

Budget Workshop Meeting
Lamar County Board of Commissioners
11-5-2024
1:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at approximately 1:00 p.m. on November 5th, 2024. Present for the meeting were Chairman Traylor, Vice-Chair Gilles, Commissioner Fletcher, Commissioner Lovett, Commissioner Thrash, County Administrator Townsend, County Clerk Davidson.

Barnesville-Lamar County Industrial Development Authority (IDA) Discussion

Attendees: Erin Cook, Charles Glass, and William Tuttle

Funding Request: Charles Glass led the discussion on the need to replace IDA Director Kathy Oxford, who is retiring at the end of the year. They are seeking applicants to take over her position. Current contributions from Lamar County are \$65,000 (2014) with an additional \$5,000 added to bring it to \$70,000.00. The City of Barnesville at \$77,500. The proposed salary package with benefits totals around \$120,000. They are requesting to have both Lamar County, and the City of Barnesville contribute another \$10,000.00. Chairperson Erin Cook stated they have received several good applications, but they will not be able to pay them what they are worth. If they did not have all the development happening in Lamar County with the I-75 project they could get someone without a lot of experience and train them up.

I-75 Project: Potential business opportunities are being evaluated, with applicants from larger cities applying. Focus on finding someone with experience or willingness to train.

Continental Project: Mr. Glass said that at one point Continental was considering closing and the Germans were going offshore with all their textile operations. The management staff at Continental led the efforts to consolidate operations at the Aldora Plant. Continental asked for incentives, but they did some other things that helped them out. They worked with a company such as Georgia Tech to come up with financial incentives that have been beneficial for workforce and infrastructure growth and are all listed in the model. Aldora Mayor Jimmy Matthews suggested that they pave the roads with Aldora SPLOST funds. However, that was not all Continental expected to be paid. They wanted their parking lot paved. They found it this was illegal because you cannot give a gift of this nature. However, you can exchange service for service. So, they came up with a deal where if they paved the parking lot, they could store the equipment used for paving the roads. The Attorney Kevin Brown worked with the State and drew up this contract. This secured the deal to keep Continental in Lamar County. Mr. Glass said that someone right out of college would not have thought about doing that, but IDA Director Oxford knew how to get this deal done.

Jordan Manufacturing Facility: Mr. Glass stated that Jordan was going to close the plant entirely and ended up closing from Thanksgiving to the end of the year. Monthly cash flow issues were with water and sewer. The City of Barnesville agreed to let them defer their bills. The IDA worked out an agreement where they would defer their bills over a 12-month period. The contract was with IDA and the agreement was if they shut down and do not pay back the bills you would have to pay back the bills with interest. The IDA also had the authority to seize their property and pursue them getting the money back. This proactive approach ensured early repayment.

Salaries and Retention: Salary disparities were discussed, particularly in comparison to other IDA positions in surrounding counties that make close to \$150,000. The general sentiment was that salary structures need updating to remain competitive.

Tax Abatements and Incentives: Chairperson Cook said they fully expect to start getting requests as they sale the lots and the infrastructure begins. Mr. Glass said the IDA will work hard to market it. When they ask for incentives, they need to make sure it is in the best interest of the County and the Schools. They do not want to sign up for incentives that will cost them money.

Commissioner Fletcher said he was good at going up on the salary, but he wanted to make sure they were getting a good return on their investment. He said he wanted to stay away from extensive abatements that diminish local revenue.

Mr. Glass said that historically they have not had any abatements. The State was involved in negotiating land use with foreign companies like B&G and the Chinese property buyer. The State let the Chinese have the land. They also did not take an abatement. Mr. Glass said that the way abatements work is that they sign over property to the IDA. The IDA defers the taxes. The IDA does not pay taxes so if the IDA has the title, they will not pay taxes. Based on the abatement schedule they would pay in 10 percent increments over a period of years. That would come to the County, but it would not be the full 100 percent amount of the taxes. It would be paid in increments over time. Mr. Glass said the IDA works out incentives that benefit the business, but it does not affect the budget of the County.

Mr. Glass stated that Piedmont Green Power had an issue with paying the total amount of taxes, so they created a five-year plan to spread out the payment for the taxes. The corporate home office was in Boston and the local company Piedmont Green Power did not know anything about this. They paid full price for the land and asked for no abatements.

Small Scale Hotel: Chairperson Cook stated that IDA Director Oxford is working on a plan for getting a small-scale hotel for Lamar County.

Film Industry: IDA Director Oxford has been instrumental in getting the film industry to come to Lamar County. She is the primary contact for film inquiries. The local economy has benefited from the short film projects, music videos, and prop rentals because this is pure profit. The film companies pay for everything, and they also shop and eat locally, which brings in more revenue.

Additional Discussion Points:

Commissioner Lovett shared his concerns and said the project on I-75 is in District 2 that he represents. He said that the City of Barnesville is not going to be a fan when they ask for more money because IDA Director Oxford told the developer that the City of Barnesville would not be interested in the water. However, the City of Barnesville is incredibly interested in the water. He said 90 percent of the industrial property being developed in the community is in one place. Even though the IDA Director was there to meet with the developer from day one, she was not interested. When he was asked if he needed the IDA to help with abatements he said no, and they do not help. They are going to sell it out without giving away a single thing. This is a tremendous opportunity, since Mrs. Oxford is retiring, to take \$70,000.00 and put it back into the budget that is already stretched. He said that spent hours yesterday trying to find a way to get the employees paid. If you look over a 10-year history of what the County and the City have already put into the IDA that is 1.4 million dollars that they put into the IDA budget just in salaries. If the developer is doing 90 percent of industrial property on his own and is asking for no help and when he did ask for help, he did not get it. Commissioner Lovett expressed his belief that this is a great opportunity to just say we do not need an IDA Director. He said they could make a supplemental agreement with the Planning and Community Development Director Buice as a point person reporting to the IDA board.

Commissioner Lovett said the City of Barnesville is going to say the same thing and put their \$85,000.00 into downtown development. Commissioner Lovett said he could show them the text where he put the Mayor and Mr. Adams together to develop the water. He said the City of

Barnesville got inrun and they did not know they were getting inrun until it was announced that this project was going to be put before the Board of Commissioners. The Mayor called him asking about this and he told the Mayor that the IDA Director said she would not be interested in doing the water. The Mayor texted him a text where she asked if she could be put in contact with the developer. Commissioner Lovett volunteered to provide this text. Commissioner Lovett said now because of this they are going to do water and sewer.

Chairman Traylor gave an account of what happened with the water and IDA Director Oxford. He said that IDA Director Oxford was involved in a meeting at Gordon State College regarding the small-scale hotel issue. The IDA Director Oxford was sitting beside him, and she turned around and she asked him what was going on with the I-75 project. Chairman Traylor said he told her about it and she asked him where the water was coming from. Chairman Traylor said he told her that as of right now the water was coming from Spalding and Butts County. He said the IDA Director said she was not told about it. Chairman Traylor said he told her it was because the previous Mayor and the previous City Manager said they did not want to deal with any projects dealing with water in the County. IDA Director Oxford picked up her phone and went outside and called City Manager York. IDA Director Oxford came back in and realized that something was going on. Chairman Traylor said she asked if she had done something wrong. Chairman Traylor told her that everyone was under the impression that the City of Barnesville was not going to be involved based off previous conversations. Then IDA Director Oxford walked outside with Chairman Traylor while on the phone with the City Manager York and they asked Chairman Traylor to tell them a little more about what was going on. Chairman Traylor said he did. Then the IDA Director Oxford asked him for the developers contact and said she was going to speak to them and requested for him to give her until the end of the day. Chairman Traylor said that this is when Commissioner Lovett received the phone call about the developer's phone number.

Commissioner Lovett said his very first introduction to the Director is telling this guy that the City of Barnesville does not want to do the work, and he cannot do the work. Mr. Glass said that Commissioner Lovett is speaking for IDA Director Oxford, and she is not here at this meeting. Commissioner Lovett said she was there last year when he brought this up. Mr. Glass said last year when Mayor Banks and City Manager Turner were in charge, they were not looking at running water outside of the city limit. Mr. Glass said there were issues with the IDA and the City of Barnesville during this time. Mr. Glass said this was older history and, in this case, there were a lot of things going on other than the IDA, the City of Barnesville and the County. They were in the middle of changing the City of Barnesville Manager and the Mayor and this was a communication issue.

Commissioner Lovett said this is a great opportunity to make an offer to the point person on this project, Planning and Community Director Buice. He said that at every meeting that he has been to it has been Planning and Community Director Buice, Planning and Community Director Buice and Planning and Community Director Buice. He said Planning and Community Director Buice did 90 percent of the Industrial Development in this community and it is on the Comprehensive Plan.

Mrs. Cook said that Developments do not always follow the exact same path. Sometimes, the developers come straight in and bypass the IDA altogether which is what happened her. She said that after the fact he did reach out. Commissioner Lovett said he takes exception to that. Commissioner Lovett said the very first meeting was IDA Director Oxford, Chairman Traylor, Commissioner

Lovett and Planning and Community Director Buice. There were four people at the meeting that heard what the developer wanted to do, and IDA Director Oxford was the point person for the community, and she said no. Mrs. Cook said that she was under the impression that the City of Barnesville would not be interested or able to do the water. Commissioner Lovett said that from that moment forward, the only person involved has been Planning and Community Director Buice. Commissioner Lovett said to Mrs. Cook, it is your authority and Planning and Community Director Buice did 90 percent of the work why do they not take a supplement and give it to her and let her be the President of the IDA. Mrs. Cook asked if Planning and Community Director Buice was going to handle the day-to-day of the IDA and handle her normal duties. Commissioner Lovett said she just did. Mrs. Cook said not just this one development. Commissioner Thrash said to Commissioner Lovett that everyone knows he is a “Bull in a China Shop”, and they are talking about one development. Commissioner Lovett said it is 90 percent. Commissioner Thrash said Commissioner Lovett is talking about pulling Planning and Community Director Buice, who cannot get everything done now, according to what she says, that she has to do now, and she is going to want more money. Commissioner Thrash said that Commissioner Lovett did not understand all of the events that IDA Director Oxford has to attend. Commissioner Thrash said Commissioner Lovett needed to make a call to former IDA Director Missy Kendrick.

Commissioner Thrash requested to look at the overall picture and not to draw a sour picture on one particular development because clearly there are different views of how this came down. Commissioner Lovett said it is 90 percent. Mrs. Cook said it is 90 percent of the land. Commissioner Lovett said it is 90 percent of the available industrial property in Lamar County in total. He said on the Comprehensive Plan for Lamar County it is 90 percent of the stuff in black. Commissioner Lovett said he took it off. He said they represent a community that does not want any more development, and he is a conduit for his community. If the constituents call and say they do not want this, then it is their job to tell you they do not want it. Commissioner Lovett said that 90 percent of the Comprehensive Plan is planned out and what else is there to the IDA. Chairman Glass replied, the Chinese Property, the Legacy Park, etc. He asked if Commissioner Lovett wanted it to look like Henry or Clayton County. Commissioner Lovett replied absolutely not but said it is their job to say no when it comes to zoning. The IDA’s job is to work with an industry and 90 percent of the industry that came in to the community the developer said they did not need to do anything. He said they were going to sell this out without having to give incentives.

Chairman Traylor said there is still property on Industrial Drive, Roberta Drive, Legacy Park and eventually property on High Falls Park Road down to Johnstonville Road. Mr. Glass said there is also a lot of work with existing businesses in Lamar County such as the examples he gave with Continental and Jordan. There is a quarterly outreach for the local businesses to make sure they are doing well. Mrs. Cook said the Gun Range opened. Commissioner Lovett asked about the IDA’s involvement in the Gun Range. Mrs. Cook said that he had clearly made up his mind and she was not going to sit there and get into a “pissing contest” with him and he sees no benefit. She said she did not know if Commissioner Lovett had something in particular against IDA Director Oxford or does he think that IDA’s are useless and said she was not really sure but there is nothing she can say at this point to change his mind about continuing to fund the IDA Director.

Mr. Tuttle said he understands the debate about whether or not there should be an increase. But to think that Planning and Community Development Director Buice can do two jobs is asinine. Mrs.

Cook said that it is too much to ask of one person. Mr. Tuttle said if they would like to put this on Planning and Community Development Director Buice then they would see it burn and fall. Commissioner Lovett pointed out that Commissioner Fletcher mentioned ROI, Return on Investment. He said a ROI on 1.5 million dollars in salary over 10 years. Where is the ROI? Mr. Tuttle said there is a lot more to it than calculation and a number. Commissioner Lovett said they spent all day yesterday trying to go from a 5 to a 7.5 percent raise for all of the employees. Mr. Glass said that without an IDA you will not have the ability to have the revenue to do this in the future. You are dependent on your property/homeowners, and you will have to tax them at a higher rate. Commissioner Lovett asked Mr. Glass to give him an example from a decade that says what he is telling him is correct. He said going forward for a period of over 10 years they have over 54 million dollars coming in that has nothing to do with the IDA.

Commissioner Fletcher said it is essential that they all work together because at the end of the day it is about the community as a whole. He said he thinks that the breakdown is that the Commissioners may not know everything that is going on with a project. Commissioner Fletcher said they are all new and he recently spoke to IDA Director Oxford but for the last two years he has not had a conversation with her. Mr. Tuttle said they have an open meeting every month. Commissioner Fletcher acknowledged that this was on him and said they all need to work together and whoever they put in that position he would like for them to be strong and able to jump in and take the ball running. Commissioner Fletcher said he was not against anything he just thinks they need to have better communication.

Chairman Traylor said he is like buying a new car and going to all the car lots. He said he realizes she has a lot of meetings, and he has been to several of them where they have looked at the property on Roberta Drive. Chairman Traylor said IDA Director Oxford has done a lot of things that have gotten us on the map and there are a lot of things she does behind that scenes that they would not know unless they go to meetings. Chairman Traylor said that Mr. Glass sends him updates when he is not there. He said the possibility of the hotel has an extremely strong potential. Chairman Traylor said they were sitting in a meeting when IDA Director Oxford brought up the I-75 project, and he was concerned because the application had not been approved but it was something he could not really share. Mr. Tuttle said Industrial Development is a weird business because you are not batting a thousand. There is a lot of work behind the scenes that never comes to fruition. He said this is the nature of the business and includes any County or IDA. There are people looking everywhere and they have to be available to talk to them that one time they choose Lamar County, and they have somewhere there. He said they are lucky if they batted 300.

Commissioner Lovett referenced the Lamar County budget book and specifically the revenue section. He addressed Mr. Tuttle and asked him to send him where the batting 300 shows up because this is a problem. Commissioner Lovett said they see them once a year. Mr. Tuttle said they are welcome at any meeting. Commissioner Lovett said they are welcome to come to any meeting to tell the Board of Commissioners about their success stories. Mr. Tuttle said he did not think he could stomach coming to the Board of Commissioners meetings. Commissioner Lovett said he has a problem with the IDA not showing up to their Board of Commissioner meetings. He said he has to find a way to pay all of the employees.

Mr. Glass said the employees that work at Continental and Jordan and other companies are all listed, and he believes they can show the projects they have been apart of over the last 10 years.

Chairman Traylor said that Commissioner Lovett is speaking for himself because unless he goes to the Senior Center or the County Extension, he only sees them once a year. He sees the Recreation Department because he goes there to watch ball games. He said unless you go to a Department such as the Health Department you do not see them unless you happen to go there. Chairman Traylor said he cannot agree with him about seeing them once a year. He said their meetings are open and it is a matter if they choose to go to them. Chairman Traylor said as far as any type of ROI or data they can get this information. Mr. Glass said the meetings are the 2nd Thursday of every month at 10:30 a.m. at the Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Glass said the property taxes, he needs to figure them out to the dollar and the penny and see what their impact is to the County. Commissioner Lovett said that Mr. Glass is the first person that has come in and talked about Jordan or Continental. Mr. Glass said that maybe people are intimidated by his manners. Mr. Tuttle said he goes to 50 meetings a week and he has not been to a meeting like this since the last time they met with the Board of Commissioners. Mr. Tuttle asked if Commissioner Lovett found this shameful. Commissioner Lovett said he finds it incredible that they come to their meeting a year later with no ROI. He said that Mr. Tuttle is in the banking industry. Mr. Tuttle said he does not understand that in this job you cannot do an ROI calculation and come up with everything that is done. They do not bat a thousand, you cannot have people doing two jobs, it is not possible. Mrs. Cook said she found out about this meeting a week ago and IDA Director Oxford is on vacation. There were no specifics provided other than they need to have a budget meeting. She said they scrambled to figure things out. Mrs. Cook said she has a full-time job and kids and said she was sorry she could not show up to every single meeting and give them an in-depth analysis on everything that has happened at their previous meetings. If there is something specific that you want to hear about spell it out and give them time to gather the information. Commissioner Thrash said it is easier to meet your goal if someone is blindsided.

Vice-Chair Gilles asked if the IDA had any debt. Mr. Glass said they had no debt. Mrs. Cook said no debt since selling the property in Legacy Park. Vice-Chair Gilles asked about the money they had. Mr. Tuttle said they have 2 Certificate of Deposits (CD). One was for \$284,000.00 and the other was \$79,500.00. That would be used to purchase property, but they have no available property to purchase at this time. Mr. Tuttle said the majority of the money for the CD came from the property they sold in Legacy Park, the Concrete Company and the Amps. They are marketing the property on Roberta Drive. Mr. Glass said the IDA Director Oxford may get a request from the State or Director prospect asking about job market, utility rates, property taxes for a 10 sq. ft. office complex. She puts together this information and then they shotgun this out everywhere. When they get the numbers back, they call the top five for more information. Then the last two go out for a site visit. Local specifics are discussed at this point. The visits highlight potential and differentiate sites from other counties like Upson and Coweta County. They are just beginning to get the property from the City of Barnesville to say it is available. Mrs. Cook said they had a Chinese company visit the property across from Legacy, but they found another piece of property with a ready-made spec building on the property.

Commissioner Thrash inquired about the property with Lester Ranew. He bought the land from IDA, and he was trying to get sewer. The paint chemicals would not mix with the treatment plant. It would kill all of the good bugs. Mr. Ranew ended up going to Thomaston Georgia but they found out that they had to have a pre-treatment plan before they could put it in their main sewer facility. Commissioner Thrash said that she, IDA Director Oxford and Mr. Glass worked hard on this project and it ended up being an issue with wastewater treatment issue.

Chairman Traylor asked that the IDA get deliverables together. Commissioner Thrash requested that they put some numbers together and send to the Commissioners. Commissioner Flether said he hoped they could all work together.

Adjournment

Vice-Chair Gilles made a motion to adjourn the meeting at approximately 1:53 p.m. Commissioner Thrash seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

THE LAMAR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Ryran Traylor, Chairman

Ashley Gilles, Vice-Chair

Jarrod Fletcher, Commissioner

Jason Lovett, Commissioner

Nancy Thrash, Commissioner

Attest: _____ Carlette Davidson, County Clerk