

**AT AN EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE BOARD OF
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR
GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA ON FRIDAY, APRIL 17,
2020 AT 10:00 A.M. THE FOLLOWING PROCEEDING
WAS HAD, VIZ:**

Present: **Dr. Anthony “Dr. V” Viegbesie, Chair, District 2**
 Brenda Holt, Vice Chair, District 4
 Eric Hinson, District 1
 Gene Morgan, District 3
 Sherrie Taylor, District 5
 Wesley Hall, Interim County Administrator
 Clayton Knowles, County Attorney
 Marcella Blocker, Deputy Clerk

This meeting was had over audio/conference call during the COVID-19 shutdown.

INVOCATION, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Viegbesie called the meeting to Order at 10:13 a.m. He asked for a moment of silence and led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the U.S. Flag.

Citizens Requesting to be Heard

Chairman Viegbesie said due to COVID-19 and the efforts of Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners to continue the practice of social distancing, Commissioners want to continue to hear from citizens under the Citizens Requesting to be Heard section of the agenda.

If citizens have any questions, comments or concerns, please email CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov and anticipate receiving a response within 48 hours.

The Board of County Commissioners would like to thank everyone for their patience and flexibility during this difficult time of uncertainty.

GENERAL BUSINESS

1. Resolution Update

Chairman Viegbesie said the Resolution had been updated and before them was Resolution 2020-017. He stated there were some changes to the Resolution from 2020-016. The most noticeable changes were the closure of vacation rentals. Vacation rentals in Gadsden County should now be closed. The curfew from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. was still in effect and in addition, a mandatory facemask usage for Gadsden County. (Item Q in the new Resolution) Chairman Viegbesie read aloud Item Q.

Chairman Viegbesie also informed the public there were currently 44 cases in Gadsden County with 2 being out of state.

Commissioner Holt agreed with approving the Resolution and asked for another public reading on Facebook or the media with a PR person.

Chairman Viegbesie asked Mr. Hall to take note of what Commissioner Holt asked and make it happen and Mr. Hall said he would.

Commissioner Holt stated she moved approval if there was a quorum and Chairman Viegbesie stated there was.

Commissioner Taylor stated it was brought to her attention by one of the Registered Nurses that reside in Gadsden County, that the BOCC should look at having customers wear some kind of facial gear. She stated she did hear in the new Resolution that all employees at various businesses were asked to wear a face covering. She was asking customers that visit those businesses wear face coverings as well.

Mr. Knowles asked Commissioner Taylor if she wanted to add, what provision specifically, and asked if it was for people to wear a mask going into stores and Commissioner Taylor said yes. She said she was being told a lot of the patients were coming from people who work in Tallahassee and come to Gadsden County but she did not know that for sure.

Chairman Viegbesie read the mandate for face mask usage again and Commissioner Taylor stated she thought it was for employees only but what she heard from the Chairman was perfect.

COMMISSIONER HOLT MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE RESOLUTION WITH A SECOND BY CHAIRMAN VIEGBESIE. THE BOARD VOTED 5-0 BY ROLL CALL VOTE TO APPROVE.

**COMMISSIONER HINSON- Y
COMMISSIONER TAYLOR- Y
COMMISSIONER MORGAN- Y
COMMISSIONER HOLT- Y
CHAIRMAN VIEGBESIE- Y**

MOTION PASSED 5-0

2. County Administrator Position

Mr. Hall introduced the next item.

Chairman Viegbesie gave an update of what the Board had attempted to do before this Emergency Meeting and the HR Manager would give an update. Chairman Viegbesie stated the BOCC reached out to Ms. Montgomery, who was previously interviewed, to see if she was still interested and available.

Lonyell Butler, Director of Human Resources, said she reached out to Ms. Montgomery, the top applicant when they were recruiting, to see if she was still interested in the County Administrator position and she advised Ms. Butler she was not interested.

Chairman Viegbesie said he reached out to the immediate past Administrator and had a conversation with her. His first question to her was if there was a lawsuit and she said there was no lawsuit, there was an intent, but never a lawsuit. His other question was if the opportunity came, would she be willing to repay the overtime she was paid and her answer was yes, she

Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners
April 17, 2020 Emergency Meeting

would be willing to put into her contract a repayment plan for the amount she was paid, which was led to her being ousted. Chairman Viegbesie said that was one option and it was in the hands of the Commission now. He further stated having a County Administrator was a serious emergency since the time for Mr. Hall leaving was coming up quickly.

Commissioner Holt said she was interested in former Commissioner, Ed Dixon. She stated he had more experience than anyone on the Board. She further stated he was a Political Science Major. Another choice was Linwood Herron in Midway, she stated he was a Certified Planner, Grant Writer and former Interim Manager for the County. Commissioner Holt stated normally, when counties were in this position, the Association of Counties would help with their Range Rider program, helping counties when they had a vacancy for a Manager until the County could go back and advertise. She stated a temporary position was probably the better way to go if the position was temporary, until the County could advertise.

Chairman Viegbesie asked Commissioner Morgan, Commissioner Taylor and Commissioner Hinson if they had any comments.

Commissioner Morgan said he agreed with Commissioner Holt to reach out to Florida Association of Counties and he also had a call into them. He stated there was a 2-week window to make the decision. He stated he thought this meeting should just be discussion and next week meet again and move forward with the process. Commissioner Morgan stated one name brought to his attention was Derrick Elias, he was a local citizen who was well versed with County knowledge. He stated the BOCC needed to consider again, how to move forward.

Commissioner Taylor said she had not reached out to anyone and she wanted to keep the present Interim in place since she was the one at fault. She said some of the candidates mentioned were doable and she agreed with Commissioner Morgan saying it should be brought back to discuss further. She wanted names of people that were willing to come and give the County 3-6 months as an Interim. She further stated if she came up with a name, she would send it to the Administrative office or to the Interim County Administrator to be vetted.

Commissioner Hinson dittoed everything said previously by Commissioner Taylor. He wanted to mention Dr. Henry Grant as Interim, he stated Dr. Grant had worked with the County for 30-40 years and had a wealth of knowledge as Interim. Two other people he would entertain, they also had a wealth of experience, were Antonio Jefferson and Robert Presnell. They would understand the community and could help navigate through the pandemic. Out of the names he mentioned he thought Dr. Grant would be the right person until a permanent Administrator was hired.

Chairman Viegbesie said with all names, in his personal position, he was leaning towards using the assistance from FAC to get help to bring someone in immediately. Ms. Montgomery specifically said no because of the cantankerous relationship and turmoil with which the Commission behaves. Chairman Viegbesie further stated the BOCC was a team. He was leaning towards going to FAC and using that program and while there was a temporary Interim County Administrator from FAC appointed, then the job could be advertised to those who met the minimum requirement and who desired to work. The person needed to be living in the County.

Commissioner Hinson said since this was a Regular Meeting, he wanted to give the name Dr. Henry Grant. *(Note: this was an Emergency Meeting)*

COMMISSIONER HINSON MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE DR. GRANT AS INTERIM COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR. THE MOTION DIED FOR LACK OF A SECOND.

Commissioner Morgan recommended to reach out to FAC to see if they could help put someone in place for Interim and to have another Emergency meeting next Friday. He stated the BOCC needed to know if they could meet the County's time frame for an Interim Manager. He further stated the notice should be written so the applicant knew they would be needed for three months at the most. He had no problem with Dr. Grant for that three-month window but he would like to see the BOCC reach out for more information to FAC that could be discussed next week and the Board could make a decision Friday.

Chairman Viegbesie said there was a meeting next Tuesday and if someone could reach out to FAC before then and have information, this item could be added Tuesday for BOCC discussion, otherwise it would have to wait until the Emergency Meeting Next Friday.

Commissioner Holt said when the County got into an emergency situation for an Administrator, she called FAC the next day and spoke with a couple of people. They told her COVID-19 had them tied up, but they would look to see if they could still provide someone. Also, she thought Tuesday, this item should be an action item in case the Board needed to vote.

COMMISSIONER TAYLOR MADE A MOTION FOR THE POSITION TO BE ADVERTISED TO GET QUALIFIED APPLICANTS AND THE BOCC MEET WITHIN THE NEXT WEEK TO LOOK AT AN INTERIM AND MAKE THIS AN ACTION ITEM WITH A SECOND FROM COMMISSIONER MORGAN.

Commissioner Holt questioned attaching a 3-4-month period to hiring a manager because if someone was found sooner, the County would be paying two people to do the same job?

Commissioner Taylor said all her motion was, was to advertise.

Commissioner Holt said when the position was advertised, a certain length of time was needed to be given in the advertisement as well as the terms of the work.

Commissioner Taylor said to move the question.

Chair Viegbesie stated everyone agreed that the position needed to be advertised immediately.

Commissioner Holt questioned what timeline was going in the advertisement.

Chairman Viegbesie asked Ms. Butler the minimum length of time a position of that category must be advertised for.

Ms. Butler said a regular position 14 days but for the County Administrator position she had always advertised for 30 days.

Chairman Viegbesie asked when would the new person start.

Ms. Butler Lonyell said the process should not take more than 3 months.

Mr. Knowles mentioned the position could be listed as being available "until filled".

Commissioner Holt said if a person was going to leave their job, they need to know what timeframe they would be looking at and the Board was going to be paying for 2 positions.

Commissioner Hinson- Y
Commissioner Taylor- Y
Commissioner Morgan- Y
Commissioner Holt- Y
Chairman Viegbesie- Y

MOTION PASSED 5-0

Chairman Viegbesie asked the Interim Administrator and the HR Manager to get ready a position to be advertised as soon as possible.

Chairman Viegbesie said he understood the County would reach out to FAC and would come back, maybe Tuesday, and at the next emergency meeting Friday.

Commissioner Hinson had a question about the Corona virus. He said his concerns were testing sites, was there anything in place to start identifying sites and if citizens had no health insurance or funding to pay for the test, could Indigent Funds pay for those.

Chairman Viegbesie read information about testing sites that the PIO had on the County website. "The following providers in Gadsden County actively screening for Corona Virus; Persons who are experiencing symptoms, and upon a medical providers discretion, will be offered the screening. I am not aware of any sites offering screening to persons without symptoms. Gadsden County Residents are required to seek their medical providers guidance prior to testing." Asymptomatic individuals were not being tested at the time. Testing Sites are Capital Regional Medical Center, 409 Howard Street, Chattahoochee, 850-663-6463; Capital Regional Medical Center Gadsden Emergency ER Campus, 23186 Blue Star Hwy. Quincy; Dr. Holloman, 223 East Washington Street, Quincy, 850-875-1146; Dr. Newberry, 602 East 5th Ave. Havana; Florida Department of Health, 278 Lasalle Leffall Drive, Quincy, 850-875-7200; Jessie Furlow Medical Center, 1249 Strong road, Quincy, 850-875-9500; Neighborhood Medical Center, 604 5th Ave. East, Havana, 850-539-9800; There was a flyer that said citizens can call 850-743-6070 for Q&A on Corona Virus in Gadsden County, Monday-Friday 8am-5pm." This information was entered into the County Website. Chairman Viegbesie suggested the County Administrator send the sites and information in regards to the guidance as to who and how people were eligible for testing to the Commissioners so they could pass the information on.

Commissioner Hinson thanked the Chairman Viegbesie for that information and said the County Attorney had sent him information. He further stated the issue was the County had an influx of people that did not have a medical provider and asked what could be done regarding that. The County had funded Indigent Care that could help offset costs from people that were not insured. Commissioner Hinson asked if it was possible the money the County had for Indigent Care could go towards paying for all citizens to get tested. He stated there were a couple of restaurants in Havana that was exposed to the Corona Virus. In his opinion, everyone that went to that restaurant needed to be tested because they were exposed. He said the BOCC needed to be proactive. People that went to that restaurant could be at risk and tested along with everyone at SuperValu. He thought the BOCC needed to have meetings every 2-3 days, if not, every week.

Chairman Viegbesie said a request had been made for community wide testing of asymptomatic individuals, and the only response was the Governor, last week, was thinking about approving asymptomatic testing for people in Auburn Counties, starting with Duval and those in the Villages in Central Florida. He said the request was, we are a rural county and we also needed county-wide testing. This is something the FDOH had also been requesting. It was a top order and this will continue to be requested. After all of the testing Gadsden County cases would most likely get higher.

Commissioner Holt said she was going to make the same comments. She stated the Corona Virus impact itself needed to be discussed and whether the impact was on the Agenda or not, the topics were discussed and it was very appropriate. She further stated, 2-3 weeks ago she received call from SuperValu and the first thing she did was called Dr. Cooksey and Dr. Cooksey went out there and spoke with HR. Commissioner Holt stated that Gadsden County needed a Liaison so one statement was going out to the public. Commissioner Holt stated she went to each facility that was named by Chair Viegbesie and asked what the test count was and how many tests they had left and each place shared that information with her. The Health Department was taking those who did not have a Physician, but if you did not have symptoms you still had to go to Tallahassee. The problem was not the opportunity for testing, it was who was going to test a person and getting to Tallahassee for the test. When she called CRMC in Quincy, she asked what the testing policy was and they said you had to be admitted in order to get tested. She further stated that was almost unheard of. She told the Commissioners that needed to be looked at. She stated it was the organization the County had been paying, and their policy for testing was something that needed to be addressed between the County and the Administration at CRMC. She said the County was not being represented well if they had to send the citizens to Tallahassee just to get tested if they were not admitted, at a location that had already received funding for Indigent Care for patients. The people at SuperValu and Chattahoochee Hospital, along with others, want to know if the County was going to support them. She further stated the issue was much more than just having a Resolution. She stated this was a serious situation.

Commissioner Morgan said everyone was concerned with the health and wellbeing of the community. He stated he was going to make a couple of cautionary comments and stated he did not think it was appropriate for the BOCC to start driving someone else's bus, particularly, our health care facilities. He thought they had done a tremendous job in response. The BOCC had clear communication from Dr. Cooksey and her staff. Daily updates were provided. He further stated, one thing to keep in mind when talking about testing, the costs of testing and those types of things, He said he was unaware of anyone who would be turned away from being tested because of cost, from the information he had been given. In addition, he said, to make sure it was understood, there was screening, CRMC was not going to test someone without going through a screening process. As time goes on things will change and testing will change. He said he did not think the BOCC needed to create controversy that were not there. He ended saying he had another meeting and needed to leave.

Chairman Viegbesie agreed and stated the BOCC should not be creating atmosphere of fear based on what they feel. He said he was in conversation with the Senator and Governor and he directly sent them requests the BOCC wanted done, what Florida State Hospital and Gadsden County Prison, and was in contact with Department of Children and Families, as well as Robert

Debose, the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Abuse for DCF. He further stated not to create an environment that would generate more fear and divisiveness among the citizens, but work together talking with one voice.

Commissioner Holt said this was a pandemic, not a social issue. She stated there were five people on the BOCC who failed to act when people were calling in every day, and when things got too hot in the room, they jumped up and go home. She said this was not controversy, it was people's lives. She talked with Dr. Cooksey every day and had called every Representative and Senator Scott's office and put those numbers on Facebook. She further stated that the Indigent Care money was put into CRMC for people to be serviced, not to be turned away. She stated the citizens and herself would like to see some representation from the BOCC. Three people from SuperValu called her this morning. They had a walk out because they were afraid that they were going to get contaminated. Community testing could be requested from the BOCC for this area. She stated the BOCC needed to take action and people who were paying the ½ cent tax and could not get the test from an organization right here in this County. She further stated she did not care if the County did not get another road, another bridge, or another nothing because if the people were dying, what sense did it make. She ended saying she needed some action!

Commissioner Hinson thanked Commissioner Holt for her passionate words. He said people have called him from all over, Chattahoochee to Georgia. He was asked if the employers checked temperatures of employees and they would know what was going on, that was one option. Also, he was asked if the County Commissioner could declare a quarantine to give Gadsden County residents paid leave.

Chairman Viegbesie asked Commissioner Hinson to slow down and make his statement clearer. He said the Family First Bill, unless local Government declares quarantine, was the only way people could get paid leave.

Chairman Viegbesie asked him to forward that to the County Attorney and County Administrator so they could further explore it. He said he would.

Commissioner Hinson further stated he had paid for masks individually to be distributed throughout the community. He suggested to the BOCC that they meet again on Monday and get more dialog to convey to the constituents. If there was a meeting Monday, Wednesday and Friday there could be more updates put out there.

Chairman Viegbesie said each Commissioner had their own approach to issues and he did not think a single commissioner was not concerned about safety and health of citizens in this County. He stated he had written many letters to many Constitutional Officers with concern to this pandemic. He asked the Commissioners to work together to make sure they were upholding the oath of office they had all taken. He stated he had met with the County Administrator and the County Attorney almost daily to discuss what needed to be done in regards to getting the upper level government to respond to our County. We need to respect our home rule when it comes to what the Board did.

Commissioner Holt wanted to talk about supplies and masks. She stated If the County had a liaison, they could get the information out. Concerning Commissioner Hinson's statement, she said she was also contacted, and the person said that their employer told them that they would have to be in quarantine in order for them to receive any sick pay, even though the employer was telling them to go home.

Chairman Viegbesie said to let the County Attorney investigate and the County Administrator would do the appropriate thing in regards to that. He further stated in regards to masks, when looking into imposing the mandate, Dr. Cooksey explored ways to distribute masks to the citizens of Gadsden County and our website may need a demonstration on how to use a regular t-shirt or something to make their own.

Deputy Clerk, Marcella Blocker stated a bandana could be used if they did not have access to make a mask.

Mr. Knowles wanted to clarify some of the uncertainties and stated facemasks were to be worn in public. He would encourage people to go to their local law enforcement with any questions about the Resolution. He further stated the CDC Guidelines were added to the Website and he would look up the Family First Bill.

Commissioner Hinson said he was trying to be proactive and save lives at the same time. He stated the BOCC needed to be positive and stay on track. One thing he was thinking about was to get in touch with the Sheriff's Department because they had a lot of folks in large crowds and thought maybe the County could get emergency funding to hire people to patrol an area and their job would be to call the Sheriff's Department.

Chairman Viegbesie stated when it came to enforcement, the Sheriff was on-board and was using guardians and volunteers to enforce the Resolution. He stated the BOCC, as citizens, should have their own individual responsibilities for the City. They knew the disease had no respect for people and therefore he did not go to anyone's church knowing the virus could harm him. He further stated the Sheriff was doing the best he could and was using resources to enforce the restrictions that the CDC had for the safety of all citizens. He asked that every concern was passed to the County Administrator because the Commissioners could not call each other in order to stay in the "Sunshine Rules."

COUNTY ATTORNEY

3. UPDATES

MOTION TO ADJOURN

CHAIRMAN VIEGBESIE CALLED THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 11:50 P.M.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

ANTHONY O. VIEGBESIE, Ph.D., Chairman

ATTEST:

NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk