Highway 53 corridor is being reviewed and it is on the MACORTS (Madison, Athens-Clarke, Oconee Regional Transportation Study) draft plan.

Dan McGee

- Thanked the Board for seeking options regarding Broadband/Internet; would like to see the Administration Building and Library property with greenspace, amphitheater and small park; future growth innovation corridor; Rails to Trails on Highway 441; start implementing the Comprehensive Plan; the Land Application System (LAS) property is needed for park space

now; Oconee's population will increase; SPLOST wish list for the next SPLOST. *Chairman Daniell response:* The Board is making generational decisions regarding the Land Application System (LAS), and property purchased for the Middle Oconee Water Treatment Plant will include passive park space. Property for Rails to Trails is not available to purchase. It is important to work within the Transportation Plan and provide safe intersections.

- Asked about competitive tech jobs stating that the County has the top school system, large universities, and other amenities that are not in other counties. *Commissioner Horton response:* The whole area does not have to be high tech jobs. *Chairman Daniell response:* The Cultural Affairs and Tourism Advisory Committee has been transitioned out and the Tourism & Visitors Bureau has taken its place.

Vickie Hammond

- Stated she was educated in Oconee County and came home to educate community. She would like to see the School Board and Commissioners work together and stated that we are all here for the same people, and people move to the County for the schools. *Chairman Daniell response:* In 2016, a study was done with the School Board regarding the undeveloped lots in the County. The Commissioners updated the sewer policy, which had a direct effect on decisions regarding development. The Board has worked with the School Superintendent regarding the use of the high schools for Parks & Recreation due to growth of both programs. We have worked together often. The lights at Malcom Bridge Middle School were installed by the School System for the County Recreation programs to use. We are trying to maintain a level of growth for the infrastructure to meet the needs and not have too much pressure on the School System. Both groups have been proactive. *Commissioner Horton response:* He served on the Board of Education during construction of Oconee's second high school. The School was a benefactor of the sewer policy litigation of the County, because large subdivisions had to decrease lots in the settlement.

Commissioner Comments

Chairman John Daniell

- The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is moving ahead with Phase II of the Mars Hill Road Widening Project. Funding is being released, which is about a year ahead of schedule. Thank you to Jamie Boswell, GDOT Congressional District 10 Representative, and GDOT Commissioner Russell McMurray helped change the funding date on the project.
- The Board seeks engagement from citizens and employees. Citizen comments impact the goals of the Board and results in better decision making, a more productive community and also a more innovative community. In 2017, 23% of the days in January had Commissioner Meetings that were open to the public. The Board created a Strategic Plan and has followed it throughout the last three years.
- Citizens can sign up on the County's website to receive Meeting Agendas and Minutes. The County's Communications Manager updates social media and the website to push information out to the community. We are accessible to you and are open to talk with you. Citizens may also sign up for CodeRed, which is a new notification system. Goal of the Board is to have every chair filled at each Town Hall Meeting.
- The County's Volunteer Fire Department received an ISO rating of 4/4X, which determines homeowner insurance ratings and is almost unheard of for a Volunteer Fire Department. The new ladder truck is in service at Fire Station No. 8. He reminded citizens that 25% of fire calls are false alarms.
- Mars Hill Road is a State Road and has not been turned over to the County. Trees were planted as part of the Beautification Project, but the last heat wave caused the loss of more trees. The trees are guaranteed for a year and the County is watering the trees.
- The Bishop Farms Parkway Project is underway with concept plans being prepared and project bids will be accepted in the fall of this year.
- The Rocky Branch Road sewer line that was leaking has been decommissioned. The Calls Creek Wastewater Plant is operating very well.
- Decommissioning the Land Application System (LAS) will be voted on at an upcoming Board Meeting. A possible future plan for the LAS is on display at Oconee Veterans Park.
- The Senior Center has applied for a grant through the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to expand the Senior Center. Announcement of the grant award should be during October of 2019.

Commissioner Horton

- Changes do happen in the County. Reviewing projects and ideas, there may be better ways to make changes.

Chairman Daniell thanked the citizens for attending the Town Hall Meeting and asked that they visit the roundabout displays.

Meeting Adjourned: 8:13 p.m.

Chairman

County Clerk

Date: _____