

County Meeting
October 17, 2024 6:00pm
Minutes
Union County Courthouse

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Paris at 6:02 pm. The Commissioner welcomed everyone to the meeting and announced that there were a few changes at the beginning of the agenda, but they would make it as smooth as possible. The invocation was then given by Scotty Thompson, Recreation Director, and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Bill Walker. Commissioner Paris thanked Bill Walker for leading the pledge for many years and offered prayers for his wife who recently had to move her residence to the nursing home. The minutes from the September 19, 2024 Called Meeting and the September 23, 2024 Called Meeting were approved as presented, and attendees were provided copies. The minutes from the September 19, 2024 County Meeting will be approved at the next County Meeting as they were not fully prepared by meeting time.

Commissioner Paris then added an item to the agenda and asked Kevin Sampson, Chair of the Union County Pickleball Club, to come to the front. A presentation was made earlier in the day to the county by the Pickleball Club and Commissioner Paris asked them to do the same presentation at the County Meeting.

Mr. Sampson's comments are summarized as follows: Every year the Pickleball Club hosts a tournament and we raise funds for a local charity that we would like to help fund. This year we spoke with Scotty Thompson, Lamar and Larry Garrett and we raised money for the Webster Fund which has been in place for many years. This fund allows kids in our county who cannot afford to play recreational sports the opportunity to play recreational sports. The influx of new residents has brought in a lot of new kids and the funds in the Webster Fund were dwindling down drastically. Lamar and Scotty always make sure these kids get to play and we raised money for that fund this year. The tournament takes a lot of work, but it is something we are going to continue to work on with the County so we can give back to Union County.

The Pickleball Club then presented a check to Union County for the Ed Webster Fund in the amount of \$19,572.00.

Commissioner Paris thanked Mr. Sampson and the Pickleball Club and stated that not only have the Pickleballers donated this money but they are always doing things and working with the County. They have one of the most awesome clubs and club members. They enjoy the sport whether they are winning or losing. This tournament was a three day tournament and it was packed all weekend. The Union County Pickleball Club has gotten the reputation of being one of the better clubs in the entire region because of the events they do and the work they do in the community.

Commissioner Paris announced that the Rotary Club was present at the meeting for the presenting of a Proclamation and asked Pat Deluca, Rotary President, to come up. Rotary does a lot for the County and the Commissioner asked Mr. Deluca to read the Proclamation.

Mr. Deluca, Union County Rotary President introduced himself and the Foundation Chair, Ed Sternburg along with his wife, Kathy. Mr. Deluca then read the Proclamation for World Polio Day as follows:

WHEREAS, Rotary is a global network of neighbors, friends, leaders, and problem-solvers, who unite and take action to create lasting change in communities across the globe; and
WHEREAS, the Rotary motto, Service Above Self, inspires members to provide humanitarian service, follow high ethical standards, and promote goodwill and peace in the world; and
WHEREAS, Rotary in 1985 launched PolioPlus and in 1988 helped establish the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, which today includes the World Health Organization, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, UNICEF, and the Gates Foundation, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to immunize the children of the world against polio; and
WHEREAS, polio cases have dropped by 99.0 percent since 1988 and the world stands on the threshold of eradicating the disease; and
WHEREAS, to date, Rotary contributed more than 2.7 billion US dollars and countless volunteer hours to protecting nearly 3 billion children in 122 countries, and
WHEREAS, Rotary is working to raise an additional \$50 million per year, which will be leveraged for maximum impact by an additional \$100 million annually from the Gates Foundation; and
WHEREAS, these efforts are providing much-needed operational support, medical staff, laboratory equipment, and educational material for health workers and parents; and
WHEREAS, in addition, Rotary has played a major role in decisions by donor governments to contribute more than \$10 billion to the effort; and
WHEREAS, there are over 1.4 million Rotary members in 46,000 clubs (Mr. Deluca interjected that the Union County Rotary Club has 33 members) throughout the world that sponsor service projects to address such critical issues as poverty, disease, hunger, illiteracy, and the environment in their local communities and abroad.

Commissioner Paris then proclaimed October 24, 2024 as World Polio Day in Union County and encouraged all citizens to join Rotary International in the fight for a polio-free world.

The Commissioner proclaimed October 13, 2024 as St. Clare's Episcopal Church Day. St. Clare's Episcopal Church began in 1984 when a local group of Episcopalians appealed to the Bishop of Atlanta to come up to the mountains and take communion to local Episcopalians in the nursing home. The first official church service was held on October 7, 1984, using the facilities of the First United Methodist Church on Cleveland Street. St. Clare's Episcopal Church built their own facility on Ledford Road in 1995. St. Clare's has shared its resources with helping agencies located in Union County such as Hope House, Helping Hand Community Clinic, the Ecumenical Food Pantry, SAFE, Union County Senior Center, Family Connection and they donated 2 acres to the Mountain Learning and Child Care Center for its facility. St. Clare's also shares its resources by providing English classes for adults, building beds for children in need and by making blankets for the homeless. St. Clare's celebrated its 40th Anniversary Festive Eucharist on Sunday, October 13, 2024 and Commissioner Paris presented this Proclamation to them on September 29, 2024.

Commissioner Paris accepted a Renewal Addendum between Windstream (WIN) and Union County for the services provided to remain at the same pricing that was in effect during the May

2024 billing cycle. This renewal addendum will cause discounts and reoccurring credits to remain in effect versus moving Union County to a month-to-month term that would cause an increase above base rates. The term of this Renewal Addendum is sixty months from September 26, 2024.

Commissioner Paris accepted an Agreement between Geo-Hydro Engineers, Inc. and Union County for subsurface exploration and geotechnical engineering evaluation for the site of the new Union County 911 Center on Shoe Factory Road. The cost of this agreement is \$10,500 with an effective date of September 26, 2024. The 911 Center planning is still in process and the County is getting closer to having the final plans. This project should be ready to go to bid soon.

Everyone was provided a copy of the list of Business Licenses issued in Union County from September 16, 2024 to October 13, 2024 for the purpose of operating a Short-term Rental in Union County. The Commissioner approved all Business Licenses contained on the list provided and this will be made a part of the minutes.

Commissioner Paris accepted Contract Amendment #001 between Winkler and Winkler, Inc. and Union County to amend the existing contract dated August 24, 2023 for construction of the Multi-Purpose Gym next to the Voting Center. This amendment will add the construction of a new pre-engineered steel building to be constructed at the Union County Transfer Station to house the new baler. This Contract Amendment is in the amount of \$339,900 and has an effective date of October 8, 2024. Commissioner Paris asked Pam Hawkins to give further details on this.

Purchasing Agent and SPLOST Project Coordinator, Pam Hawkins' comments are summarized as follows: Union County typically does not have to do a contract amendment like this but toward the end of August we put out an RFP (Request for Proposal) for a contractor to construct a metal building at the Union County Transfer Station that would house the big baler that the County purchased with SPLOST money. When we put the RFP out, it was advertised for four weeks in the local paper, on the county website, and through the Georgia Procurement Registry. When the proposal due date came on September 18, 2024, we received zero proposals. So, nobody was interested in putting together a proposal to do the work. We could have waited a while and put it back out to bid to see if we could receive any response, but we also have a baler coming in the next two to 3 months. We need the building built. The only contractor we had under contract was Chad Winkler with Winkler and Winkler, Inc. who is working on the gym project. We asked him to provide a proposal to do the metal building. He got with a contractor locally, gave us a price of \$339,000, so we just added that contract amendment to his current gym project contract. It is another project, but Winkler and Winkler, Inc. is going to be able to do it for us. They are bonded, insured and already under contract.

Commissioner Paris stated it is always good, when you do something out of the ordinary, to be sure that everyone understands what it is and how the County is doing it. He elaborated that citizens can be assured Union County always tries to get the best price and the best deal on whatever they are doing.

The Commissioner adopted Resolution R-2024-18 declaring a local state of emergency in Union County, Georgia on September 26, 2024 at 1:00 pm. This Declaration of Emergency recognizes that significant damage could have occurred in parts of Union County due to the storms and flooding that were predicted to happen during the late night and early morning of September 27th, 2024. As you know we were blessed that we didn't get the worst damage, but we did have some. The declaration allows Union County Government to request assistance and reimbursement funding from the State of Georgia and FEMA in the event that damage from the storms and flooding on September 26th and 27th would qualify for reimbursements to cover the cost to the county for their cleanup efforts and repairs. Continue to think about the people in North Carolina, South Georgia and Florida, for all that they went through. We were very blessed since that storm was coming right toward us. We are thankful that we didn't have the damage, but we have also tried to help those that had damage. I know a lot of you out here have provided funding and assistance and we have tried to help here at the Courthouse here also.

Rob Medwed requested to be placed on the agenda to speak regarding the North Georgia Tri-State Amateur Radio Club including Ham Radio and Emergency Services. Mr. Medwed came to the front and his comments are summarized as follows: We all saw the devastation and destruction that Hurricane Helene inflicted on the area. As the Commissioner said that could have been us. Unfortunately, next time it might be us. We also saw a very dismal response, not to get political, by the federal government. In the event of a disaster, just know, we might be on our own for a while. In addition to the loss of life and property, those impacted by the storm also lost electricity, water, cell phones, land lines and cell towers. Essentially all communications ceased. You just lost your family member, your friend, your home and people had no idea if and when help was coming. Those tasked with providing that hope had no communication with those impacted by the storm. What help was needed and where. Not knowing this made this tragedy so much worse. I am a licensed amateur radio operator. Commonly referred to as ham radio and a member of the North Georgia Tri-State Amateur Radio Club. This club is also a part of the Amateur Radio Emergency Services Network which are groups of ham radio operators across North America who are licensed and trained and ready to volunteer their time and equipment whenever they are needed. The Amateur Radio Services Group was activated prior to the storm up there. They volunteered countless hours to go up and help wherever they could. In the event of a big disaster like this, commercial communication systems fail. However, ham radio can function completely independent of commercial power, the internet, cell phones and land lines. These radio stations can be self-contained and ham radio operators can step in to provide a crucial link between those in affected areas and those in the outside world. Ham radio operators are frequently called upon to coordinate large scale relief efforts. They provide critical information to emergency management officials and help direct resources where they are needed most. Ham radio operators can provide information about victims, supplies needed, damage to authorities and family members outside the affected area. Hams can also be assigned to operate from emergency operation centers, hospitals, shelters, and other critical sites to provide communications. What if this event happened here in Union County? Chief Dyer is not here today but I want to thank him. A lot of training goes into planning and setting up an Emergency Management Agency. Our county has contingency plans for almost any event. Additionally, our radio club has emergency communications equipment already stationed up in the Emergency Operations Center in Station 1. It is ready to go, quickly, should Chief Dyer decide to activate it. All that equipment is supplied at no charge to the county by the North Georgia Tri-State Amateur

Radio Club. We are a small non-profit that just enjoys the hobby of ham radio. The radio station has its own power, and it can broadcast help messages in or out on any ham frequency across the county or around the world. We also have an additional radio station set up at the hospital should that be needed. Beyond communications during emergencies, the radio club also helps with large community events such as the Six Gap Bicycle event, the Duncan Ridge Trail Run and the Georgia Death Race. Since cell service in this area can be spotty at best, ham radio operators are stationed throughout the event course to pass along information or provide emergency communications. Commissioner Paris and Chief Dyer have been to several of our events. As a licensed radio operator and a member of this community I appreciate the support that the Commissioner and Chief Dyer provide by coordinating with us to provide backup emergency communications should regular communications fail. To those here tonight, just know that this community is a safer place because of the partnership between Union County Government, licensed ham radio operators and the North Georgia Tri-State Amateur Radio Club. If anyone is interested in learning more about the club or getting licensed check out the clubs website or Facebook page.

Commissioner Paris stated this is another group that the general public does not know is out there and it can be used. There were horrible stories from up in Asheville where people lost complete communications. They had no idea that such a storm was going to be there and that it was going to happen. They may not have had the communications that we have here as a backup. Whereas it does not completely replace the phone or cell phone we appreciate this club very much for putting in time and effort to make the county safer.

Ed Crenshaw requested to be placed on the agenda to speak regarding the Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park and the veterans group. Mr. Crenshaw's comments are summarized as follows: I am the Project Manager for the Appalachian Veteran's Memorial Park Project. If you are not familiar with the park site, it is right next to the ballfields on the hill in Meeks Park. We assembled a project team back in early 2022 and started planning. We were fortunate to get a retired Navy CEC Officer and a retired architect that I knew from the military days. He drew the plans up pro bono, and they didn't cost us a dime. This would have been a big expense. Then we started fundraising and that has probably been the hardest thing we have done in the project. Over the next two years with the help of many individuals in the county and the area we were able to start construction this past summer. The preconstruction grading was donated by one of the local contractors. We then contracted with Ben's Concrete Creations who poured fifty-seven yards of stamped concrete. They also custom cut and stamped a forty-foot compass rose. They also did a stamped concrete walkway with a kneeling soldier and an American Flag. The next step was the installation of the eight flagpoles. The American Flag, the Georgia State Flag and military branch flags will be on these poles. We spent most of our money on the concrete pour. The flagpoles were going to cost us another \$18,500 that we didn't have, but we put out the word. One of our local veterans donated all the money for the flagpoles in recognition of his son who had recently passed away. The flags will soon be flying. The remaining part of phase one is the landscaping. We are working with a local company who may be able to donate the shrubbery. The next phase will be the installation of the brick monument and the bricks that individuals have been purchasing will go in this monument. You can still purchase a brick for a loved one or a veteran. We will then put in a monument around the compass rose for each branch of service. That will complete the second phase. The final phase will be a meandering

walkway that stops at each veteran's service organization as they will all have their own dedicated space. Benches will also be placed throughout the park. We would like to have a pavilion in the future, but this is an ongoing monumental project. The generous donations from individuals and businesses are helping move us in the right direction. We are a 501c3 nonprofit and no one on our team draws a salary. You can follow the project plan on our website at www.theveteranspark.org. I appreciate your time.

Commissioner Paris stated that he appreciates all this group has done. This project will be something to be proud of in Meeks Park. This is a great area of the park for this project, and Union County is very proud of the progress they have made.

Commissioner Paris stated that he just got back from a meeting with the Association of Tennessee Valley Governments. They meet about three times per year. One of the gentlemen that came was a commissioner in one of the worst hit areas of North Carolina. Some of the other counties near them helped with sending helicopters to rescue people. It is just a reminder that you can plan for anything, but when you have 15-30 inches of rain fall, landslides, destroyed roads and no phones or cell service there is not much you can do.

The Commissioner reminded everyone to go vote. Early voting started on Tuesday and Union County had a record number of early voters. There will be a record number of people voting in this election. Commissioner Paris closed stating that it does not matter who you vote for just go vote and remind your friends and family.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:43 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Jennifer Mahan, County Clerk

Approved this ____ day of _____, _____

Lamar Paris, Commissioner