

# PUTNAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



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117 Putnam Drive, Suite A ♦ Eatonton, GA 31024

## Called Meeting

### Minutes

Monday, March 23, 2020 ♦ 3:30 PM

Putnam County Administration Building – Room 203

The Putnam County Board of Commissioners met on Monday, March 23, 2020 at approximately 3:30 PM in the Putnam County Administration Building, 117 Putnam Drive, Room 203, Eatonton, Georgia.

#### *PRESENT*

Chairman Billy Webster  
Commissioner Daniel Brown  
Commissioner Bill Sharp

#### *ABSENT*

Commissioner Kelvin Irvin

#### *STAFF PRESENT*

County Attorney Barry Fleming (via telephone)  
County Attorney Adam Nelson (via telephone)  
County Manager Paul Van Haute  
County Clerk Lynn Butterworth

## Opening

1. Call to Order

Chairman Webster called the meeting to order at approximately 3:31 p.m.

(Copy of agenda made a part of the minutes on minute book page \_\_\_\_\_.)

## Called Meeting

2. Update from Sheriff Sills (BW)

Sheriff Sills made the following statement. No action was taken.

*"The Office of Sheriff carries with it the **duty** to preserve the peace and protect the lives, persons, property, health, and morals of the people."*

*That sentence was written by the Supreme Court of Georgia long ago and it established in Georgia Law what a sheriff has a duty to do. Georgia Law prescribes and authorizes various other law enforcement agencies and departments of government the authority to enforce certain laws within certain jurisdictions, etc., but only the sheriff has the aforementioned solemn duties.*

*On Saturday evening I leisurely sat on my back deck enjoying the warm temperature while grilling pork chops for me and my wife. The trees in the back yard were all greening up and the dogwoods, azaleas, and other shrubs were in bloom. With the exception of a little pollen, it was the perfect Middle Georgia springtime day, but I was consumed with worry as never before. Next month I will begin my 47th year in law enforcement, and over these many years I have been exposed to many very dangerous situations. The grace of God coupled with my education and training has kept me from serious injury and enabled me to successfully manage every crisis I have faced during my career, but Saturday evening I found myself faced with a new kind of enemy, an enemy I can't arrest, an enemy I can't even see to shoot. That enemy of course is the Coronavirus/COVID-19. I felt nothing but guilt for lounging at home while the people of my community, whose lives and health I had the duty to protect, are in grave danger from this dreaded disease, but I simply didn't know what I should do next.*

*The President of the United States and our Governor have very explicitly told the public they need to stay at home for the next few weeks. To my knowledge, almost all of the schools in the nation are closed. The CDC and Georgia Dept. of Public Health have repeatedly warned us to frequently wash our hands, disinfect surfaces, and practice social distancing, along with a myriad of other warnings and suggestions. Yet as I traveled around our county on Saturday I saw far too many people simply going about their business and entertainment as nothing was afoot. I found at least 8 different restaurants operating with their dining rooms open. A couple of local fitness centers were also open as usual. I saw many other people at various locations all around the county who were engaged in anything but social distancing.*

*After dinner on Saturday, I decided I should call someone for advice about our present crisis, someone who I have absolute confidence in. I spoke at some length with one of the most respected pulmonologists in this state. This doctor is a little older than me and has practiced medicine for over 40 years. I only asked him two questions. The first question was could I do anything more than the procedures and prophylactic measures already given to me by the CDC and Health Dept. that could help protect my officers, staff, and prisoners in my jail during this pandemic. His response was a simple no, but said to utilize the protective procedures to the greatest extent possible. My second question was did he know of anything I should be doing as the sheriff of my county to protect the people. Again, his answer was relatively simple. He said, "Do everything you can to get people to stay at home and not spread this disease!" But he followed that up by saying, "I'm scared, I'm really scared that if something isn't done to slow the spread of this virus down, it's literally going to completely overwhelm our hospitals and medical systems' ability to handle it." That answer struck me like a slapjack to my forehead. With that response firmly implanted in my mind, I expressed my thanks to him for taking time to advise me and also expressed my thanks for all the professionals like him for their courage and dedication while being on the front line during this very dangerous time in our nation's history.*

*I am going to my county commission meeting this afternoon and will tell them that I believe it is now the time for them to pass some resolution that will legally restrict public gatherings and require everyone who possibly can, to stay at home and do so for at least the next couple of weeks. I will be asking the Mayor and Council of the City of Eatonton to promulgate a similar resolution, if it is legally necessary for them to do so.*

*I think many public officials fear political backlash to ask for what many will immediately proclaim to be an unnecessary draconian measure like this. I have never been afraid of controversy, and I'm more than willing to take the heat from those in the public who will disapprove of my actions. Furthermore, I am fully confident in my resolve that it is my duty to stand up and request such measures at this juncture in time.*

*I implore you, I beg you, for the sake of your families, friends, and neighbors, please stay at home and follow the instructions of our medical professionals just as much as humanly possible for the next couple of weeks.*

*May God bless and guide us during these troubling times.*

### 3. Public Health Discussion (BS)

County Nurse Manager Peggy Pettit gave the following update. No action was taken.

- 11 confirmed cases of the Coronavirus in our district
  
- Health Department does not do testing or collect samples - physician must send in request for testing, testing only high-risk people: over 65, people taking care of elderly, working in nursing homes, jails, prisons, or in nursing homes, jails, prisons
  
- if you have symptoms - stay at home for 7 days, including 72 hours after last fever
  
- if you come in contact with someone with the virus – stay at home for 2 weeks
  
- Health Department is limiting services, limiting visits to 10 minutes or less
  
- Environmental Services - handling items with the least contact as possible
  
- asking patients to wait in vehicle
  
- screening every person and asking pertinent questions

In addition, Chairman Webster provided an update from Putnam General Hospital: tested 5 people; all negative.

4. Authorization for Chairman to sign Resolution Under a State of Local Emergency for: (BW)
  - a. Postpone All Public Hearings Until Further Notice
  - b. Disorderly Conduct

**Motion to approve a Resolution Under a State of Local Emergency for Postponing all Public Hearings until Further Notice and Disorderly Conduct and authorize the Chairman to sign.**

**Motion made by Commissioner Sharp, Seconded by Commissioner Brown.**

**Voting Yea: Chairman Webster, Commissioner Brown, Commissioner Sharp**

(Copy of resolution made a part of the minutes on minute book page \_\_\_\_\_.)

**Closing**

5. Adjournment

Chairman Webster called a meeting for tomorrow, March 24, 2020 at 4:00 p.m. for purposes of approving another resolution under local state of emergency.

Chairman Webster adjourned the meeting at approximately 4:08 p.m.

ATTEST:

Lynn Butterworth  
County Clerk

Billy Webster  
Chairman