

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION  
REGULAR SESSION  
February 22, 2021

PRESENT: Chairman Mark S. Culver, Commissioner Curtis Harvey, Commissioner Ricky Herring, Commissioner Brandon Shoupe, County Engineer Barkley Kirkland, Chief Administrative Officer Peter Covert and County Attorney Pres Register.

Chairman Culver welcomed everyone to the January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Houston County Commission Regular Session and called the 10:00 a.m. meeting to order. He declared a quorum as all commissioners were in attendance. He also welcomed everyone that was watching the meeting via ZOOM.

ABSENT: Commissioner Doug Siquefield

The invocation was given by Chief Administrative Officer Peter B. Covert and Commissioner Shoupe led in the pledge of allegiance.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved on a motion by Commissioner Harvey and seconded by Commissioner Herring. The motion passed unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Culver reminded everyone to stay safe during this COVID time even though the numbers are down it is still a bad time as this has impacted our county family closely by death and sickness and he does not want that to continue if at all possible and he encourages everyone to continue to wear their mask and do the things that are required to help to get beyond this.

REGULAR AGENDA

1. Request to appoint Melanie Hill and reappoint Brad Kimbro to the Dothan-Houston County Library System Board

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the request to appoint Mrs. Hill and Mr. Kimbro to the Library Board. Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

2. Request to authorize finance agreement for budgeted item (2 Backhoes) for Road and Bridge – Peter Covert, Chief Administrative Officer

Commissioner Shoupe made the motion to approve the request to authorize the finance agreement for the (2) Backhoes and Commissioner Herring seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Request to authorize finance agreement for budgeted item (Crew Cab Truck) for Road & Bridge – Peter Covert, Chief Administrative Officer

Commissioner Harvey made the motion to approve the request to authorize the finance agreement for the Crew Cab Truck. Chairman Culver stated that we continue to get an extremely aggressive rate on these items as they are all at the rate of 1.63%. Commissioner Shoupe seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

4. Request to authorize finance agreement for budgeted item (Low Boy Truck) for Road & Bridge

Commissioner Herring made the motion to approve the request to authorize the finance agreement for Low Boy Truck and Commissioner Shoupe seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Request to approve Resolution authorizing purchase, sale, and lease of real property

Commissioner Shoupe made the motion to approve the request and Commissioner Harvey seconded. Chairman Culver stated that there has been some feedback on this particular issue so he began to read the Resolution in its' entirety (see attachment to original minutes). After completion of reading the Resolution, Chairman Culver commented that the Resolution does several things and for one it is for the purchase of the Five Star Credit Union Building for the Sheriff's Dept. and that is the major part of this Resolution. He continued by stating the Sheriff's Dept. is currently on top of each other and in previous years they have asked for budget funding for more space and this is what is being addressed by not only giving them space but enhances the community as well. The Five Star building is about 20,000 square feet and the Sheriff's Dept. currently are operating in 12,000 to 13,000 square feet so this significantly increases their space and includes much more parking than they currently have as this sale also includes a gated/secured parking lot that includes 50 spaces. Chairman Culver added that the building will require minimum renovation as a secured evidence room is required but all furnishings and accessories that are currently in the Five Star building are included in the sale. He reported that when Five Star Credit moved to the Gander Mountain building, they spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on furnishings so the value of the furnishings we are getting in this sale is significant. Chairman Culver stated that he spoke with a contractor and their estimate on building a new building the size of the Five Star building, in today's market, and furnish it as well, we would be looking at about 5 million dollars. The

county is purchasing the building, furnishings and the parking lot for 2.2 million dollars and to address the Sheriff's needs, it is a good and viable answer. Chairman Culver continued by stating that just as importantly, and what makes this a good opportunity, is the Commission's commitment to Downtown Dothan. The purchase of this facility will continue to enhance the northern part of Downtown Dothan and Five Star Credit Union will now build a branch on the lot behind the Administration Building. They will lease the current building from the County until their new branch is built on that property. This area is considered the northern gateway to Downtown Dothan and the continued growth and enhancement of Downtown is extremely important to this Commission and the community and this helps that continued effort. Because of the property exchange, there will be some other enhancements that will be happening Downtown which will include a local Farmer's Market, which contributes to agriculture that is important to everyone, it will allow for some additional retail growth, expand security on the north end of Downtown, and just a good thing to continue the Downtown growth. Chairman Culver stated that even if the Sheriff's Dept. was not going to locate in the Five Star building, it makes sense for the county to purchase the building regardless. He also mentioned that there has been some conversation about locating the Sheriff's Dept. to the Farm Center but first, the Commission is committed to Downtown Dothan; secondly, there is not a building at the farm center that is able to be occupied by the Sheriff's Dept. as something would have to be built there and the cost would be around 5 million dollars and this would not include the demolition that would need to occur. Chairman Culver stated that at one time they looked into getting the arena building set up as a new arena and it was going to cost about 6 million dollars so locating there is not a good alternative. He continued by reporting that the meeting procedures at this time state for the public to submit comments via email and a comment was received concerning meeting procedures. He stated that due to the numbers from COVID-19 getting better, it is the hope and desire of the Commission that normal procedures can begin in April, unless things get worse. He stated that this is the best that can be done at this time and we must continue operating the County safely. He added that this particular project (Five Star building purchase) has been in the works for over a year and he appreciates the Commission, Engineer Barkley Kirkland, Chief Administrative Officer Peter Covert, Sheriff's Dept., DDRA and everyone that has been involved in making this happen as he feels that it is "red letter day" for the County.

Commissioner Shoupe stated that he had a few people reach out to him with concerns about the Commission spending the money and he appreciates it and understands the public paying attention to what goes on in the county. He added that he ran as a fiscal conservative and he is sure that the Sheriff's Dept. would love to have a brand new 5 million dollar facility, but that is just not within the financial reality. Commissioner Shoupe commented that the 2.2 million dollars would be paid out over fifteen years and he agreed with the Chairman that whether or not the Sheriff's Dept. would use the building that the County needed to own it. He stated that the Commission had a chance to buy the building years ago and it is significantly higher now

and if they continue to wait the price could be six to ten million dollars. Commissioner Shoupe added that the amount of square footage that the Sheriff's Dept. will have will last them for many years to come. He stated that he is excited about this and it makes sense to save the county money and the Sheriff's Dept. has been asking for a new headquarters as their current building was built in 1926. Commissioner Shoupe commented that this has been a long time coming and this is not something that they just decided to spend a lot of money and set up a new office for the Sheriff's Dept., but it has been needed for a long time and this solves a lot of problems, saves a lot of money and it is the most efficient way to do it and if it were not the case he stated that he would be the first to stand up and say so.

Commissioner Harvey stated that the Commission has been deliberating over this for at least a good year now and he thinks that it is a great decision that is being made and he also agreed with Chairman Culver that the Commission is committed to Downtown Dothan. He added that he did have a few calls from concerned citizens and he had great conversations with them concerning how the Commission is spending money and it has to make sense. Commissioner Harvey stated that it makes sense not to spend 5.6 million dollars compared to 2.2 million. He also agrees that the building should have been purchased years ago. He added that the Sheriff's Dept. will definitely benefit from the purchase and we are not only getting the building but also getting fifty or more secured spaces for their fleet. He also feels that this is an all around good project and he realizes that there is concern. Commissioner Harvey said he had one citizen ask about the dirt roads in the county and he responded that they will always be there even after this commission leaves, they will still have those problems. He stated that what they do as a Commission is to try and make the very best decisions that they can while they are here and present.

Chairman Culver stated that two things he was reminded of was one, spending 2 million dollars on a building as opposed to 5 million on a new building, because the Sheriff's Dept. is not going away and they are going to continue to ask for a new facility. With this purchase, it frees up 3 million that can be spent on roads and the other item is that he wanted to commend the Sheriff as he was on social media this morning and put an endorsement of this project and certainly is in favor of it and he is appreciated for that. Chairman Culver then asked the Director of the DDRA, Jamie Bienvenu, to come forward to comment on this project. He added that he is in hopes that everyone gets the gist of it by him reading the Resolution and the discussion as it is really more than buying a building for the Sheriff's Dept.

Ms. Bienvenu came forward and began by stating that it is absolutely bigger than just buying a building and the relocation of the Sheriff's Dept. She stated that she appreciates and can't say thank you enough to the Commission's support of Downtown Dothan. The DDRA has had studies beyond studies showing that the central business district needs to be more concentrated back to Downtown Dothan as the focus is normally outside of the circle. She

added that with that being said, this particular property is on the key gateway into downtown and it is one of the highest traffic counts in the city as far as pass through traffic to and from the beaches. Ms. Bienvenu said that she is happy to see the large blue metal building, which was located where the new Five Star Credit Union branch will be built, gone and she appreciated the commission tearing it down but she is excited about the opportunity to keep Five Star Credit Union downtown. She recognizes that the Sheriff's Dept. needs a new building but we also need to keep Five Star downtown as they are one of the only banks downtown that caters to the local community within walking distance of the downtown areas. She feels that if they vacate totally from downtown, that the community connection would be lost and it is important that they keep and retain Five Star as a banking branch. Ms. Bienvenu added that the entire gateway to downtown will be cleaned up as there will be clean up efforts in that area and this sends a message to the travelers as they come through Dothan. She commented that this will also help the future Farmer's Market that is planned for downtown. Ms. Bienvenu stated that she understands that there is a desire to have more traffic at the Farm Center but the reason this location is so instrumental for the Farmer's Market is that it currently feeds the local neighborhood. She feels that moving it to this particular location will also feed the local neighborhoods within local walking distance and this is a major reason that the DDRA selected that site for the Farmer's Market. Ms. Bienvenu stated that they are partnering with county farmers and bringing them into the city district to sell their products. The area where this is located has no other facility to buy fresh and local produce. She feels that the DDRA did their homework in selecting the site for that reason and it will also provide a commercial kitchen for those farmers where they can help to reduce some of their loss in their product as they can use the canning kitchen as well and turn their items around for resale. She reiterated that this is bigger than just a building, but it will revitalize an entire city block which is obviously important to the revitalization to Downtown Dothan and it will continue and further support our local agriculture industry by providing the farmer's market site.

Chairman Culver thanked Ms. Bienvenu and stated that all her points are important and it is a location for the Sheriff's Dept. but it is also a community investment and the commission agrees that it is a good investment.

The motion carried unanimously to approve the Resolution.

6. Request to sell on GovDeals: 2003 Ford Explorer and Misc. Office Supplies from Probate Dept. and Misc. Office Equipment from Road & Bridge

Commissioner Herring made the motion to approve the request to sell items on GovDeals. Commissioner Shoupe seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

## STAFF REPORTS

Chief Administrative Officer – No report

County Engineer – 7 closed roads to include Middleton, Gilmore, Cecil Varnum, Pleasant Grove, Coot Adams, Glen Lawrence and Peterman.

County Attorney – No report

Chairman Culver asked about the status of Middleton Rd. and Engineer Kirkland stated that it could be another two to three weeks before it is completed.

Meeting Adjourned