

HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSION
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUBJECT: Leasing Old Sears Space for Elections & Voter Registration Office & Habersham South Precinct

DATE: April 11, 2022

- RECOMMENDATION**
- POLICY DISCUSSION**
- STATUS REPORT**
- OTHER**

BUDGET INFORMATION:
ANNUAL-
CAPITAL-

COMMISSION ACTION REQUESTED ON: April 18, 2022

PURPOSE: To lease the old Sears space in Cornelia to use as the main office for the Elections & Voter Registration department, and also to use as the Habersham South Precinct for Advance Voting and Election Day Voting.

BACKGROUND / HISTORY: The Habersham County Board of Elections & Voter Registration has been discussing the need to find another Habersham South Precinct, since we lost the use of the First Baptist Church of Cornelia in early 2021. Right now, we are able to use the Cornelia Community House as a temporary location, thanks to the generosity of Dee Anderson, Cornelia City Manager. We also need more office space because we do not have enough room to store our voting equipment, precinct supplies, tables, etc. and also do not have a large enough room for the Election Management System, nor a good area for issuing and processing absentee ballots. Right now, we are having to rent a storage space in downtown Clarkesville for our voting equipment, precinct supplies, tables, etc. We also do not have a good area for the public/media to observe the EMS room where we conduct the process of Election Day/Night totals.

The Habersham South Precinct is our 2nd largest precinct and we have tried to find a new location that lies within the city limits of Cornelia, since we conduct elections for the City of Cornelia, and they use our county precinct as their city precinct. We have had no luck so far, securing a more permanent location that has enough space, enough parking, enough electrical capacity, and that is ADA compliant. Some of the locations that we looked at did have the specifications that we need but did not have the facilities available to accommodate us during election time due to having pre-schools or using all of their spaces for worship. Most of them also did not want to give up a secured space for the amount of time (13 days) that we need to conduct Advance/Election Day Voting at the Habersham South Precinct. The only location that we did find, that had enough space, parking, electrical capacity and that was within the city limits of Cornelia, was the old Sears space that is owned by Ingles. We believe that this space is in a perfect location for the Habersham South Precinct and would also work great for the Elections & Voter Registration department.

FACTS AND ISSUES: We believe that moving our office into a large enough facility to hold both our office and the Habersham South Precinct, would be beneficial for many reasons. It would allow us to house all of our voting equipment, precinct supplies, tables, etc. as well as function as a Voting Precinct, with our office staff there to help/supervise the conducting of Early/Advance voting & Election Day voting. It would be a better place for the security of the election equipment and reduce liability issues. We could keep the voting equipment that we would use for the Habersham South Precinct set up all year long, along with having a large enough storage area to have the other Voting Precinct machines set up, making it easier to conduct maintenance on the voting equipment that has to be done every 30-90 days. We would also be able to conduct three (3) weeks of Early/Advance Voting at the Habersham South location

instead of just one (1) week of Advance Voting, like we have done in the past. As of right now, without having a more permanent location that can accommodate us for thirteen (13) days, we are not able to have Advance Voting at all in the south end of the county. Also with the larger space, we would be able to dedicate a room that would have an observation area for the public/media on Election Day/Night, and also during the early processing of absentee ballots. We could also have a training area for our poll workers and a meeting room for our board. All in all, we would have more space to conduct elections and would be in a better place to be able to continue to stay in compliance with the new election laws that were signed by Governor Kemp in 2021.

OPTIONS:

- 1.) Approve recommendation and authorize County Commission Chairman to sign a Letter of Intent for a lease agreement with Ingles and all pertaining documents for the space at 199 Habersham County Shopping Center, Cornelia, Ga. 30531.
 - 2.) Deny recommendation to authorize County Commission Chairman to sign a Letter of Intent for a lease agreement with Ingles and all pertaining documents for the space at 199 Habersham County Shopping Center, Cornelia, Ga. 30531.
 - 3.) Commission defined alternative
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- 4.) **RECOMMENDED SAMPLE MOTION:** Move to approve the authorization of the County Commission Chairman to sign a Letter of Intent for a lease agreement with Ingles and all pertaining documents for the space at 199 Habersham County Shopping Center, Cornelia, Ga. 30531.
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DEPARTMENT: Elections & Voter Registration

Prepared by: Laurel Ellison

Director: Laurel Ellison

ADMINISTRATIVE

COMMENTS: _____

_____ **DATE:** _____

County Manager
