



LEE COUNTY

Life works well here.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

T. PAGE THARP GOVERNMENTAL BUILDING
102 STARKSVILLE AVENUE NORTH, LEESBURG, GEORGIA 31763

TUESDAY, APRIL 12, 2022 AT 5:30PM
T. PAGE THARP BUILDING
KINCHAFOONEE ROOM
WWW.LEE.GA.US

SPECIAL CALLED MEETING

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Billy Mathis, Chairman	District 3
John Wheaton, Vice-Chairman	District 1
Luke Singletary, Commissioner	District 2
Rick Muggridge, Commissioner	District 4
George Walls, Commissioner	District 5

COUNTY STAFF

Christi Dockery, County Manager
Kaitlyn Sawyer, County Clerk
Jimmy Skipper, County Attorney

The Lee County Board of Commissioners met for a Special Called Meeting on Tuesday, April 12, 2022 at 5:30pm. The meeting was held in the Kinchafoonee Room of the Lee County T. Page Tharp Governmental Building in Leesburg, Georgia. Those present from the County were Chairman Billy Mathis, Commissioner Luke Singletary, Commissioner Rick Muggridge, Commissioner George Walls, County Attorney Jimmy Skipper, County Clerk Kaitlyn Sawyer, Finance Director Heather Jones, and County Manager Christi Dockery. Those present from the City of Leesburg were City Manager Bob Alexander, Councilwoman Judy Powell, City Attorney Bert Gregory, Councilman Rufus Sherman, Councilman Jason Renfroe, and Councilwoman Amanda White. Those present from the City of Smithville were Mayor Vincent Cutts, Councilman Dwight Hickman, Councilman James Champion, and City Attorney Tommy Coleman.

Chairman Mathis called the meeting to order at 5:38PM.

INVOCATION

County Commissioner Rick Muggridge led the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Board and the audience said the Pledge of Allegiance in unison.

CALL TO ORDER

(A) **Review of the minutes from the Special Called meeting held March 22, 2022.**

The minutes were reviewed as presented.

(B) **LOST Renegotiations with officials from the City of Leesburg and the City of Smithville.**

Chairman Mathis welcomed everyone and opened the floor for discussion. Leesburg City Attorney Bert Gregory gave regrets from Leesburg Mayor Billy Breeden, who could not be in attendance, and apologized for missing the previously held meeting on March 22. Mr. Gregory asked for clarification on the County's position as he did miss the discussion last time.

Commissioner Muggridge summarized his points from the March 22 meeting, stating that it was his understanding that LOST was originally created to offset property taxes and his contention is that 100% of people in Leesburg and Smithville live in the County. So, if we were to fairly distribute LOST funds, which are paid by 100% of the people who live in the County and those visiting the County, the funds should be divided among the taxpayers and the easiest way to accomplish this is by dividing the LOST percentage by population. As discussed in the prior meeting, pulling from the 2020 Census population numbers, Commissioner Muggridge suggests a split of 88%, 10%, and 2%, as displayed below:

Location	LOST (2021)	Population	Per Capita Benefit
Lee County – 88%	\$4,168,845.09	33,163	\$125.71
Leesburg – 10%	\$473,732.40	3,480	\$261.84
Smithville – 2%	\$94,746.48	593	\$285.48

If split in this manner, a citizen of Leesburg or Smithville will still get double the benefit of a citizen in the unincorporated area. The following services are paid for by the County property taxpayers: Fire & EMS, 911, and many of the courts. Additionally, the majority of the sales tax funds generated, one could argue far in excess of 88%, are created in the unincorporated area of the County (i.e. Ledo Road, Hwy 82, Hwy 19 S).

Mr. Gregory wished to clarify that in looking at the population percentages presented, the 88% represents that population in the unincorporated area, with the other 12% being made up of from Smithville and Leesburg, which Mr. Muggridge confirmed. Mr. Gregory asked what the County was proposing on how to divide the sales tax. Chairman Mathis stated it was what Commissioner Muggridge has just summarized. Chairman Mathis asked Mr. Gregory what the City of Leesburg would like to do.

Mr. Gregory stated that the Leesburg officials met to discuss the issue and are asking for consideration based on being the County seat, the nature of the town, and having the Housing Authority, the school system, a lot of churches, and many of the County and State government buildings. All of these tax exempt entities are a strain on the City's infrastructure. The City provides services to those who live in the unincorporated areas as well. The Leesburg Public Works and Public Safety are major benefits to the citizens. Whenever there is a ball game or other major event, the Leesburg Police Department provides officers. The City's police department also provides school resource officers with the City being responsible for those officers and bearing the cost during times schools are not in session.

In looking at the budget, LOST accounts for 16.5% of the general fund, which supports the public services that are given to the tax exempt entities within the City limits. Mr. Gregory provided a personal anecdote about family members who recently moved to Lee County, and when they are asked where they live, they say Leesburg, not Lee County, even though they live in the unincorporated area. Mr. Gregory emphasized that people identify with the County seat. It is true that people within both Smithville and Leesburg go outside of the incorporated areas to shop. Smithville is right between Leesburg and Americus and after asking around, they mostly come this way to shop, so the dollars being spent are being spent by those 12% as well. Mr. Gregory stated that looking only at population is not a fair way to do this. Last time, there was an understanding that Leesburg would be at 13%. Based on the City's needs, Leesburg is asking for 16% of LOST funds.

Chairman Mathis stated that while he was not present for the discussions last time (10 years prior), he understood that the 13% was to take into consideration all of the issues Mr. Gregory spoke about, and is approximately one-third more than the County would have had to give the City of Leesburg based on population. Chairman Mathis asked if anyone else present would like to add to the discussion. Councilman Champion stated that the census population for Smithville is not correct and they are not sure what to do to get it corrected, but the incorrect numbers are throwing them off.

Smithville City Attorney Tommy Coleman stated that this presents an existential threat to small cities, many of whom he represents. There are not many resources or tax revenue sources within Smithville and there are not many funding sources available for a City the size of Smithville other than LOST. Mr. Coleman stated he appreciated the argument for population and he understood it perfectly, however, that's not really what the role of government is. The role of government is to determine where the needs are and then allocate the money to fit those needs and to serve those communities and fit that service delivery in those cities. Mr. Coleman stated that he thinks everyone would agree that Smithville is an anomaly in the County, as it is away from the major population centers and is predominantly an African-American population. This presents the question of if they could continue to provide quality services to their citizens. Mr. Coleman stated that Smithville officials have met with Leesburg officials in his office not too long ago. The City of Smithville needs the money to keep going and

fit the needs of the City. Therefore, the position of Smithville is to seek 8%.

Chairman Mathis agreed with Mr. Coleman about the Service Delivery Strategy, citing the importance of government in providing those services (including Fire & EMS and the Sheriff's Office) to the citizens. Mr. Coleman added that the County was very generous in the Service Delivery Strategy. The County provides and pays 100% for the Fire & EMS (and 911) services and has one of the best Fire & EMS departments in the state after starting with basically nothing, only a volunteer fire department. The personnel is cross trained and the departmental upkeep is very expensive. Mr. Coleman agreed and said he wasn't arguing that fact, but again emphasized the need for funding, stating the citizens of Smithville have a different level of pride than those in the County.

Chairman Mathis wished to point out that Lee County is different than many other counties in the state in that the cities are smaller in population than the incorporated area of the County, a drastic difference from say Albany or Atlanta. We could provide a very long list of services that the County provides to the Cities of Leesburg and Smithville that they don't have to pay for; however, we did not bring this list. Mr. Coleman stated that there is a need for this community to exist and the City simply could not run on 2%. If reading the presented information correctly, this would be a reduction of approximately \$189,000.00 per year. The services will remain the same, yet there will be less money... and they need the money, and that is the base of the City of Smithville's argument. Mayor Cutts agreed, adding that their citizens pay both County taxes and City taxes.

Smithville Councilman Hickman stated he broke down how much each entity would get each month over the next 10 years, if going by the County's proposal. By his calculation, the County would receive approximately \$368,073.71, Leesburg would receive \$3,947.77, and Smithville would receive \$789.55. Mr. Hickman asked if you could run a City on that much money a month. Mr. Hickman said that it was obvious that the County cared more about the citizens in the southern part than the northern part, a statement Chairman Mathis quickly rebutted by stating that was not true and the commission is committed to every citizen in the County and does their very best to take care of everyone in this County. Every citizen in this County has Fire & EMS and 911; services the County provides for free. Chairman Mathis added that he and Commissioner Singletary have been talking recently about getting another fire station to service the northern part of the County.

Another meeting will be scheduled and held in the near future.

PUBLIC FORUM

Citizens will be allowed to address the Board of Commissioners regarding any issues or complaints. Individuals should sign up prior to the start of the meeting.

No citizens took part in the Public Forum.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

(A) The next regularly scheduled County Commission meeting is ***April 12, 2022 at 6:00pm.***

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:58PM.

Lee County is a thriving vibrant community celebrated for its value of tradition encompassing a safe family oriented community, schools of excellence, and life long opportunities for prosperity and happiness without sacrificing the rural agricultural tapestry.

Persons with special needs relating to handicapped accessibility or foreign language interpretation should contact the ADA Coordinator at (229) 759-6000 or through the Georgia Relay Service (800) 255-0056 (TDD) or (800) 355-0135 (voice). This person can be contacted at the T. Page Tharp Building in Leesburg, Georgia between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays, and will assist citizens with special needs given proper notice of seven (7) working days. The meeting rooms and buildings are handicap accessible.