

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION  
REGULAR SESSION  
September 13, 2021

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

Chairman Culver called the 10:00 a.m. meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the September 13, 2021, Houston County Commission Regular Session. He declared a quorum as all commissioners were in attendance.

The invocation was given by Pastor Mark Kocsi, from Trinity Lutheran Church and Commissioner Harvey 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 carried unanimously.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Culver announced that the ceremony held on Saturday commemorating 9/11 was a very good and moving ceremony. He hated that more people could not attend, but with it being a Saturday it is understandable. Chairman Culver added that he is in hoped that people took time to pause and remember and reflect of that day as it changed our world. He added that Nancy was in New York and on the street that day and he is glad she was okay and still with us. He mentioned that Commissioner Herring did the step climbing at the event and it is very much appreciated.

#### AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

##### 1. Recognition – Chris Judah, EMA Director

EMA Director Chris Judah approached the podium and stated that he wanted to recognize a few people and that the county has a very resilient community and the people are fantastic. Unfortunately in the county, there are not enough resources that the city of Dothan or the State has and the county has to rely on volunteers and citizens that help us. He reported that about eight weeks ago they started a community outreach program which includes visiting senior centers, schools, and a lot of other places and they have had a lot of good feedback from it. This outreach includes weather awareness, COVID awareness, and things of that nature. Mr. Judah stated that on Tuesday, August 31, 2021, there was some terrible weather during the morning hours in the south part of the county as well as in Jackson County. Mr. Judah then called Captain James Ivey to the podium. He stated that on the 31<sup>st</sup>, a tornado dropped right out of the sky while he was on Hwy. 605. Captain Ivey called him and stated that he saw the tornado and they both headed to Brannon Stand Road where it hit. Mr. Judah wanted to recognize Captain Ivey as within seconds of seeing the tornado, he was on the phone with the EMA Director and

coordinating everything as the Sheriff's Dept. was there within minutes. On behalf of the EMA, he presented Captain Ivey with a certification of appreciation. Mr. Judah then recognized three dispatchers that were also working that day and they did a fantastic job of coordinating fire and rescue as well as with the Sheriff's Dept. He presented a certificate to three communication dispatchers to include Haisten Murphree, Lacey Raley and Denise Cain. Mr. Judah stated that these dispatchers are some of the best around. He then recognized volunteer Hunter Trawick with the Wicksburg Fire and Rescue as he kept Mr. Judah aware of all activity in the Wicksburg area during the August 31<sup>st</sup> tornado outbreak. He stated that Hunter is only 21 years old and has been a junior firefighter and now a volunteer at Wicksburg. Mr. Judah presented Mr. Trawick with a certificate and thanked him. Mr. Judah then recognized Nick Floyd with the Rehobeth Fire and Rescue, but is all over the county helping with every need there is. He presented Mr. Floyd with a certificate and thanked him as well for all he does for the county. Chairman Culver asked them if they would like to make any comments or the sheriff and they all declined. He then recognized Mayor Kimberly Trotter, who was in attendance today, and stated that she is the Mayor of Rehobeth and is doing an outstanding job for the town of Rehobeth.

## 2. Proclamation – “Hunger Action Month” – Julie Gonzalez, Asst. Director, Wiregrass Area Food Bank

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the proclamation and Commissioner Harvey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Culver thanked Ms. Gonzalez for being here today and he stated that he is sorry that they have not been able to have the annual softball game to benefit the Food Bank, due to COVID. They need to get together and make plans for next year. Commissioner Sinquefield read the proclamation and CAO Peter Covert presented it to Ms. Gonzalez. Chairman Culver thanked Ms. Gonzalez and her staff and co-workers for all they do for the entire region and for making us aware of this event. Ms. Gonzalez stated that she wanted to express their continued gratitude and thanks to the Commission for supporting the Wiregrass Area Food Bank. She reminded everyone that this food bank belongs to the community and they cannot do what they do without the support of the community. She also stated that these times are very trying, as far as having close contact events, they still can have food drives and they urge everyone to host those. They are trying to come up with new and inventive ways to do the job that they do and it has been stressful as they are doing a lot more work with fewer volunteers during these times but they are still able to accomplish taking care of Houston County citizens. She thanked the community.

## 3. Proclamation – “Family Day – A Day to Eat Dinner With Your Children” – Dana Bonney, Executive Director, 334 Prevention Project

Chairman Culver asked Ms. Dana Bonney to come forward to accept the proclamation and to introduce herself to the commission as she is the new director of the 334 Prevention Project. Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to approve the proclamation and Commissioner Herring seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Commissioner Shoupe then read the proclamation and CAO Peter Covert presented it to Ms. Bonney. Chairman Culver thanked Ms. Bonney and her staff for taking on this opportunity and asked her to introduce herself and for comments. Ms. Bonney introduced herself as the new Executive Director and with her is Julie Dobbs, the new Community Outreach Coordinator with

the 334 Prevention Project. Ms. Bonney stated that she began in July and Julie joined in August and said it has been a lot of fun learning and especially the history of the partnership with Houston County. She said that even though it is very important to go into the schools and impact and educate the children, they know that half the battle is won if they can reach the parents and this is where Family Day comes in and the importance that is placed on Family Day. Ms. Bonney stated that she learned that the partnership to end addiction, which began in 2001, helped them to educate the parents to connect with their children and it has been proven that if children have warm and supportive relationships, the chances of substance abuse goes way down. In turn, she continued self confidence, emotional regulation, and all the positives increase but it starts at home. She encouraged everyone that on September 26<sup>th</sup>, to put their phones down and spend time with the family. Chairman Culver thanked them and wished them luck in their endeavors and that the 334 Project is near and dear to the commission.

## REGULAR AGENDA

### 1. Request to approve the 2021-2022 Budget – Peter B. Covert, CAO

Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to approve the 2021-2022 budget and Commissioner Harvey seconded. Mr. Covert began by stating that this is a very unusual year as this community has dealt with many things that were unplanned and unexpected and some of those are presented in the budget both in revenues and expenses. He added that going forward into the next year there are similar items. He continued with the presentation and the following were the highlights: labor and fringe benefits account for 40% of operations and net increase in head account is 3 and there is some movement in departments that will impact the labor/wage/salaries; COLA increase of 1.5% beginning October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 and this is in addition to the 4.3% that was approved and implemented in July and this would bring the total to the CPIU increase for the southern states, which was 5.8%. Major capital expenditures that have been requested in this budget are in working with various dept. heads and their needs: He pointed out that more of a onetime event, 2.5 million dollars for major infrastructure repairs throughout the county are about half of this year's identified critical items by the maintenance department. The projected fiscal year shows 20 million dollars in the fund balance which is above what was budgeted due to onetime income items, which they try to take a conservative approach to the revenue, and in this particular year there are several items that are onetime events. These include expense reimbursements but with government accounting, even though it is an expense reimbursement it is considered revenue and it is recorded as such. Mr. Covert added that with this year's budget they are forecasting 49 million dollars in revenue and 59.8 million dollars in expenditures and forecasting a fund balance at the end of fiscal year 2022 of just under 9.5 million dollars. The general fund forecast and ending balance of just over 7 million dollars. The next slide showed the expenditures and revenues that are in the budget and it shows that the revenue is down from the actual, but it is up from budget. The expenditures contain some information on one time expenditures in this year's budget that will be discussed in detail. He stated that the revenues are expected to come in at 49 million dollars for next year's budget and he pointed out that for the revenue dept. it reflects a 1.5% increase over actual compared to what was budgeted last year, this year and next year, which is a 3.7% increase. The sales and use tax, reflects 11.9% increase over forecast from last year's budget so this is likely to be just over 10 million dollars

forecasted for 2022. The Probate Dept., likewise, shows a decrease but really is not. Last year's budget was 4.5 million dollars so this shows a 4% increase as 2021 was a high revenue year for the Probate Dept. Mr. Covert noted that one thing new in the Probate Dept., is the shift from the franchise taxes being paid to the State rather than coming into the Probate Dept. and there is not a lot of history on that new procedure to calculate accurately. He continued by reporting on the expense side of the budget with it being just over 59.8 million dollars and this is a standard allocation with 42% being salaries and benefits; 42% department expenditures; 7% for capital and other; 5% agencies; and debt services being 3%. Operations expenses include a lot of onetime items in the operating expense for next year although it looks like a large increase; included is 3 million dollars that the Road & Bridge Dept. is expecting to spend on Rebuild Alabama roads in the coming year. In addition, he stated that 2.5 million dollars, mentioned earlier for county buildings critical repairs, and \$650,000 dollars for the renovation work expected to be done in the new Five Star Building (new Sheriff's Dept. location). Mr. Covert added that in the 2021 budget, although they did not receive any revenue on the Five Star Building when purchased, and as the way government accounting works, the loan that was incurred for 2.2 million dollars, it is recognized as revenue. Mr. Covert reported that the expected agency allocations for 2021-2022 are shown in the report. Lease spending is going up slightly due to already expected expenditures that were previously approved. He stated that the non-salary operating expenses and the categories in which they are incurred, such as contract services, is just over 7 million dollars, but this is also where the Rebuild Alabama money is. Mr. Covert continued reporting on the long term debt, the bond refinance, and the Rebuild Alabama bond money and the expected maturity dates of those. He also stated that the county health insurance will show an increase on both the county side and the employee contribution side and added that this is expected each year. In regards to the workforce, there is only a net 3 increase with one being in the Maint. Dept., one additional appraiser, which is reimbursed by the state, and one refuse driver which is due to the growing state of the county. Mr. Covert reporting on the Liability/Workman's Compensation and stated that it is increasing as cost are going up and although the safety of our workers is being watched beautifully by our Safety Director Kelly Crowell, it is a constant job.

Upon the completion of the budget presentation, Chairman Culver commented that he would like to reiterate what Mr. Covert said that the budget is higher than what has been in the past, but the influx of COVID money that has been received, the significant amount of one time expenditures and revenue, primarily related to COVID money, and also Rebuild Alabama and other things, makes the budget look larger than it is, but it should go back to the normal operating amounts next year. During the meetings, the commission discussed that although it appears to be a lot of money, the county did not need to get into the position of spending money that was onetime money on long term items. Chairman Culver stated that there is no doubt that there are areas that additional staffing is needed, but until they can figure out where exactly they will level out, and how it changes, the county did not feel comfortable adding those expenses and knowing that the budget will be significantly less than it is now for next year. He is in hopes that some staffing can be added at a later time, even in this budget year they are looking at but they did not feel comfortable doing it now with all the uncertainty as the money is one time and is specified how it can be spent. Chairman Culver said that he was glad, as he has always believed that they need to pay the employees for the work they do before they hire other employees and not pay any of them for the work they do. He was glad to see that they were able to complete the total 5.8% COLA,

that the cost of living actually shows. Part of this was done in June/July and then the remainder finished in this budget. He feels that the employees deserve that in order to stay in step with the cost of living and also, as they have talked about several times, the Sheriff's Dept., Road & Bridge, and Probate, that in order to keep the ability to hire people as they still continue to struggle with that. He is in hopes that this will help to address that.

Commissioner Shoupe commented that this was a fairly easy budget to put together relative to years past, but given the current inflationary environment he does not think that they should be surprised if they need to come back and look at another midyear cost of living increase. He added that he did not receive a lot of wide spread criticism, but there were some comments last time they did a midyear cost of living increase. Commissioner Shoupe wanted to remind everyone that the people that work for the county are not indentured servants and we do not pay them just to be gracious employees and in a free society we compete for people in an open labor market and we have to pay people what they are worth or they will go somewhere else. Commissioner Shoupe stated that he is not saying that they have to look at it on a specific date at a specific time, but he said that this is something that they need to keep an eye on. Chairman Culver commented that this is a good point and also in their discussions of doing the cost of living, that every four years they try to do a pay study to make sure their pay is in line and competitive. This study should be coming up in a year or so to look at the pay scale and they are in line with comparable jobs elsewhere whether it is Lee County, City of Dothan or private sector.

When called for the vote, the motion to approve the budget passed unanimously.

2. Request to appoint Malone Garrett to fill unexpired term on the Houston County Port Authority

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the request to appoint Malone Garrett to the Houston County Port Authority. Commissioner Shoupe seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

3. Request to appoint Bob Woodall to fill unexpired term on the Industrial Development Authority of Houston, Henry and Geneva Counties

Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to approve the request to appoint Bob Woodall to the Industrial Development Authority. Commissioner Shoupe seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

4. Request to approve the Houston County/Dothan City Gasoline and Diesel Fuel Joint Bid Agreement = Peter Covert, CAO

Commissioner Shoupe made a motion to approve the joint fuel bid agreement and Commissioner Harvey seconded. Chairman Culver reminded everyone that this is the joint purchasing program with the City of Dothan to buy large quantities of fuel. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Request to approve Policy #17-A of the Houston County Policy Manual concerning requested work for the Houston County Board of Education

Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to approve Policy 17-A and Commissioner Herring seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

6. Request to approve lease for mobile health unit to the Alabama Department of Public Health and authorize Chairman to negotiate terms

Commissioner Shoupe made a motion to approve the lease and authorize the Chairman to negotiate terms. Commissioner Sinquefield seconded. Chairman Culver asked CAO Peter Covert if had spoken to anyone on the delivery of the unit and Mr. Covert reported that he had spoken to them and he should be receiving today the artist rendering of what it will look like and once it is approved, the vehicle should be delivered to Houston County by the end of this month. Chairman Culver stated that he had communicated with the director of the health department and they need to schedule a meeting between now and that time of delivery to set up guidelines and specifics. With no other discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

7. Request to award bid for Bituminous Surface Treatment to lowest bidder meeting specs – Road & Bridge

Commissioner Herring made a motion to award the bid for Bituminous Surface Treatment to lowest bidder meeting specs. Commissioner Harvey seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

8. Request for 050 Retail Beer (Off Premises Only) License and 070 Retail Table Wine (Off Premises Only) License – Super Seven, LLC, d/b/a Cottonwood Mart, located at 13306 Cottonwood Rd, Cottonwood, AL 36320

Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to approve the request for the Retail Beer and Retail Table Wine License and Commissioner Shoupe seconded. When called for questions and vote, the motion carried unanimously.

#### STAFF REPORTS

Chief Administrative Officer – No Report

County Engineer – County Rd. 8 is closed at 3 different locations. This is major work and will take some time to complete.

County Attorney – No Report

Meeting adjourned.