

**FRANKLIN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL MEETING  
COURTHOUSE ANNEX, COMMISSION MEETING ROOM**

**FEBRUARY 14, 2020**

**1:30 PM**

**MINUTES**

**Commissioners Present: Noah Lockley – Chairman, Ricky Jones-Vice-Chairman, Joseph Parrish, William Massey, Bert B. Boldt, II**

**Others Present: Erin Griffith-Assistant Finance Director, Michael Moron-County Coordinator, Michael Shuler – County Attorney, Lori P. Hines-Deputy Clerk to the Board.**

**Call to Order**

Chairman Lockley called the meeting to Order.

**Prayer and Pledge**

Commissioner Jones said a prayer followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**County Coordinator – Michael Morón – Report**

Mr. Moron read the following item from his report:

1. USDA Loan - Inform the Board that the USDA Marianna office is requesting that the County submit a written request to either provide a proposal to proceed for the \$10,000,000.00 loan or a request to de-obligate the funds for the Hospital Improvement Project no later than Thursday, March 12, 2020. Rural Development obligated the \$10,000,000.00 for the Hospital Improvement Project on June 22, 2015 but there has been no expressed interest in proceeding with this project since a March 12, 2019 conference call. Last year, Weems received an Agency for Healthcare Administration (AHCA) Stage II Stand-up Review approval for the Hospital Improvement Project, however the Board paused the Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) process.

**Request:** Board discussion and action to proceed with building the hospital project including, authorization to proceed with such matters as may be required by USDA to proceed with building of the hospital project, obtain a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP), authorize me to work with Mr. Joe Bynum (project architect) on the creating the proposal to proceed that will be submitted to USDA to continue the obligation of the \$10,000,000.00 prior to the March 12, 2020 deadline, direct Attorney Shuler to start the bonding process for

the loan or submit a request to USDA to de-obligate the funds.

Mr. Moron clarified he is not asking the Board to agree to the building project or the loan terms. He explained he just needs to know if the Board wants to keep the money obligated or not and find out from USDA what it will take to keep the money obligated. Mr. Moron said the Board has 2 proposals and when he talked with Mr. Roger Hall, Ascension/Sacred Heart, he said the USDA loan is the best option for the free standing emergency room. He explained Mr. Jim Coleman, Alliant/Tallahassee Memorial Hospital (TMH) has also said the USDA loan is the best option to pay for the hospital improvement project. He stated with either proposal they are going to need a loan to pay for the building. He explained there is a misunderstanding that Ascension/Sacred Heart is constructing a building but they are not. He reported Franklin County will construct the building but it will be to Sacred Heart's specifications. Mr. Moron said Mr. Hall has asked to use their own contractor but he is not sure if that is possible. He stated either way the county will need a loan. He stated he needs to know if the county wants to keep the loan going for 60-90 days until the Board makes a decision on what they want to do. Mr. Moron reported on Tuesday they will have a discussion about another special meeting because Mr. Hall would like to meet again with the Board. He explained all he needs to know today is whether the Board wants to move forward and try to obligate the money or has no interest in the loan.

### **Public Comments**

Mrs. Mel Kelly, a resident of Carrabelle, said the plan to meet on the future of the hospital construction project at a time when most voters are working and with less than 48 hours' notice to the public seems to create its own message of subterfuge. She questioned what the need and urgency are for a special meeting with a mid-March deadline and a regular scheduled meeting in 4 days. Mrs. Kelly stated they have had excellent proposals for the future of Franklin County healthcare over the last few months. She reported they have a choice of a hands on stand-alone emergency room fully staffed and equipped or a consultant plan with promises and goals from with TMH that has not proven to be a real partner after many years. Mrs. Kelly said they sought consultation through the Texas A & M grant. She said they have listened to presentations and failed to make a decision for people who need modern and competent health care services. She reported by moving forward on the loan effort they are turning their back on Ascension/Sacred Heart. She said they proved with studies that they could provide care and promised to bring mammography to the county which is something Weems has not provided for years. She reported Alliant will bring bookkeepers and Weems already has bookkeepers. She stated to move forward with this meager loan that will not build or equip anything but a skeletal facility is an insult to those that voted for them and trusted them to do the right thing at this pivotal time. Mrs. Kelly suggested they could revamp the loan proposal to build a stand-alone emergency room and not have a hospital that will have less than 1 patient per night, have old equipment and will require taxpayers to subsidize it. She provided two stories concerning Sacred Heart Hospital.

Mr. Steve Kirschenbaum, Citizens for a Safer Franklin County, stated he is upset that the Board meetings are at 9:00 a.m. and that there is no interaction with the Commissioners on resolutions. He reported it appears the decisions are made before they come into the room. He said there needs to be an opportunity for working citizens to attend the meetings and the meetings need to be held at night.

Mr. Kirschenbaum reported people are leaving the county for health care and the hospital does not need to be run by the County Commission. He stated there are 4 air lifts a week out of this county because the hospital cannot handle the needs. Mr. Kirschenbaum reported the air lift comes from Perry and charges \$44,000. He said if they put a helicopter in this county they could get grant money and the revenue from the air lift could come in to the Sheriff's Department to offset the cost of the helicopter. He stated they could also provide support to other counties and make money. Mr. Kirschenbaum reported they need hospital professionals running the hospital. He said \$10 million will not pay for anything. He stated they need Sacred Heart in this town and they need a hospital and a free standing emergency room.

Mr. Kevin Begos, Mayor for the City of Apalachicola, urged the county to keep the USDA money available. He stated they understand the two competing proposals and the pressure the Board is under but the City of Apalachicola strongly feels like the hospital or some health care facility should remain in Apalachicola. He said both proposals have pros and cons and the Board is properly taking time to look at the proposals. Mayor Begos referenced the referendum and Interlocal Agreements and said they are expecting a hospital or some facility to be built in Apalachicola. He asked them to keep this project alive and see what USDA says in response to a 60-90 day extension. He thanked the Board for their work on this issue as health care is a complicated subject for any rural county. Mayor Begos stated this Board gets criticized for holding meetings in the daytime and he gets criticized for holding meetings in the evening because the meetings go on too long. He said on the idea of moving the hospital from Apalachicola to Eastpoint he would never suggest moving the stand alone health facility from Carrabelle to somewhere else so they should not engage in that kind of suggestion. He stated they may need a facility in Eastpoint or St. George Island at some point and he supports that too. He reported the City of Apalachicola Commission feels like they need to keep the hospital or some facility here in Apalachicola.

Mr. Alan Feifer, Concerned Citizens of Franklin County, said other people's money has been used to prop up Weems Memorial Hospital for years. He stated the Health Care Trust Fund (HCTF) was the worst thing for Weems because it allowed \$20 million to be improperly used to prop up a hospital where there are too many bad outcomes. He reported this has delayed a decision on what makes sense and the public is excluded from the conversation. Mr. Feifer said they can speak but cannot get answers. He reported with over 80% of the HCTF already spent they cannot afford a decent clinic much less a hospital. He questioned where the money will come from to pay for new equipment. Mr. Feifer stated Sacred Heart will bring a mammography machine at no cost. He reported a new larger facility costs more to operate and they cannot pay for the old one. Mr. Feifer said they do not even know what a new facility will cost and how they will fund it. He questioned the hate and mistrust of Sacred Heart and why they do not feel like their proposal will work. Mr. Feifer said he receives calls that people received substandard care and died. He discussed the number of CEO's at Weems and why Hospital Board members resign and wish they were not on the Board. He stated the hospital employees will never receive benefits because there will never be enough money. He reported they must deny Weems before they are stuck with an everlasting debt and run on the general fund in future years. He said they quickly called a meeting to make a decision for a generation. Mr. Feifer asked the Board to set aside political interests and do what is right for the people.

Mr. Tony Partington, a resident of Eastpoint, said Weems Memorial Hospital has a rich history and has played a part in his life. He stated all of his family has received care at Weems and he worked at Weems. He reported the elected officials are charged with making a decision that will affect the lives of their constituents, the people of Franklin County. He discussed the changes to health care and the economy since Weems opened their doors in 1959. Mr. Partington reported economy of scale dictates whether or not a medical practice or facility succeeds or fails. He stated before moving to Franklin County he and his wife worked in health care. He reported the residents and visitors need and deserve quality health care and that cannot be realized through a private rural hospital that would be a financial burden to them and their children. He asked the Board to consider the opinion and counsel of those that have professional healthcare experience. Mr. Partington reported Ascension/Sacred Heart has provided a comprehensive, financial and viable solution to the issue of healthcare in the county and he asked the Board to consider it.

Mr. Patrick Leach, a property owner at St. George Island, presented a letter from Mr. Tim Sullivan stating there was not enough notice for the meeting. The letter also said the building of the hospital in that location is yet to be decided and questioned why the Commission feels rushed to make a decision to spend a large amount of taxpayers' money when this issue has not been settled with the voters. The letter stated there are many questions from voters and the national assistance grant from Texas A & M will answer financial and logistical questions.

Ms. Susan Leach, a property owner at St. George Island, read a letter from Mr. Jim Warner expressing shock at the short notice of the special meeting on this matter. The letter stated the two issues are the business issue and brand name. The letter requested the business model, financials and a polling of the residents on services needed and supported.

Chairman Lockley reported part of these things were already voted on 15 years ago.

Ms. Elizabeth Roffey, a property owner at St. George Island, asked Commissioner Parrish to pay attention to what they are saying. Commissioner Parrish responded he has heard everything that is being said. Ms. Roffey stated the Board is supposed to be making good decisions for the citizens and should do the right thing and vote for the Sacred Heart deal.

Mrs. Diane Brewer, a resident of Apalachicola, stated Mr. Moron explained the purpose of the meeting but she has attended many meetings and the controversy of what kind of health care and who is going to pay for it and the next 30 days is not going to get them any further. She reported it is time to give up the funding because they do not know what they are going to be building or where. Mrs. Brewer asked the Board to give up the obligation for funding, get out of the health care business and leave it to the professionals.

Mr. Mike Thornburg, a resident of St. George Island, stated they should not have called a special meeting when they did not need to make a decision for 4 weeks and could have made a decision on Tuesday. He said they have a general election in November and they should let the voters decide what they want to do going forward in health care. He stated the ballot language does not say the hospital has to be in Apalachicola or mention the Interlocal Agreements. Mr. Thornburg reported \$10 million

will not build what the county needs and he questioned how they will pay for the \$10 million loan. He said this \$10 million does not include doctors or services and will be a substantial payment.

Ms. Wanda Johnson, a resident of Lanark Village, said she is on the Board of Directors for the Lanark Association and will represent their feelings. She stated the situation now is a 6 bed hospital at Weems with an emergency room with old equipment and a walk in clinic in Carrabelle operated by Weems. She reported if they have an emergency the clinic is only open 8-5 Monday thru Friday. She stated health care is an issue on the weekend and they need an emergency room. Ms. Johnson said if this money is coming from tax dollars and is a 40 year loan then they will be paying for a long time and will not get a lot. She stated they should vote on this issue and they should consider the issues addressed today.

Ms. Mary Ann McGuire, a resident from St. George Island, requested the Board not obligate her tax dollars to a \$10 million debt for a new Weems Hospital building. She reported with a 1 bed occupancy rate the hospital has been losing money and surviving with help from the county. She expressed her opinion that this is not a sustainable situation and a new building will not solve the financial problems. Ms. McGuire said a solution has been proposed by a professional health care company with a proven track record and she supports the proposal from Ascension/Sacred Heart to build, equip and staff a state of the art facility that will serve the health care needs of the citizens. She reported the county does not need or can they afford a new hospital. She explained the proposal by Ascension/Sacred Heart will better address the health care needs of the citizens with less financial risk. Ms. McGuire urged the Board to begin the process with Ascension/Sacred Heart.

Mrs. Deborah Storck, a resident of Eastpoint, said she has attended meetings and the biggest untruth is Sacred Heart will build an emergency room. She stated Mr. Moron just explained it is still the county's sales tax money that will build the facility. She said if Sacred Heart is committed why they have not sent doctors that admit patients to the hospital or provided specialists. Mrs. Storck reported this is a health care issue but also an issue of jobs and they cannot address one without the other. She stated with the Sacred Heart proposal they will lose approximately 60 jobs and they will not find jobs in the county and will be leaving. She pointed out the county needs a hospital to attract businesses and she finds it hard to believe the mayors would support a stand alone emergency room. She stated the mortality rate will go up and they will be giving their sales tax to another county to provide less than what they have now. Mrs. Storck reported she supports building a new hospital with Alliant/TMH. She reported the critical access designation is site specific so they must build in the current location. She stated the citizens voted on a hospital to be built in Apalachicola and it is time they get what they asked for.

Mr. Ben Huston, a resident of Alligator Point, stated the hospital should be centrally located. He questioned what happens if the bridge closes and only the people in Apalachicola can access the hospital. He questioned what the distance would be for the rest of the county to get to a hospital. He stated not enough thought has gone into access for medical services for the other parts of the county if the hospital is in Apalachicola. Mr. Huston reported they will be paying for medical services for a few citizens. He discussed the time involved with waiting for an ambulance and being transported to the hospital. Mr. Huston reported Franklin County residents utilize Sacred Heart more than Weems. He

questioned if a new building will bring adequate doctors or specialists. He stated the eastern part of the county feels there needs to be a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Wakulla County to have faster access to medical services as they are closer to Tallahassee than Apalachicola.

Mrs. Gail Riegelmayr, a resident of St. George Island, stated at the last meeting Weems needed a loan for payroll and will pay it back with a Hurricane Michael claim. She questioned what this says about the financial situation at Weems. Mrs. Riegelmayr stated at the special meeting with Alliant/TMH Commissioner Parrish asked for assurance that they will mentor the Weems CEO and she commented they cannot afford what it would cost to train employees at Weems. She reported Commissioner Parrish also acknowledged significant revenue is not being collected because they do not have the expertise. She explained he also wanted assurances Alliant would manage this aspect of Weems. Mrs. Riegelmayr stated they do not have time to wait nor the money to pay for Alliant to do these studies while money is being left uncollected. She reported at the Carrabelle Commission meeting last week Commissioner Boldt said the County Commission is concerned that all employees and 10% of the citizens have Capital Health Plan insurance and Sacred Heart does not take that insurance. Mrs. Riegelmayr stated Sacred Heart will take CHP insurance but they are out of network. She said Dr. Ryan Pharr and other Sacred Heart services in Franklin County do take CHP. She said this can be negotiated with Sacred Heart. Mrs. Riegelmayr reported at the same Carrabelle City Commission meeting they discussed withdrawing from the Interlocal Agreement with the county and directing their attorney to look into the ramifications. Mrs. Riegelmayr said Weems is already losing money and a new hospital would increase that amount and they would need to pay Alliant. She questioned what would happen if Carrabelle withdraws their money and expressed concern it would come from ad valorem taxes. She stated the Carrabelle City Commission has already thrown their support behind Sacred Heart. Mrs. Riegelmayr reported a lot more people would have been here except for the late notice of the meeting. She said the Board's job is to work at the will of the people and urged the Board to negotiate the best deal with Sacred Heart. She asked everyone that support Sacred Heart to raise their signs.

Dr. Richard Mitsak, a resident of St. George Island, stated they have heard many arguments and ideas over the last weeks and there is sentiment that they are going to ignore that and vote for a narrow vested interest rather than representing all the people of Franklin County which he hopes is not true. He said they should ask if they have met their obligation and represented everyone.

Mrs. Pat O'Connell, a resident of St. George Island, stated she talked with Mr. Moron and staff about what this proposal was because she thought they were making a final decision and foregoing any other discussion. She reported Mr. Moron explained that was not true and they are not closing out any options or shutting off the presentation by Texas A & M which will compare the options. Mrs. O'Connell reported they are simply asking USDA to extend their loan until they can come back with the actual proposal that is based on their best judgment. She stated if this does not make a commitment to Weems or change the opportunities for Ascension/Sacred Heart or TMH then the Board should go on the record and say that. She commented the motion Mr. Moron has written is very unclear and she ask the Board to amend the motion to only give authority to ask USDA to extend the loan until this Board can make a decision. Mrs. O'Connell stated there are people in the county who know powerful people and they can call and get the extension on the loan. She reported the USDA money has the

best rate and that is their function. She said the Board needs to make sure the people understand that this is not a decision they are just extending the loan opportunity.

Mr. David Adlerstein, The Apalachicola Times, stated the motion said they would work with Mr. Joe Bynum, project architect, and he questioned if that means the project as envisioned by Mr. Bynum would be the operable project.

Mr. Moron stated he will address these questions after public comment.

Mrs. Donna Butterfield, a resident of St. George Island, read the proposed motion. She reported Mr. Bynum is the architect that has been trying to build Weems for 20 years so that is what caused a problem.

Mr. Moron explained Mr. Bynum is the person he will be working with and he has worked on the project but he also worked with him on other issues and the reason he went with Mr. Bynum is he is familiar with USDA. He said the only reason they are using Mr. Bynum is to create the Proposal to Proceed that needs to be submitted to USDA to continue the obligation of the \$10 million. He reported USDA requested a Proposal to Proceed and he was trying to work with someone who was well versed in working with USDA to obligate the loan if that is what the Board wants to do. Chairman Lockley said the people voted to build a hospital and he is not going back over this. He explained some of the same people that were objecting then are still here objecting now. Chairman Lockley said this matter has already been to a vote. Mr. Moron clarified he is not trying to further the building project but wants to know what USDA wants from the county to keep the money obligated. Mr. Moron questioned how they are going to pay \$7-9 million for a building if they go with the Sacred Heart proposal. Commissioner Massey said he was going to ask the same question. Commissioner Parrish commented he had the same question. He said people keep saying that Sacred Heart is going to build a new building but is that factual. Mr. Moron answered no. Commissioner Parrish stated he thought the county had to build the building and questioned how they will do that if they de-obligate the funds. Mr. Moron reported the county would need a loan. Commissioner Parrish asked if USDA has the cheapest rate. Mr. Moron replied yes. Mr. Moron reported Mr. Hall said he would provide the specifications and would like to use a contractor they use but the discussion has not gone that far and he does not know if the bid policy allows that. He said the building is the county's building and they must pay for it. Commissioner Parrish stated the county bids out these jobs according to their bid policy. Commissioner Massey reported if Sacred Heart builds this building they said they were going to keep the Carrabelle Clinic open 2 days a week and that is going to upset the people in Carrabelle. He stated they said they would close it 3 days a week. Mr. Moron reported his intent is not to shut down negotiations and on the Tuesday Agenda he is asking for a special meeting because Mr. Hall would like to re-address the Board because they want to make additions to their proposal. He stated he thinks next week a representative from Sacred Heart will be talking to Texas A & M about their additions and then they would like to talk to the Board. Mr. Moron said the Board either wants to keep the money or not. He explained if they do not want to keep the money from USDA then they need to start looking somewhere else. Mr. Moron reported he is trying to get an answer and is not going to reach out to USDA without direction from the Board. Chairman Lockley said over 70% of the people voted for the hospital and they still have trust in it and the same select few do not want it. Commissioner Parrish left

the meeting. Mr. Moron asked the Board to tell him if they have interest in the loan and if they do how long they want to extend the loan. He explained he would have liked to have met yesterday so they could get Mr. Bynum started on the Proposal to Proceed with USDA and that was his urgency in calling the meeting. He reported they have the meeting Tuesday and the first meeting in March before something has to be submitted to USDA and he is not going to submit something until the Board approves it. Commissioner Parrish returned to the meeting. Commissioner Boldt said the two issues are brick and mortar and management. He reported to keep all pathways open they must agree to keep the money obligated. He stated Medicare has said they have a critical access hospital here that they believe in and Texas A & M sponsored by the federal government is giving a perspective and they have USDA who may provide a \$10 million loan. Commissioner Boldt said they have a covenant with the federal government and must keep the access and pathways open. He stated they have done so much already in hearing from people who want to manage their health care and keeping this money obligated is another pathway they must keep open. Mr. Moron explained they are free to make any motion they want but he presented his recommendation. Commissioner Jones said if they are just trying to keep the loan obligated he is okay with that but the questions he and Commissioner Parrish have asked repeatedly about sustainability have to be answered for both proposals. He explained in both proposals they still have to explain how they are going to pay for it. He stated someone challenged him yesterday to put it on paper and he could not do it and make it work. Commissioner Jones reported if they are just trying to obligate the funds to work out the proposals then he is fine with that and with staff working on it but anything other than that he is not fine with because he cannot put it on paper and make it work. Mr. Moron apologized if his wording caused the confusion because that was not his intention. Commissioner Massey reported if the City of Carrabelle pulls out of the Interlocal Agreement the Carrabelle Clinic will close unless the City of Carrabelle runs it. He went on to say if the City of Apalachicola pulls out of the Interlocal Agreements they will need to run the Apalachicola Clinic. **Commissioner Parrish made a motion directing county staff to work with Mr. Joe Bynum on creating the Proposal to Proceed that will be submitted to USDA to continue the obligation of \$10 million prior to the March 12<sup>th</sup> deadline.** Commissioner Parrish clarified the Board has not made a decision about whether they are going with Sacred Heart or building a hospital but they do need to hang on to the loan or nothing will get done. **Commissioner Boldt seconded the motion.** Commissioner Boldt stated they have done what is right in keeping their options open. **Motion carried; 5-0.**

### **Commissioners' Comments**

Commissioner Jones stated the Board is not obligating anything today. He explained they are asking the USDA to continue to have their obligation to the county for these funds whenever they work out a proposal. He clarified they are not obligating the taxpayers of Franklin County to anything today. Commissioner Jones reported they are trying to keep the loan open because it is taking too long and it needs to come to a conclusion.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 2:42 p.m.

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Noah Lockley - Chairman

Attest:

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Marcia M. Johnson - Clerk of Courts