

**CAMDEN COUNTY, GEORGIA
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 3, 2009, 6:00 PM**

A regular meeting of the Camden County Board of County Commissioners was held at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 3, 2009, in the Board of Commissioners' Meeting Chambers of the Government Services Building, Woodbine, Georgia.

Chair Rainer called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Reverend Hamm delivered the invocation.

Chair Rainer led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Chair David L. Rainer; Vice-Chair Katherine Nisi Zell; Commissioner Willis R. Keene, Jr.; Commissioner Stephen L. Berry; Commissioner Charlene Sears; County Administrator Steve Howard; County Attorney Brent Green, and Interim County Clerk Kathryn Bishop.

AGENDA AMENDMENTS:

Vice-Chair Zell made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Sears to remove Item 6 from the regular agenda.

The motion carried unanimously.

MOTION TO ADOPT THE AGENDA:

Commissioner Keene made a motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Zell, to adopt the agenda as amended.

The motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Commissioner Sears made a motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Zell to approve the minutes of the February 17, 2009 regular meeting.

The motion carried unanimously.

PRESENTATIONS:

None.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Attorney Jim Stein, St. Marys

Mr. Stein stated that he is here tonight to talk about the recent postings of property tax reassessments on the Camden County Maps website. He explained that a meeting was held previously in downtown St. Marys where Chief Appraiser Rick Daniel spoke regarding the postings and the upcoming reassessments. He stated that Mr. Daniel gave no answers to the residents and told the group that anyone was welcome to come to Woodbine and discuss the issue further with staff. Mr. Stein asked the Board of County Commissioners for answers regarding who put this information on the website prematurely if they were not going to rely on those figures for the reassessments. He explained that he believes the Tax Assessors office was going to rely on those figures for the reassessments and now the figures have been removed. He stated that everyone is entitled to know the answers. Mr. Stein urged the Board of County Commissioners to provide these answers to the people and relief in these hard economic times. He stated that everyone walked away with more questions than answers.

Attorney Bert Guy, St. Marys

Mr. Guy thanked the Board of County Commissioners for allowing him this time to voice his concerns regarding the recent property tax reassessments that were posted on the Camden County Maps website. He explained that the Board of County Commissioners is the only connection to the Board of Tax Assessors the people have. He stated that they are not elected and have no responsibility to the citizens. He stated that St. Marys has no representation on the Board of Tax Assessors. Mr. Guy stated that there is a serious economic situation in Camden County and everywhere at this time. He explained that people are worried their property is going to see an increase of anywhere from 10 to 40 times in value. He gave an example of a property in downtown St. Marys that according to the Camden County Maps website increased from a value of \$235,000.00 to \$1,000,000.00 and there are serious consequences for working people such as this that have no intentions of selling their home. He stated that last year they reassessed commercial properties in this same manner.

Tom Cypher, St. Marys

Mr. Cypher approached the Board of County Commissioners and provided a handout of a chart reflecting home price indexes in Camden County over the past several years. Mr. Cypher thanked Commissioner Sears for attending the meeting downtown St. Marys where Chief Appraiser Rick Daniel spoke regarding the recent postings of reassessments on the Camden County Maps website. He explained that in St. Marys the housing bubble came about when the mill closed and Cumberland Harbour came to town. He stated that lot prices are average \$865,000.00 an acre according to the Board of Tax Assessors figure posted on the Camden County Maps website. Mr. Cypher stated that Bert Guy made some good points in his previous statement and he urged the Board of County Commissioners to come to the rescue for the residents of St. Marys and all of Camden County.

Roger Rillo, St. Marys

Mr. Rillo stated that he is a 20 year resident of Camden County. He stated that he has talked about the reassessments of residential property since the recent commercial reassessments last year, but he is dumbfounded by the way this all has happened. He explained that from downtown St. Marys to the rail road tracks is where the reassessments are centralized and nowhere else in St. Marys have the increases reflected so erroneously. Mr. Rillo stated that when Chief Appraiser Rick Daniel was asked if they traveled and went to these properties, Mr. Daniel stated yes. He stated that if they had traveled and went to these properties then why are a 5 acre lot valued at \$500,000.00 and a 63 acre track lowered to \$500,000.00 while surrounding properties also reflected an increase in the reassessment. Mr. Rillo declared that nothing was consistent with the values posted on the Camden County Maps website. He stated that the increases are also based on 3 to 4 sales in which the buyer paid over price for the value of the property in the sale with some for intentions of placing condos and not single resident homes. Mr. Rillo stated that some residents are on fixed incomes and cannot afford such increases as well as, home owners flood insurance premiums going up. He urged the Board of County Commissioners to help residents on fixed incomes and elderly to not be punished by these reassessments.

Wyman Westberry, St. Marys

Mr. Westberry stated that he has in the past appealed several of his properties that have seen double even triple increases in reassessments over the past few years while the economy continues to crumble. He stated that at his business he had 5 people alone come in last week looking for jobs. Mr. Westberry explained that following the news they report a significant fall in market values of homes all over the United States and here the values continue to increase according to the Board of Tax Assessors. He urged the Board of County Commissioners that the residents need relief and the Board of Tax Assessors is out of control. He stated that he would appreciate a serious look at the situation by the Board of County Commissioners.

Rindy Howell

Mrs. Howell stated that she is a victim of the outrageous assessments. She explained that her husband has lived in their home for all of his life and lost his job of 25 years when the mill closed a few years back. He went on to work for the railroad but was later laid off from there as well. She stated that one day you wake up and realize that you are being taxed out of your home. She explained that when Chief Appraiser Rick Daniel was asked who he works for he did not know who that person was. She

urged the Board of County Commissioners to stop the unaccountability and help the people that do not make the kind of income to afford these reassessments.

Doug Vaught, St. Marys

Mr. Vaught stated that he would like to know who posted the information to the Camden County Maps website as well as, who removed it and why it was removed.

The Board of County Commissioners each took a moment to express their concern over the issue of the posting of 2009 reassessments on the Camden County Maps website by the Board of Tax Assessors and it was unanimous that the Board would extensively look into the issue with the intentions of finding resolution and relief for the citizens of downtown St. Marys, as well as all citizens of Camden County affected by these future reassessments.

Chair Rainer stated that several members of the Board of County Commissioners would be attending the City of St. Marys Council Meeting on Monday and plan to hold a Work Session inviting the cities as well as local legislators on Tuesday, March 17, 2009 at 4:00 p.m. He urged all citizens to attend these meetings and express there concerns.

REGULAR AGENDA:

1. Resolution establishing the terms of office and making appointment for members of the Camden County Board of Tax Assessors.

Vice-Chair Zell made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Sears to approve the Resolution establishing the terms of office and making appointment for members of the Camden County Board of Tax Assessors.

The motion carried unanimously.

2. Appointment to the Board of Tax Assessors. (District 3 - Commissioner Berry)

Commissioner Berry made a motion seconded by Vice-Chair Zell to appoint Richard Frizzell to serve a term of 4 years on the Camden County Board of Tax Assessors.

The motion carried unanimously.

3. Approval of Bid for Automated Agenda Software.

Vice-chair made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Keene to approve the bid by MCCi, Municipal Code Corporation, for Automated Agenda Software.

The motion carried unanimously.

4. Approval of Federal Seized Asset Agreement.

Sheriff Tommy Gregory gave the Board and overview of the proposed agreement and explained the time constraints he is under to get this document executed in order to allow his department to participate in the Federal Seized Asset program.

Commissioner Berry made a motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Zell to adopt the 1994 Federal Seized Asset agreement of the Board of County Commissioners.

Discussion:

Commissioner Berry stated that he would like to adopt the 1994 Agreement because it is very well written and entails stipulations to all the issues that Board worked so hard to overcome this last year with the previous Sheriff.

Commissioner Sears stated that besides the addition of involving the Department of Justice in the process she did not see anything wrong with the agreement presented by the Sheriff and she would not vote for the 1994 agreement.

Commissioner Keene stated he does agree with some of what Commissioner Berry has stated but when a request is submitted for funds to be released from this account that

document becomes subject to open Records Law.

Chair Rainer stated that the Board should give the new sheriff the opportunity to manage the seized asset program as he sees fit and let staff make recommendations as to what is appropriate to spend the funds from that program on.

So voted:

Chair Rainer - Nay

Vice-Chair Zell - Nay

Commissioner Berry - Aye

Commissioner Sears - Nay

Commissioner Keene - Nay

The motion failed.

Commissioner Sears made a motion, seconded by Chair Rainer to approve the Federal Seized Asset Agreement with proposed amendments made by the Board of County Commissioners.

Discussion:

Commissioner Sears proposed the following amendments to the Federal Seized Asset Agreement: Addition of the County Administrator appointing the Chief Financial Officer or his designee and any request for funds from the account bypass the County Attorney and go straight to the Department of Justice for review.

Commissioner Keene proposed that the designee of the County Administrator be left with the Chief Financial Officer.

Vice-Chair Zell stated that her amendments have already been reflected in Commissioner Sears & Commissioner Keene's statements.

Commissioner Berry asked if the Board wanted to put that much pressure on the County Administrator if something were to be done improperly it would affect his office as well.

Chair Rainer made the following recommendations for the official amendments to the Federal Seized Asset Agreement to read: County Administrator or his Financial Designee and Monthly Financial Reports are to be submitted to the Board of County Commissioners for review regarding the Federal Seized Asset Fund.

Chair Rainer called for a vote regarding the proposed amendments to the previous motion.

So voted:

Chair Rainer - Aye

Vice-Chair Zell - Aye

Commissioner Berry - **Nay**

Commissioner Sears - **Aye**

Commissioner Keene - Aye

The motion carried 4-1.

5. Ambulance fee schedule review.

Commissioner Sears made a motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Zell to approve the ambulance fee schedule as presented by Chief Dennis Gailey.

The motion carried unanimously.

6. Approval of contract for physical fitness.

This item was removed during agenda amendments.

7. Approval of Seaboard Contract for Ella Park Church Road modifications,

deducts, and reconciliation of quantities.

Vice-Chair Zell made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Keene to approve the Seaboard contract for Ella Park Church Road modifications, deducts and reconciliation of quantities.

The motion carried unanimously.

Reports

- County Administrator's Report

County Administrator Steve Howard reported the following:

- He announced that a letter was received from the City of St. Marys asking the Board of County Commissioners to attend the St. Marys City Council Meeting on Monday, March 9, 2009, at 6:00 p.m. to discuss recent postings of future 2009 reassessments.
- He announced that a letter expressing thanks from the Woodbine Women's Club was received and also announcing their upcoming event, "Jazz & Art on the Waterfront" held on the Satilla River Walk here in Woodbine on March 22, 2009.

- Calendar - January/February

Interim County Clerk Kathryn Bishop read the March & April calendars.

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Roger Rillo, St. Marys

Mr. Rillo stated that one of Sheriff Gregory's promises during his campaign was to work with the Board of County Commissioners on financial matters. Also, he stated that if Chief Appraiser Rick Daniel were to visit Sanctuary Cove development off of I-95 there is a sign posted by this development advertising 1990's pricing.

Tom Cypher, St. Marys

Mr. Cypher stated that it is refreshing to hear that the Board of County Commissioners' are willing to help the citizens of Camden County.

Norman Covert, Kingsland, Board of Tax Assessor's Member

Mr. Covert stated that previously a Work Session was announced to be held March 17, 2009 at 4:00 p.m. regarding reassessments. He asked the Board of County Commissioners if the Board of Tax Assessors would be invited to attend this Work Session. He further explained that March 17, 2009 is a special election in Camden County and polls will be open. He stated that he is also a poll worker and will not be able to attend this meeting. He stated that the Board of Tax Assessors should be there to provide input from the people who know the answers.

Sydney Howell, St. Marys

Mr. Howell stated that Chief Appraiser Rick Daniel does not need to be at the upcoming Work session from his experience of him at the previous meeting held in downtown St. Marys in which Mr. Daniel attended.

Chief Dennis Gailey, Public Safety

Chief Gailey encouraged everyone to stop by the "Spotlight on Animal Control" display outside the meeting chambers.

Doug Vaught, St. Marys

Mr. Vaught thanked the Board of County Commissioners for their support in resolving this matter of the reassessment and explained that should the Board of County Commissioners all attend the St. Marys City Council meeting on Monday it may make history.

Sheriff Tommy Gregory

Sheriff Gregory stated that the Federal Shared Asset Agreement approved tonight is very clear how it is set up and his intentions have never been but to be open and honest.

ADJOURNMENT:

Commissioner Sears made a motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Zell, to adjourn the March 3, 2009, meeting. The vote was unanimous to adjourn the meeting at 7:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

David L. Rainer
David L. Rainer, Chair

Kathryn A. Bishop
Kathryn A. Bishop, Acting County Clerk