

**MINUTES**  
**MERIWETHER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**Work Session**  
**April 25, 2023, 4:00 p.m.**

Commissioners Present: Chairman Bryan Threadgill, Vice Chairman Gene King, Commissioner Rosla Plant, and Commissioner Adam Worsley

Commissioners Absent: Commissioner Emmett Collins

Staff Present: County Administrator Michelle Irizarry, Finance Director Bill Gregory, Deputy Clerk Allyson Stephens, Director of Special Projects Theron Gay, Special Projects Bill Cawthorne, and County Attorney Michael Hill

Staff Absent: County Clerk Beverly Thomas

I. **WELCOME** – Chairman Bryan Threadgill welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

II. **NEW BUSINESS**

**Roads Closed from Recent Weather Event:** County Administrator Michelle Irizarry handed out packets to the Board with the list of roads damaged in the recent weather event that included pictures of the roads and estimates for repair. Administrator Irizarry stated that Staff is looking for recommendations on getting the roads back open as quickly as possible and we do not have the staffing at Public Works to do so and are looking for direction from the Board on the use of outside sources. Chairman Threadgill asked if we had staff that could do any of these projects. Administrator Irizarry stated due to the extent of the damage, we are requesting assistance. Chairman Threadgill stated some of the estimates looked low. Mr. Bill Cawthorne stated that we have already taken care of two of the roads on the list, Jimmy Clark Road, and Reaves Road. Mr. Cawthorne stated they plan to take care of Silver Street. Chairman Threadgill asked if Strickland Town Road and River Cove Road were about the same and if they were looking at putting in box culverts as this was the second time River Cove Road had washed out since he had been on the Board. Mr. Cawthorne stated that the previous Board approved repairs to River Cove Road that included a replacement pipe and concrete headwalls. Mr. Cawthorne stated that Commissioner Collins would like to have a box culvert for River Cove Road. Chairman Threadgill asked with what the County had already allocated for the repair, what the costs would be. Mr. Cawthorne stated the pipe was approximately \$29,000 and it took 6 months to come in. Chairman Threadgill asked what the difference would be in the box culvert and the previous approval to replace the pipe and the poured concrete headwalls. Mr. Cawthorne stated that Piedmont was approved to build the precast headwalls and set those, and the County put in the pipe and do all the backfill as well as asphalt materials and that was an additional \$29,000-\$30,000. Mr. Cawthorne stated that would be right at \$80,000 to \$90,000 doing the work in-house. Chairman Threadgill asked what the \$350,000 to \$400,000 was for. Mr. Cawthorne stated that was for a box culvert. Director of Special Projects, Theron Gay asked Mr. Cawthorne if the pipe we have already could be used at another location. Mr. Cawthorne stated it could, but he did not know of any locations as of now. Chairman Threadgill asked if we used the existing pipe and allowed Piedmont to put in the headwalls, approximately how long would that last. Mr. Cawthorne stated the polymer pipe had a rating of 50 years. Chairman Threadgill asked what the recommendation would be. Mr. Gay stated that Commissioner Collins would like a box culvert and that he had not been working with them as closely as Administrator Irizarry, but there may be some GEMA or FEMA funds to help. Administrator Irizarry stated there were two representatives from FEMA and 2 representatives from GEMA that came down to administer a PDA or Preliminary Disaster Assessment and we are waiting to hear back. Administrator Irizarry explained this is from two different storms. Commissioner Worsley stepped out of the room at 4:07 p.m. Chairman Threadgill stated that with the multiple washouts he understood the need for the box culverts, however \$400,000 is a lot. Mr. Gay stated that there is a substantial difference and that they had projected this be bid out with headwalls and someone else installing the pipe. Mr. Gay stated that

Commissioner Collins would like a box culvert and Mr. Gay felt this was a more permanent option. Mr. Gay explained that some of the items could potentially be done in house, but the problem is that we are half-staffed right now and it has been difficult to find people to work. Commissioner Worsley came back to the Work Session at 4:07 p.m. Mr. Gay stated there would be a little bit of a timing issue and if we let these go to a contract the work could possibly be done quicker. Mr. Gay stated that there is potential to use storm event funds and there is also availability of TSPLOST dollars that would allow us to take care of some of these things. Mr. Gay stated it would be a while before we could have staff do all of these repairs. Chairman Threadgill asked if we had received any assistance from FEMA or GEMA from the original tornado. Administrator Irizarry stated that we are still working on this. Chairman Threadgill asked when it would be done. Administrator Irizarry stated it is very hard to estimate that as it is done based on state and Federal timelines. Chairman Threadgill stated he understood but wanted to get some type of estimate on what the County will be receiving. Chairman Threadgill stated he agreed the box culverts would be the best, however we are looking at close to \$1,000,000 in repairs. Mr. Gay stated that one of the things staff could do is go ahead and put together bid packages for these projects and bring back what the costs would be to the Board. Mr. Gay stated this would buy time to see if we get the Declaration and if we do not, it also allows the Board the ability to take a look at the projects. Mr. Gay feels there are probably enough remaining dollars in TSPLOST to do all the projects. Mr. Gay stated this helps to keep us moving forward and not just sitting and bring the options back to the Board. Chairman Threadgill stated that he would like to get the RFPs out. Commissioner Worsley stated we need to get that done as quickly as possible. Commissioner Worsley also stated the proposals don't have to go out as a package, they can go out individually. Chairman Threadgill stated he would also like to get the application completed as quick as we can so we can try to get some type of estimate of what the County will be getting back from the storm damage. Chairman Threadgill stated he doesn't have a problem using TSPLOST money, but it would be nice to replace that if we could use it for the projects that were in mind when TSPLOST was approved. Mr. Cawthorne stated that it does take some time to send items out to bid. Chairman Threadgill asked what the turnaround time was and thought it was 30-45 days. Mr. Gay stated we usually allow 30 days and once we get the bid out, we have templates that we can use again for other projects. Mr. Gay stated that Mr. Cawthorne was able to speak with a mutual friend and he has agreed to do the basin analysis which allows us to choose the design on the size of the culvert, saving around \$30,000 per job. Mr. Gay stated the gentleman is a registered engineer and will do that for us. Chairman Threadgill asked Mr. Gay if we even had the equipment to do these big projects. Mr. Gay stated the County doesn't have the equipment to do the box culverts and some of the bigger projects really stretch our ability when they get deep. Mr. Gay stated some of the smaller projects we could do, but if we could get 4,5, or 6 done at a time, we can get the roads back open. Commissioner Worsley asked if the friend was doing this work for free. Mr. Gay explained he was a P.E. and is certified and they have worked with him in the past. Vice Chairman King asked if the box culverts were precast or built on site. Mr. Gay stated some are precast and some are built on the site. Chairman Threadgill asked regarding the price difference with using an outside contractor or doing inhouse if we could just purchase the equipment to do the jobs ourselves. Commissioner Worsley stated we do not have the staff. Mr. Cawthorne stated we don't have the staff and there could be another rain or storm incident that creates more road work. Commissioner Worsley wanted to know how long it would take to get an RFP out. Chairman Threadgill explained there would need to be exact measurements and there is a lot that goes into an RFP. Mr. Gay stated we could have an RFP out by the end of the next week. Mr. Cawthorne stated that he had prepared a draft of a bid package for Strickland Town Road prior. Chairman Threadgill stated that the bids need to be individual. Mr. Gay stated the bid package for River Cove Road could include both an option for concrete headwalls and a pipe as well as a box culvert option. Mr. Gay stated box culverts are a good idea and don't require any more upkeep. Chairman Threadgill stated with the way River Cove Road washes out it may be the better option. Mr. Gay stated that he felt we could get the bid packages together by the end of next week. Mr. Gay also explained that they have to be advertised in the legal organ two times and placed on the State Procurement website. Mr. Gay stated there will be a bid opening date set as well as a mandatory pre-construction conference at the site to allow the contractors to look at the site and then

bring back bids, which then can be brought back to the Board. Chairman Threadgill asked about the progress with FEMA and GEMA. Administrator Irizarry stated that Brin is working to get that finalized but is waiting on information from the tower equipment. Chairman Threadgill asked if the Board could be kept updated on that progress. Administrator Irizarry stated she would update the Board. Mr. Cawthorne stated there were several other roads that were found, including Gordon May Road and JW Dunn Road. Commissioner Plant asked if Gordon May Road was passable. Mr. Cawthorne stated it was. Chairman Threadgill stated that some of the jobs presented are just pipes and smaller jobs and he understands that we are short-staffed but if some of this can be done it needs to be instead of contracting everything out. Mr. Gay stated they could have two to three projects listed in an RFP and if something comes up only choose that option. Mr. Gay stated there has been indication that some of the contractors are looking for work right now and hoped to get more bids back. Mr. Gay stated if we don't receive enough bids or something we can work with, we just do it in-house and work towards getting it done. Mr. Cawthorne stated that he checked with pipe distributor and there should not be the same delay on getting pipe as there was before with River Cove Road.

**On Demand Vendors for Road Work:** Administrator Irizarry explained that she had received requests from a couple of Commissioners for on-demand services on jobs that either Barry Lucas or Bill Cawthorne feels are needed. Administrator Irizarry stated this would be at a per-unit price, and only on some of the jobs that we don't have staffing or equipment to complete. Chairman Threadgill asked what that would entail. Mr. Gay stated that what has been discussed is similar to what GDOT does. Mr. Gay explained that if you are a contractor with GDOT, they go ahead and prequalify you to make sure you are insured, bonded, and equipped with everything needed to get the work done. Mr. Gay explained because every job is different, their recommendation would be to prequalify contractors and if there is something that comes up, such as another flood event, and the county needs help, the vendor would already be qualified. Mr. Gay explained the prequalified contractors would be on a vendor list and will not be called on until the County needs them. Mr. Gay stated in the event something happens and the County can't get to the job or are tied up, there is a list of prequalified vendors to call on. Chairman Threadgill stated if something like this is done there needs to be something put into the contract to limit the financial obligation until it comes before the Board. Chairman Threadgill stated if they have something that comes to Public Works, they don't want or can't get to and it costs \$100,000 and a vendor is contracted out and we could have done it for \$25,000, then there needs to be a stipulation in those contracts that states it has to come before them on anything over \$5,000. Vice Chairman King stated that he is one of the Commissioners that brought this up and gave a couple of examples of how this would help our staff. Vice Chairman King stated his company was doing a job on Beaver Lake Road and came upon a small section or road that looked as if it had been harrowed under and hog rooted, causing him to put his truck into 4-wheel drive to get through it. Vice Chairman King stated he contacted Barry Lucas, and they could not get to the area as they were swamped, and homeowners were calling to complain. Vice Chairman King stated that he had his company, which he did not charge the County for, nor would he, come out and in 40 minutes scrape all the slush off and put it beyond the right-of-way. Vice Chairman King stated that Public Works wasn't sure when they could get rock out to the location but came out pretty soon and this was all done in about a two-hour time frame. Vice Chairman King stated citizens began calling and thanking them and were appreciative. Vice Chairman King stated there was another incident on Timber Ridge and a citizen called and told him they had to pull the mail lady out. Vice Chairman King stated that the road was pretty good other than about a 40-ft section on one side of the road to the stop sign that was very deep in slush and ruts. Vice Chairman King explained that what he is suggesting is not the extravagant jobs and something that a skid steer and gravel could take care of in about 1.5 hours' time, but if Public Works crews are spread out and a homeowner calls one of the Commissioners for service, it would give Bill or Barry the ability to look at a list to see if someone can take care of it. Vice Chairman stated that he feels that this is something that would cost around \$250 to \$300 and use county rock or have the rock included as this would be minimal. Vice Chairman King stated that it would be cheaper than what we would have to pay to load a crew up and fix it and helps to get caught up on miscellaneous things. Chairman Threadgill stated that he thought it was a great idea, but we have one pot of money in

this County and if we begin to contract everything out, that pot of money dwindles, and we have to be very cautious. Chairman Threadgill stated that we have numerous dirt roads and if 50 citizens called in on one day at \$1,000 per call, that is \$50,000 that quick. Chairman Threadgill reiterated the need to have legal do a contract with stipulations on the dollar amount. Mr. Gay stated that you would have to set a dollar amount, because of State requirements on Georgia Procurement and if it is over a certain amount, it has to be listed on State Procurement. Mr. Gay explained that we could come up with a prequalified list of contractors. Vice Chairman King stated that this is for the ability to do this without putting it on the next month's Agenda because if the road is messed up so bad that an ambulance can't get there and Public Works can't get it fixed, the liability on us is worse. Vice Chairman King stated he is referring to small items that would make the citizens happy, save us a little money and help get us ahead of the game because we have so much devastation right now and don't have a full staff. Chairman Threadgill stated he is on board with it, but feels it needs to be streamlined as much as possible. Mr. Gay didn't feel that the small jobs they were referring to would be much more than \$5,000, allowing Administrator Irizarry to sign off on them. Commissioner Worsley wanted to know if there would be a report regarding this type of work. Chairman Threadgill stated that if the amount is under \$5,000 then the Administrator could approve it, however if there are a lot of calls then the Board would need to be made aware of that. Administrator Irizarry stated that she would be glad to provide a spreadsheet showing that. Mr. Gay stated that staff would begin working on getting those specifications written up and sent to the County Attorney. Commissioner Worsley asked, "How long will that take?" Mr. Gay stated that we would work on that during the same time period and that's what we do. Mr. Gay stated that the biggest backlog will unfortunately be on Allyson because of his typing. Commissioner Worsley asked when our intern would start. Administrator Irizarry stated that unfortunately we do not have one for the Board of Commissioners and this was for Probate Court. Commissioner Worsley asked if we could have one for the Board of Commissioners. Administrator Irizarry stated that the application period had expired. Chairman Threadgill stated we did have an intern before. Mr. Gay stated that it can be difficult if you don't know what you are looking at, however we have a lot of templates we have developed and can plug into one of those. Chairman Threadgill asked if Mr. Cawthorne and staff would get the information together. Commissioner Worsley stated that he didn't want to be here again at the end of June talking about this. Vice Chairman King stated this was the purpose of the Work Session and he understood that things didn't go that quick, but they need this to go quicker than normal because when we come back 2-3 months later still talking about this, it is a waste. Mr. Gay stated that is why we're here today to talk to the Board and get direction. Commissioner Worsley stated we have to get some traction on some things. Mr. Gay stated they are ready to go and agreed. Vice Chairman King stated we could always reach out to Barry and Bill and let them know we have a situation. Chairman Threadgill stated the Board doesn't need to reach out to anyone but Michelle. Vice Chairman King stated that is what he means, and she can reach out to Barry and Public Works to get things taken care of as quickly as possible. Commissioner Worsley asked if there was anything in place that allows Administrator Irizarry to approve work that needs to be done on situations similar to those Vice Chairman King referred to previously. Chairman Threadgill stated that we have always done that type of work inhouse and not contracted it out. Administrator Irizarry stated this would prequalify the contractors, putting them on a list after checking all of the background information as opposed to just reaching out to A or B company and waiting on them to provide us with their insurance coverage and everything we need. Mr. Gay explained considering an emergency with a low dollar amount, we could move forward without having to go through the bid process. Commissioner Worsley asked what qualifies as an emergency. Mr. Gay states that if an ambulance can't get through, that would qualify as an emergency. Commissioner Worsley asked if there is anything in place now that would allow us to ease the burden and make citizens more comfortable in the progress we are making. Chairman Threadgill stated the Board has an obligation to protect every citizen in the County and provide them with necessary services. County Attorney Michael Hill stated that it is important to trust in Administration and staff to make decisions. Vice Chairman King stated that the word Mr. Hill is looking for is impassable. Commissioner Worsley stated that he doesn't feel that his question is getting answered. He states that he feels that in the example of Jimmy Clark road, which has been repaired, what would we do in that

situation if there was no access and an ambulance needed to get down the road? Commissioner Worsley stated based on what Mr. Gay stated being an emergency. Mr. Gay stated that his comment regarding an emergency was referring to how we determined what would be needed and the question from Commissioner Worsley was what constitutes an emergency? Mr. Gay stated he would say again that if an ambulance couldn't get through or someone was trapped. Mr. Gay stated that he agrees with the Attorney and thinks you will have to trust the staff to be able to do that and after a list of vendors is in place and there are problematic areas then we can use one of the qualified vendors in the event Public Works can't get to it. Mr. Gay stated that we want to get the vendors qualified because the last thing we want to happen is to get someone out on the job that doesn't know what they are doing. Commissioner Worsley stated he understood all of that but was trying to make sure the wheels of government are not grinding this down to a halt where we don't get this done as efficiently as we could. Commissioner Worsley just wanted to make sure that we have something in place to get some of these things done and stated he wasn't trying to be accusatory or critical. Mr. Gay stated that we want to get these things done as well but as a private citizen we can call our own contractor, but in government we have to go the extra step because we are spending someone else's money. Commissioner Worsley stated he understood, and we are heading down the right track but wants to know if that could be sped up as well. Chairman Threadgill stated that we also have to look at the fact that there is not just roads we have to deal with every day and there is so much that staff deals with on a daily basis and it is not intentional if there is a delay but with 80 different things happening, there is only so many hours in the day. Commissioner Worsley stated that it was important that we look at some of those delays and knock down those barriers in order to streamline the process. Chairman Threadgill stated that the Board of Commissioners are a policy and budget board handling policies and the budget and other than that, trusting our Administrator to do the rest. Commissioner Worsley stated that he in no way by stating this is saying he has a lack of confidence in the Administrator but was just looking for ways in which we can help the Administrator do more. Administrator Irizarry stated that is the purpose of the Work Session. Commissioner Worsley stated that he trusts the Administrator but wants her to have the ability to do more. Chairman Threadgill stated that he stated what he stated because the Board is a policy and budget Board by law. Mr. Gay stated that staff is there to help Michelle and the Board do whatever needs to be done and save money as well. Mr. Gay stated that writing the contracts out, doing the specs, and doing the design saves the taxpayers.

**Dirt Road Priorities:** Mr. Gay stated that he will go over the list and numbers that Mr. Cawthorne put together and he appreciates him doing so. Mr. Gay stated that one of the projects or priorities is Beulah Evans Road and we are on the verge of getting done and have one more property owner we are waiting on. Mr. Gay stated this was about a \$1.5 million dollar project, which has about 60 homes or so off of it that will be paved. Mr. Gay explained that County Ordinance was changed to not allow dirt roads for a subdivision as the dirt roads cannot handle the traffic. Mr. Gay explained that three other roads had been paved and we are ready to get the deeds certified by the Attorney and bring them back before the Board of Commissioners. Mr. Gay stated that he and Mr. Cawthorne will go out and complete a layout of the project, prepare a bid package and get this bid out as this is something the previous Board had committed to complete. Chairman Threadgill stated that he thought it was \$1 million as per all the previous conversations. Mr. Gay stated that things have gone up and he hopes it comes in at \$1 million but there is money budgeted to fund the project. Mr. Gay stated they also have a list of dirt roads for repair and that one of the problems is we have a lot of dirt roads that don't have a lot of gravel and haven't been graded or had the pipes replaced in a long time, which causes problems when the ditches fill up and run over the road, cutting a ditch in the road. Mr. Gay stated he feels the main problem is there is not enough gravel and when it rains, he has been on some of the roads in a 4-wheel drive and felt like he was going to slide in a ditch because it is like driving on ice with the red mud. Mr. Gay stated staff felt a project that would work, being all covered under TSPLOST, to improve the dirt roads substantially, would be to address some of the most highly traveled dirt roads and ones that have the most citizens living on, would be to contract and let out a bid on these roads. Mr. Gay stated this would be for the contractors to go in, pull the ditches, regrade the road, and put down a substantial amount of gravel, turning it into a gravel road instead of dirt. Mr. Gay stated in speaking with Mr. Cawthorne, this would help the maintenance and

would be a good way to get some of the recurrent roads taken care of. Chairman Threadgill asked if we could get a list of roads, specifications and have another Work Session to assess. Vice Chairman King stated what he wanted was to have a list of priority dirt roads to inspect and if the drainage ditches were dug out properly and a wherever there is a crushed and bent pipe fixed. Vice Chairman King stated that he has seen where they move the dirt, and the pipe becomes completely closed up. He stated citizens call him all the time when water is flowing on top of the road instead of through the pipe and feels these need to be addressed first. Chairman Threadgill stated there has been a long running issue with the ditches not being dug out properly. Vice Chairman King stated that the County is not going to get a motor grader operator for \$16, \$17, and \$18 dollars per hour as qualified motor grader operators are going to work for \$22, \$25, and \$28 dollar per hour elsewhere. Vice Chairman King stated that qualified and talented motor grader operators are not coming her for \$16-\$17 dollars per hour. Mr. Gay stated that we are trying to be proactive on these issues, especially those that are serving the most homes to hopefully prevent a call when the next storm system comes through that the road is impassable. Mr. Gay stated there are a lot of dirt roads in the County. Mr. Cawthorne described two projects that Public Works was able to take care of that are still working fine today. Mr. Gay stated this would be a way to help get ahead of the game and we have TSPLOST dollars that have to be used on transportation. Mr. Gay stated this would be an immediate impact to the residents that live on the road. Commissioner Plant wanted to confirm that what Mr. Gay is meaning is that they would obtain a list of dirt roads that could be contracted out do 5-10 roads. Commissioner Plant asked if this was to contract the work out. Mr. Gay stated that was correct. Commissioner Plant asked if this would get us ahead of the curve and felt this would make a huge difference in the number of calls and tends to be the same roads and same problem. Commissioner Worsley asked if there was a way to get neighboring counties to help come in and contract to do some of the work if they are fully staffed. Chairman Threadgill asked if the prison system had any crews that could help. Mr. Gay stated that the prison system usually only has a construction crew and other counties have a lot of work to do themselves. Mr. Gay stated that Coweta County has a prison camp and Troup has let theirs go. Chairman Threadgill stated if this is contracted out, could the contractor use our gravel since it would already be paid for. Mr. Gay stated that would be ideal as well as we could avoid paying taxes. Vice Chairman King stated this was what he was referring too and if there were jobs that required a contractor to bring in a skid steer, maybe that contractor could coordinate with Michelle what they needed as far as gravel and Michelle coordinate with Public Works to have gravel on the site and then Bill Cawthorne sign off on the work. Chairman Threadgill stated there will be times when the County won't have the size gravel needed, but he didn't want to get into the habit of paying for gravel on every job if the County has it. Chairman Threadgill stated any materials that we can provide, we provide, and the contracted company provide the labor. Mr. Gay asked that the Board review the list that was provided to them. Mr. Cawthorne provided the Board with a list of potential dirt roads. Administrator Irizarry also provided the Board with Pages 5, 6, and 43 of the 2023 Meriwether County Resurfacing Project regarding for informational purposes as well as the GDOT project list. Deputy Clerk Allyson Stephens explained to the Board that this was already sent for advertisement and would be advertised in the newspaper for two weeks and then go to bid. Administrator Irizarry stated that this gives the Board a list of projects from GDOT through 2028. Commissioner Plant asked if Administrator Irizarry knew when the project for Coleman Creek would start. Administrator Irizarry stated she had not heard anything and only saw the sign turned off and trash bags covering other signage. Commissioner Plant stated that she heard there was a problem obtaining signage. Vice Chairman King asked if Administrator Irizarry had reached out to GDOT regarding Alvaton. Administrator Irizarry stated that she reached out to Harland, and Harland reached out to someone else and sent her an email to see the reply. Administrator Irizarry stated that she took a snip-it of that and can forward him the email. Administrator Irizarry stated that Vice Chairman King is referring to the two-way stop at Hwy 362 and Hwy 85 in Alvaton. Administrator Irizarry asked GDOT to share any traffic study that has been done by GDOT with staff and if one had not been done, she requested a traffic study on that location. Mr. Gay stated he had a RFP proposal on a construction project that is being finalized that he will share with the Board tomorrow regarding the jail roof. Mr. Gay stated he would like to move forward with getting RFP's out on the dirt road projects as well.

**III. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Administrator Irizarry stated there was a need for Executive Session for Litigation, Personnel, and Real Estate. A motion was made to go into Executive Session at 4:56 p.m. by Commissioner Worsley and seconded by Commissioner Plant. All were in favor.

A motion was made by Commissioner Plant and seconded by Vice Chairman King to go out of Executive Session at 5:42 p.m. All were in favor.

There was no action taken in Executive Session.

**IV. CONCLUSION OF MEETING**

The Work Session concluded at 5:42 p.m.

Approved by: Majority vote of the Board of Commissioners

Attest: Beverly A. Thomas, County Clerk

Date: May 10, 2023