

**GATES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
EMERGENCY MEETING MINUTES  
OCTOBER 12, 2016**

The Gates County Board of Commissioners held an Emergency Session at 6:00 p.m. Wednesday, October 12, 2016 at EOC, 308 Highway 158, Gatesville. Commissioners Hofler, Owens, Jordan, Felton and Freeman were present. Also present was County Manager, Natalie Rountree.

Chair Hofler called the meeting to order. She told everyone the purpose was to get an update on activities surrounding Hurricane Matthew.

Billy Winn, Emergency Management Director, provided an update on the road closures, storm damage, and emergency rescues. He also provided details on the number of water deliveries made to people in homes and the number of man hours to date for response and recovery.

Commissioner Jordan questioned why a helicopter was not called in for the missing person. Mr. Winn and Sheriff Randy Hathaway explained the person had been missing for hours before he was called in missing. The helicopter would not have worked.

Sheriff Hathaway and the Sheriff's Office responded to calls with caution. He stated he had been at EOC daily and there had been no problems.

Commissioner Freeman explained how he performed a water rescue with others and opened Gates VFD for an overnight shelter. The shelter at the High School provided a safe haven for 21 residents.

Mrs. Rountree said as of the meeting and following a call with a representative from the Governor's Office, Gates County had not been added to the FEMA disaster relief list. Congressman Butterfield and State House Representative Hunter were lobbying for Gates County to be added to the list.

Mr. Winn said people could still apply for FEMA assistance to speed the process for them if Gates was added. Insurance would pay first then FEMA.

Timmy Hedgepeth, Water Department Head, explained the Sunbury water tower was almost empty which prompted the boil advisory. An 8-inch main that feeds the Sunbury tank ruptured due to erosion around the pipe. The split pipe was found today due to the pipe being under water until today. For the boil advisory to be lifted, the water system must be charged and chlorinated for 24 hours. Bacterial samples must be pulled and sent to a lab. The lab will watch for 24 hours. If there are no cultures, the boil notice is then lifted. A problem cannot be fixed until it is identified. Two valves have been turned on and a temporary bypass on the 8-inch main began. Work will continue on Thursday. A back-up plan has already been discussed to assist with situations in the future. Currently a 4-inch main is being used to pump water to the Sunbury tank; this does not carry as much water or can withstand as much pressure as an 8-inch main. Mr. Hedgepeth identified potential areas that will be tested to be released from the boil advisory on Friday.

Mr. Hedgepeth stated there is still a potential for issues in swamp bottoms. Valves are being opened slowly and lines tested before proceeding to new areas of the county. The county water system is based upon elevation not pressure. The Sunbury tank that needs to be refilled holds 250,000 gallons.

Commissioner Jordan stated he felt this was a dire situation since people did not have water and they were isolated.

Mr. Hedgepeth said the system wasn't isolated and water allowed to be continuously drained from the Sunbury tank the problem would be even larger and would result in more issues.

Commissioner Owens asked if the shelter was still open. Mr. Winn said it had been closed on Sunday. Commissioner Owens asked if we have a dire situation, shouldn't the shelter be open? Mr. Winn explained EOC had been dealing with a dire situation since Sunday. Water has been delivered to shut-ins, home health agencies have been contacted, and others have been contacted as needed. Gates House even offered during the height of the storm to accept people if needed. If a shelter was needed and asked for, it could re-opened.

Commissioner Jordan felt this information should have been sent in a Code Red call because if water is taken away it puts people in dire straits. People should be told what to do.

Chair Hofler reminded everyone the meeting was for an update. There would be a meeting for debriefing and improvements at a later date.

Commissioner Jordan said he is getting questions now and can't give them information. Mrs. Rountree stated she nor anyone else at EOC wanted to give incorrect information to citizens then have to retract. This would make everyone look unprofessional. They felt general information was the best for the situation since there were many unknowns. Mr. Hedgepeth and Mr. Winn have discussed applying for a Hazard Mitigation Plan grant to assist with water in the future. Mr. Hedgepeth explained everything was being done that could be done without sacrificing the water plant and to make sure everything and everyone was safe. Another pump would not have helped. Water would be brown due to sediments when it was returned to full pressure. Mr. Hedgepeth advised everyone it was harmless and to flush lines. Mr. Hedgepeth reminded the Board that no one standing before them tonight had ever worked in a situation like this; the last time this type of work needed was during Irene. He repeated the process to get water to the Sunbury tank and how to remove the boil advisory.

Commissioner Jordan questioned why Water Department staff were not working around the clock to fix the issue since this was a dire situation.

Mr. Hedgepeth explained he has 3 employees that work with water plus himself. He explained water is needed in the Sunbury tank to help with the situation. As many areas of the county have water that can as the moment because when the tank got to 12 feet of water, areas began to lose pressure. An engineer has provided assistance and everything is being done that can be done.

Commissioner Felton thanks Mr. Hedgepeth, Mr. Winn, and Sheriff Hathaway for everything. He said he has been listening on the radio and know what they have been doing and appreciated it.

Chair Hofler thanked everyone at EOC. She reminded everyone the meeting was just to keep Commissioners informed.

Commissioner Owens shared he had visited EOC early Saturday and saw Mr. Hedgepeth and Sheriff Hathaway working then. He appreciated all the hard work.

Mr. Winn shared phone numbers to call if anyone had a problem or needed anything. As of October 12<sup>th</sup>, 98,000 bottles of water had been distributed. No more MRE's would be ordered since power had been restored.

Mr. Hedgepeth said he anticipated being able to release the Town of Gatesville on Thursday and the area between Central Middle and Eason's Crossroads and Down East on Friday. However, water must be boiled until results are back. Residents who are signed up will receive a Code Red call when the boil advisory is lifted. The notice will also be on several Facebook pages as well as the county website.

Sheriff Hathaway asked Commissioner Jordan was aware of anyone specifically that needed water or other assistance that had not received any. Commissioner Jordan said he did not know of anyone.

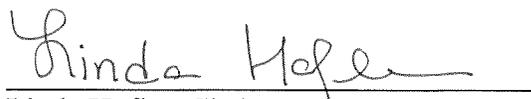
Mr. Erna Bright with Sunbury VFD was granted permission to address Commissioner Jordan about the recovery of the gentleman in Sunbury. He stated he assisted with the efforts and everything that could be done was done. The National Guard assisted as well with the search.

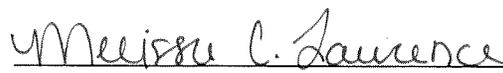
Commissioner Jordan said he appreciated the efforts but everyone must recognize as elected officials when citizens call, elected officials must be informed.

Mr. Hedgepeth stated when the EOC is activated, all groups report to EOC as events happen. EOC documents everything. This can be sent to the Commissioners. Mr. Hedgepeth asked for Commissioners to not call department heads but direct calls to EOC so department heads can focus on their task at hand. EOC has the accurate information. Mr. Winn said the information exchange is one of the most important aspects of Emergency Management. Press updates were sent to local media but we do not know if they were posted. Mr. Winn said he would note this as something to improve upon for the next emergency.

Commissioner Felton again reminded everyone that once a state of emergency is issued everything and everyone reports to Emergency Management, even the County Manager. Mr. Winn used a fire call during the height of the storm as an example of how all calls, even 911 calls, were routed through EOC.

Commissioner Hofler thanked everyone for their time and hard work. Lots of people have volunteered. She said the tough times brings out the best in some people but the worst in others. The meeting adjourned.

  
 Linda Hofler, Chairman

  
 Melissa C. Lawrence, Clerk

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