



Cherokee County Board of Commissioners WORK SESSION MINUTES

December 2, 2014

3:00 p.m. | Cherokee Hall

The Chairman began at 3:04 p.m. Those present included Commissioner Harry B. Johnston; Commissioner Raymond Gunnin; Commissioner Brian Poole; Commissioner Jason Nelms; County Manager, Jerry Cooper; County Clerk, Christy Black. Also present were Agency Directors/Department Heads; the media; and the public. County Attorney, Angie Davis arrived late at 3:10 p.m.

1. Cherokee County Division of Family and Children Services presentation by Charity Kemp, Director.

Ms. Kemp began by stating she wanted to get out the positives about DFCS to counter the negative attention they receive. She went over the office positions that make up DFCS and the Board of Directors. Ms. Kemp stated they have two different programs. The Office of Family Independence (OFI) takes care of benefits such as TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), Food Stamps, Medicaid, Childcare, Heat/Christmas Assistance, and Resource Assistance. Social Services cover the State Child Abuse Hotline, Family Support, Child Protection Services (CPS) Investigations, Family Preservation Services, Foster Care Services, Adoptions, and Foster Care Recruitments.

Ms. Kemp shared changes for DFCS this year. They branched out of the DHR umbrella and have a direct link of an appointed Commissioner, Bobby Cagle, that reports directly to the Governor. They started their family support cases to help families in need of resources and community support. They also started the State intake child abuse hotline. OFI services such as Medicaid and food stamps can be applied for locally but are processed remotely as a State program. Clients can apply at various locations or they can apply online.

Ms. Kemp went over the positive outcomes such as increased accessibility to services, resources, and support for families; increased independence and overall wellbeing; increased positive family functioning for better family life which reduces child abuse and child fatalities; and permanency outcomes for the children which can be through reunifying with a parent, guardianships, permanent custody or

adoptions. In the last 24 months, Cherokee County finalized about 45 adoptions. Ms. Kemp provided a chart showing the increase in intakes in the last year, which nearly doubled and increased the workload.

Ms. Kemp shared various statistics for annual benefits issued in Cherokee County by OFI. In the last year, OFI provided benefits on a monthly average for 111 families, 18 adults, 189 children, and 207 recipients. The total benefits distributed in Cherokee County were \$345,410 for 2013. Food stamps are one of DFCS's biggest areas serving over 23 million annually in over 10 million households. The average benefit per family was \$288.58. The total number of Medicaid applications during the last year was 668,642. In Cherokee County, the number of CPS reports was 152 in July and 239 in October of this year. There were zero child fatalities or serious injury reports. Ms. Kemp stated that the County averages about 80 Family Preservation Cases a month. She also shared a graph showing the increase in foster care totals for the State at 9,602 youth as of September 2014.

Ms. Kemp went over various challenges of DFCS. Cherokee County is a part of Region 3 which has the highest number of foster children in the State, Cherokee County has the highest number in the Region. As a region, they have 220 children in childcare institutes throughout the state and the caseworkers for these children have to travel once a month to meet the childcare providers face-to-face. There are 391 children in foster care in the County averaging about 25 a month. Ten of these children are 18 and older and are voluntarily remaining in foster care. Cherokee County has only about 60 foster homes which offer about 106 beds. There are over 130 children who have been placed with relatives. DFCS works with Goshen Valley Boys Ranch but they have a limited number of beds.

Other challenges presented which includes inadequate technology; huge increase in referrals and the number of cases with the State intake line; extremely high caseloads; high-stress and long hours with limited compensation; potential dangerous situations; and high staff turnover rates, which delays permanency for a child or family. Ms. Kemp addressed things the Commissioners can do to help DFCS such as a newer facility to accommodate the staff adequately. The Cherokee County DFCS office is number one on the State's list needing a new building. They currently have three caseworkers per office; contact them when there is an issue with receiving benefits so they can assist clients in a timely manner; talk to legislators and advocate for higher pay and lower caseloads; talk to local community partners about recruiting additional foster homes; and recruit local DFCS employees.

Chairman Ahrens asked for the main reasons for such a high turnover rate, whether stress or pay. Ms. Kemp replied that it is a combination of long hours, low

pay, high demand, rare time off, and everything is crisis driven. The Chairman asked when they receive a call to go out to a home if they contact the Sheriff's Office and have someone go out with them. Ms. Kemp responded that they average about 10-20 calls a day and they call law enforcement if there are primary safety concerns, but only in severe cases. She added that they have a small after-hours unit that serves from 5:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. that responds to calls during that time, but if they receive a large number of calls, they have to call out their regular employees. The Chairman asked what size space they are looking for, ideally. Ms. Kemp replied that currently the State is asking enough space to hold 6x6 cubicles; however, a 9x9 is still small. They require the ability to store volumes of files on each child and be able to have somewhere for families to sit. Ms. Kemp added that they anticipate a 250% increase in staff and the setting the State proposed will hold 70 employees and right now, they have 83 on staff.

Commissioner Nelms asked the selection criteria they use and what they look for in a foster family. Ms. Kemp responded that there is an orientation they can attend to give them an idea of the process such as fingerprints, background checks, medicals, and a home study. If they are still interested at that point, they will go through impact training and modules of teachings and the backgrounds equipped to deal with the children. This gives prospects an opportunity to decide what type of child they could manage effectively and they have the option of the criteria of a child they choose to take. They would have to have an income where they can provide the children outside of the minimal reimbursements they would receive from the State. Ms. Kemp added that you really have to have a passion for the kids as most have been through so much trauma and have developed coping mechanisms as a result. She mentioned there is a foster parent association in the County to provide support for each other. Commissioner Nelms asked how many children that are housed outside of the County. Ms. Kemp replied that it would be around 150 and the rest in various locations such as a mental facility. She added there are times when other counties will call them looking for placement for a child in their custody. The Chairman asked if anyone in the audience had any questions. Chief Vic West commended Cherokee County DFCS for the job that they do for families and children. He encouraged the Board to visit the DFCS office.

2. Update on progress of Outlet Shoppes by Marketing Director, Charlie Brennan.

Ms. Brennan first introduced Ms. Meliza Whitfield, then began by stating they are very pleased with where they are and the growth is exceeding their expectations. She indicated they have been up double digits in traffic every month since August. They currently have 98 stores making up 97% of their space leased. She stated

that they are preleasing for the second phase. She also shared that a couple of restaurants are opening this month and one next spring. The Chairman asked if the opening of Cabela's has effected them any. Ms. Brennan said they have not seen any change related to Cabela's. The Chairman mentioned he heard they had a shuttle service. Ms. Brennan confirmed that they did. She stated that it is a free service that runs in the morning then goes back in the afternoons. She added that on Sundays, they go to Georgia Tech and pick up students. Commissioner Nelms commented that he appreciated what they are doing and has noticed that parking is always full. Ms. Whitfield asked the Chairman if he would be attending the Menorah lighting again this year. The Chairman commented he would as he does most every year, but there is a BOC meeting that evening. He encouraged others to attend if they are able.

3. Topics for meeting with State Delegation on December 10th at 10:15 a.m. at the Chamber of Commerce-Terrace Level.

Chairman Ahrens mentioned a draft letter he had written to the delegation and asked the Commissioners if they had time to review it and if they had any questions. He commented that he thought about leaving off the subject of the RRDA, but decided to leave it on because they have a number of issues to handle with two of the members leaving. The Chairman stated that his main purpose was to give the delegation background on the HOST. He added that the timing needed refining. He stated that he will get the letter out the following day and include the two Commissioners-elect as well.

4. Discussion of Regular Agenda Items.

Chairman Ahrens asked the Commissioners if they had received the list of Boards and Committees with several upcoming Board appointments outside of the new Commissioners. He asked if they wanted to go ahead and vote on those appointments or wait until the new Board. The Chairman asked Ms. Davis her opinion. Ms. Davis replied that it could go either way. The Chairman stated he would get the list out to the Commissioners and they can decide by the next meeting.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. The Board of Commissioners will hear a request by applicants Blalock and Bruce to create a Legacy Lot on their property at 767 Old Mille Circle, Ball Ground (Tax Map 03N22, Parcel 028).

Ms. Vicki Taylor-Lee gave an overview of the case. She stated that the Bruce family would not be there but Blalock would be there. The Chairman asked Commissioner Johnston his thoughts on the case. Commissioner Johnston stated that unless someone in the area objects, he doesn't have a problem with it.

2. The Board of Commissioners will conduct a Public Hearing regarding the abandonment of a portion of Green Drive located in Land Lot 299 of the 14th District.

Ms. Davis mentioned that the advertisement for this ran after the election and outgoing Commissioners cannot vote on this. Mr. Geoff Morton stated that this portion of the road had once been deeded to the County in 2000 in hopes of improvement and expansion with a future development. The development never took place. The owner has requested it be abandoned. Mr. Morton added the County never maintained it.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

CHAIRMAN

L.B. AHRENS

- A. Re-appointment of Natalie Green to the Board of Ethics for a 7-year term. (Current term expires January 2015)
- B. Re-appointment of Danny West to the Region 1 EMS Board for another 2-year term. (Current term expires January 2015)

COUNTY MANAGER

Mr. Cooper went over the six items under the **County Manager** portion:

- 2.1 Consider approval of Agreement with the City of Ball Ground for the County to provide van service for the March of Toys for Tots on December 5, 2014.
- 2.2 Consider design services agreement with Moreland Altobelli Associates, Inc. for the Canton Road Sidewalk Project in the amount of \$73,420.00.
- 2.3 Consider modification of Personnel Policies regarding retiree medical.

Mr. Cooper stated this would be for an employee who has been with the County for at least 30 years, is in good standing, and they would receive employee-only medical premiums. Mr. Cooper added that he capped it at 2014 cost, but the Commissioners may choose to adjust that over time. The cost would be about \$5,200 a year. Ms. Davis made several suggestions for clarity. The first she suggested was to add "an employee who meets the tenure requirements set forth below" when speaking of the retired employee. The second suggestion was regarding the years of service to include "less than 30 years." Mr. Cooper asked if they decided to offer a deal as they did before, would they need an independent resolution. Ms. Davis said they would if it was a separate program. She added this may merit more discussion on that point. Ms. Davis commented that they may need to talk to the administrator since the plan indicates a partial payment by the County and they may bring back a plan amendment to make sure everything is consistent. Ms. Tracy Chambers interjected explaining that was written by a law firm when the County's insurance went self-funded and the reason it was written like that was because they had several different retirement incentives but prior to those incentives an employee could keep what they had. Ms. Davis stated that they will need to go back and address the question of full payment versus partial payment on behalf of the retiree. Ms. Davis asked if the County has ever paid out 100% with the current language. Mr. Cooper replied only for individuals who selected a retirement program. The Chairman asked if all was okay. Ms. Davis stated that they need to explore it a little further, but as a matter of policy, they are fine to go ahead vote on it, but will just need to make the plan document fit it. She added she and Ms. Chambers and Mr. Cooper can work on that.

- 2.4 Consider a four-year contract with Wells Fargo as the County's banking partner and allowing County Manager to execute three agreements required to form the relationship once approved by the County Attorney. Wells Fargo had the highest overall score of four proposals.
- 2.5 Consider resolution naming the east park located on Highway 20 near Water Tank Road and Jack Page Lane "Cherokee Veterans Park".

The Chairman stated that he would pass along a message on behalf of a couple living adjacent to the park, that they preferred it not be named Veterans Park but rather have a section of it dedicated to Veterans.

- 2.6 Consider Professional Services Agreement with Ten-8 in the amount of \$1,677,779.00 for the purchase of ten (10) Ten-8/Osage Ambulances over the next four years and authorize budget amendment from Fire SPLOST reserves in the amount of \$61,416.00.

Mr. Cooper stated that the primary reason Ten-8/Osage won was because of the warranty.

Chairman Ahrens indicated there has been a buzz going around about the Holly Springs re-zoning. It is 88 acres adjacent to the school with 230 homes. He asked Ms. Carolyn Mathews from the Cherokee Tribune if she could share anything from the meeting. Ms. Mathews stated there were just discussion of the County receiving a lot of phone calls and an issue of traffic. The Chairman stated that he felt there was enough concern by residents that he would pass on information that our staff is prepared. Commissioner Nelms confirmed that the average lot size is 7,500 square feet. Mr. Watkins stated it is 7,800 square feet. Commissioner Johnston mentioned that Barrett Farms across the street appears to be fairly comparable to what is proposed. Commissioner Gunnin commented that his concern was how the houses are set. He asked if it was from the front or just where. Mr. Watkins stated it is a side setback. Commissioner Gunnin stated that from a firefighting standpoint, the walls facing each other will have to be fire resistant with no opening, but any openings will have to be fire rated. He added that if one catches on fire, the next one will. Further discussion ensued concerning fire safety issues and other building projects.

ADJOURN

Hearing no further items, Commissioner Johnston made a motion to adjourn to Executive Session to discuss property acquisition, personnel matters, pending or threatened litigation. Commissioner Nelms seconded. The motion carried unanimously.