

**FRANKLIN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
PUBLIC HEARING (Weems Memorial)
FRANKLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX
OCTOBER 7, 2014
5:00 PM**

MINUTES

Commissioners: Cheryl Sanders - Chairman, William Massey - Vice Chairman, Pinki Jackel, Noah Lockley, and Joseph Parrish

Others Present: Alan Pierce – Director of Administrative Services, Michael Shuler – County Attorney, Michael Morón – Deputy Clerk to the Board

Call to Order

Mike Cooper, Weems' CEO, called the Public Hearing to order. He explained that Weems Hospital is in need of renovation. He described some of the problems with building structure and operation of the Hospital. He distributed and reviewed a handout that contained information on the proposed renovation then provided some history on what has been done thus far to get to where the Hospital is today.

Donna Butterfield, a St. George Island resident, stated that at a past meeting she asked the County Commission not to agree to a contract that would hire CSS to provide services to the Hospital but CSS was hired. She stated that CSS has yet to provide the services to Weems and doesn't think that CSS is licensed to do business in Florida. She suggested that the County consider a triage, treat, and transport service instead of the renovation project that is being discussed today. Mrs. Butterfield explained her recommendation further.

Mr. Cooper explained that CSS doesn't need the license Mrs. Butterfield is referring to provide the services they are contracted to do for Weems. He stated that her recommendation is very similar to what is being presented today.

Marie Marshall, a resident of Apalachicola, stated some of her previous experience with Health Care and stated that she was in favor of upgrading the facility, but not at the cost of \$10 million. She recommended meeting with a neighboring county's hospital to collaborate on this project.

Allen Feifer, of APTA, and Mr. Cooper discussed the drawing of the renovation project and how it relates to the Hospital's budget. He stated that healthcare is more important than a new hospital to the residents of Franklin County. He stated that the lack of confidence in

management and financial projections are some of his concerns, which he discussed in more detail with Mr. Cooper. Mr. Feifer commented on other issues regarding the project, and discussed the possibility of the County losing Critical Access Designation.

Mr. Graham, Weems CFO, responded to some of the issues raised by Mr. Feifer and provided projection information regarding Weems financial status. Mr. Cooper also commented on some of Mr. Feifer's concerns and stated that a newer facility is needed to attract more doctors and provide more services.

Gail Riegelmayr, a St. George Island resident, asked for a more detailed explanation regarding the process of the USDA application. She also asked about the feedback from this public hearing, if adequate healthcare could be provided with a less expensive renovation project, and how will and under what conditions would the USDA loan be paid back.

Mr. Cooper stated that USDA required this public hearing as the final step before a decision is made on the application and that the funding would be about the same for the triage, treat, transport suggestion that was made earlier during the meeting as the renovation project that is being discussed today. He explained the construction and funding process further.

Mrs. Riegelmayr suggested that the County allow some time to pass before moving forward on this project, especially since both the CEO and CFO are new hires.

Mr. Cooper responded to her suggestion.

Mr. Cooper and Mrs. Riegelmayr discussed the current status and future improvement to the ambulance service and other services offered at the Hospital.

Jim Bachrach, of the Hospital Board, explained that the current state of the Hospital building is a contributing factor to the inadequate healthcare that is being provided.

Bobby Miller, of Apalachicola, stated that a majority of the people of the County voted to build a new hospital, he was in favor of it, and the County Commission should move forward.

Sam Childers, a resident and contractor who recently built a hospital in Madison County, stated that USDA would not approve a loan if the County wasn't able to repay it. He stated that Madison County would be a good resource if anyone wanted to ask questions.

Cliff Butler, a resident and a member of the hospital foundation board, stated that if we don't build a better hospital healthcare will get worse in the County. He stated additional problems and increased cost the County will experience if we don't improve the Hospital.

Commissioner Jackel explained that if residents of the County use an out of County hospital, Franklin County becomes responsible for your cost, and discussed further.

Chairman Sanders stated that FAC is trying to cap the amount owed by some of the smaller counties that Commissioner Jackel is referring to.

Commissioner Parrish spoke further about the Hospital renovation project, including those who are for and against the project and their reasons for their concerns and opinions. He stated

that the taxpayers of this County voted to tax themselves to improve healthcare in the County so the Hospital project needs to move forward.

Commissioner Lockley agreed with Commissioner Parrish's comments.

Commissioner Parrish asked if it is a possibility to use some of the Capital Outlay fund to pay down on the loan. Mr. Cooper explained the planned use for the Capital Outlay Fund.

Mr. Feifer stated that the ballot language that was approved by the taxpayers did state that a new hospital will be built but wanted to know what would happen if USDA denies the loan.

Mr. Cooper responded.

Mr. Feifer stated that the Hospital has to do something about the self pays or non-paying customers.

Commissioner Jackel stated that the insured customers are using newer facilities outside of the County which affects Weems financial status, and commented on other healthcare projects completed by the Board, such as the Carrabelle center. She congratulated Mr. Cooper on his presentation today and the job he has done thus far. Commissioner Jackel discussed the economic importance and the need for of the Hospital to the County and stated that she supports the hospital and building a new facility, primarily because a majority of the voters approved it during an election.

Barbara Holmes, a resident, was in favor of the hospital as she has received excellent service there and stated that there is a need to provide healthcare services for those living in the County that cannot afford it.

Jan Roberts, who moved to the County, has a daughter who has a medical condition that has received very good care at Weems. Her daughter stated that Weems has a PR problem because she was afraid to use Weems when they first moved to the County but after she actually used Weems it was a very good experience.

Mr. Cooper commented further on the renovation project thanked everyone for their comments and attending the public hearing.

Cheryl A Sanders, Chairman – FCBOCC

Attest:

Marcia M. Johnson – Clerk of Courts