

HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION
5:30 P.M., MONDAY, JUNE 17, 2024
HABERSHAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE
JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM
295 LLEWELLYN ST, CLARKESVILLE, GA 30523

The Habersham County Board of Commissioners held a regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, June 17, 2024 at 5:30 p.m. in the Jury Assembly Room of the Habersham County Courthouse located at 295 Llewellyn St, Clarkesville, GA 30523.

Present was Chairman Ty Akins, Vice Chairman Bruce Harkness, Commissioner Bruce Palmer, Commissioner Dustin Mealor, Commissioner Jimmy Tench, County Manager Alicia Vaughn, Attorney Ralph Taylor, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, staff, members of the media and the public.

Chairman Akins called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

Commissioner Tench lead the invocation.

Commissioner Mealor lead the pledge of allegiance.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

a. Member Services Provided by the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC)

Ken Schubring, GMRC Chairman

Heather Feldman, GMRC Executive Director

Patrick Larson, GMRC Director of Economic Development

GMRC Chairman Ken Schubring introduced the Commission to GMRC's Executive Director Heather Feldman and Director of Economic Development Patrick Larson. Ms. Feldman gave the Commission background information regarding the mission of the GMRC. She informed them that every county and city in the state of Georgia is a member of one of twelve regional commissions, which were formed under state statutes. Habersham County is a due paying member of the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission. The GMRC in turn provides technical assistance to local governments with economic development by providing services such as grant writing, grant administration, revolving loan funds for small businesses and entrepreneurs, comprehensive planning, environmental planning, historic preservation, work force development, GIS and infrastructure mapping and more. Their primary focus for tonight's work session is to give the Commission more information on the grant services that the GMRC provides. While there is a small recovery fee for these services of around \$1,000-\$2,500 for an application it is much more affordable than the \$25,000-\$30,000 or more that would be spent with a private consultant. While she does not have the statistics for FY24, in FY23 the GMRC administered 15 different projects for a total of \$18 million in grants. They prepared 20 grant applications that yielded \$6 million back into the 12 counties that make up the GMRC. They were also responsible for writing the largest grant that has ever been awarded amongst the region for \$17.9 million. Ms. Feldman gave credit to GMRC Director of Economic Development Patrick Larson for having written this grant and invited him up to speak further on the topic of grant services that GMRC provides. Mr. Larson provided the Commission with a chart detailing several grants that the GMRC regularly works with that assist with projects ranging from infrastructure (water, sewer, solid waste, etc.) to parks and recreation. They encourage local governments to come to them with funding issues they are having with projects so that they can look and see if there is a grant that fits their needs. He informed the

Commission that the \$17.9 million grant that Ms. Feldman mentioned earlier was awarded to the City of Cleveland through a disaster allocation fund from the Economic Development Administration for the purpose of wastewater treatment plant upgrades. This not only benefits the City of Cleveland but brings this money back into the region. In addition to himself, the GMRC has two Project Managers and a full-time Grant Administrator who assists with grants. The Grant Administrator is particularly beneficial as she assists communities who do not have the capacity to keep up with the administrative requirements of the grants once they are awarded. He reminded the Commission that the GMRC has assisted Habersham County with grants before, citing as an example the 2017 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for expanding the senior center.

Commissioner Harkness asked if the County's Grant Administrator works in conjunction with the GMRC? County Manager Vaughn informed him that this would be dependent on the grant, but there are certainly several for which it would be beneficial to work with the GMRC. She reminded the Commission that there is a lot of required reporting on the end of the County when they get awarded a grant and that it remains beneficial for the county to have their own grant writer/administrator.

Commissioner Akins asked if the GMRC could provide assistance with grant administration? Mr. Larson informed him that if the County chooses to work with the GMRC for writing a grant, that if they wish for the GMRC to administer the grant they can contract for both at the same time. The cost for this service would be dependent on the size of the grant and the reporting requirements as some have more intensive requirements than others.

Commissioner Akins asked Mr. Larson if he could give a few more examples of grants that the GMRC has assisted with in the nearby area. Mr. Larson stated that they have worked with Union County Development Authority to secure a grant to assist with the creation of a strategic plan that they could use for implementing future projects. They have also recently assisted the City of Cornelia with a USDA grant to fund a trail known as "Apple Tree Alley". They worked with the City of Hiawassee located in Towns County with funding for a business center that will be acting as a small business incubator as well as with funding for a splash pad and a community pavilion.

Commissioner Palmer wished to add that the GMRC has a unique ability to navigate the requirements for getting grants through the Appalachian Regional Commission which is one of the more difficult agencies to receive a grant from.

Mr. Larson wanted to take a moment to give the Commission some additional information regarding the GMRC's revolving loan fund program, which offers small businesses loans from a minimum of \$10,000 to \$300,000. These funds can be used for a variety of needs such as acquisition and improvement of real estate, purchasing of machinery and equipment, working capital etc. that they can't get conventional financing for. This is a great resource for local small businesses.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

There were no additional comments from the Commission.

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Tench, seconded by Commissioner Palmer and voted unanimously to adjourn at 5:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

By: _____
Commission Chairman Ty Akins

Attest: _____
County Clerk Brandalin Carnes

DRAFT