

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION
REGULAR SESSION
August 10, 2020

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

Chairman Culver welcomed everyone to the August 10, 2020, Houston County Commission Meeting and called the 10:00 a.m. meeting to order. He declared a quorum as a majority of the commissioners were in attendance.

The invocation was given by Judge Patrick Davenport and Commissioner Siquefield led in the pledge of allegiance.

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

ABSENT: Commissioner Curtis Harvey

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONER

Chairman Culver reported that they are in hopes that the administrative meetings will start up again soon but until then the ZOOM broadcast will continue while the building is on semi-lockdown. The plan at this point is to resume with administrative meetings in September but that is subject to change due to COVID-19 regulations. He encourages everyone to continue to do their part to slow the spread of the virus by wearing their masks and social distancing as it is a rapidly spreading sickness.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

1. Proclamation – “August 2020 Census Month” – Lori Wilcoxon, Census 2020 Coordinator

Chairman Culver invited Mrs. Wilcoxon to come forward to the podium and asked Commissioner Shoupe to read the proclamation.

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the proclamation. Commissioner Shoupe seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

Chairman Culver reported that Mrs. Wilcoxon has been all over the local counties that she is serving and is encouraging everyone to participate in the Census. He added that this is a difficult task during the COVID-19 restrictions and due to everyone being at home that the expected the numbers to be higher than what they are. Chairman Culver then asked Mrs. Wilcoxon for comments.

Mrs. Wilcoxon thanked the commission for their support and reported that Census 2020 is at approximately 60% participation at this time, which is below the 2010 response and unfortunately this is a statewide issue. She announced that a statewide event will be held on August 12th to encourage businesses to allow their employees time to take the census online if they have not already. They are also working with agencies in the area to work with hard to reach areas. She reminded everyone that for every person that takes the census that is \$1,600 back in federal funding for the next ten years and the area needs that money. Mrs. Wilcoxon also stated that everyone knows how hard the COVID-19 has been on everyone with no school, no child care, no healthy lunches, no federally funded programs and these are the very programs that are funded by this census so it is very important that everyone be counted. She reported that statewide they will be targeting the rural white community as well as the African-American community and the school systems. Mrs. Wilcoxon ended by thanking the commission and stated that she would appreciate any help they can give to achieve the goals for the Census 2020, as it will end September 30th instead of the projected October 31st date and 80% is the goal.

Chairman Culver commented that it is extremely important and he assured everyone that the census workers have been trained in accord with the COVID-19 regulations and they can be trusted to come into the homes to help the public take the census. In addition, on August 12th, he encourages businesses to take the time to check with their employees and if they have not taken the census to allow them time to do so. Lastly, Chairman Culver reported that the county is significantly affected in the way of gas tax as it is distributed based on population percentage of each county. He stressed that it is very important that everyone get counted for the census and encourages everyone to do their part.

REGULAR AGENDA

1. Reappoint Jim Loftin to the Dothan-Houston County Airport Authority

Commissioner Shoupe made a motion to approve the request and Commissioner Sinquefield seconded. Chairman Culver reported that the Airport Authority is made up of 4 members and the county has one appointment on that board and added that Mr. Loftin has represented the county very well on this board. When called for the question and vote, the motion carried unanimously.

2. Request to approve resolution for the relocation of the Ashford polling place from the Ashford Depot to Watermark Church East Gymnasium – Patrick Davenport, Judge of Probate

Judge Patrick Davenport came forward and stated that this is a late blooming opportunity that they have been looking at for quite some time. He continued by reporting that this is a large and growing area that has been utilizing the Ashford Depot, but that the Depot is a very small polling facility and that area has outgrown it. He reported that Watermark has purchased the former First Methodist Church of Ashford and they have turned it into their church gymnasium. He feels this is an exceptionally good move for the Ashford area as it is only about three minutes away from the Depot. He stated that the

church faculty is glad to partner with the county for this move. Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to approve the request and Commissioner Herring seconded. Judge Davenport mentioned that they are bringing this request to the commission under the emergency proceedings because today is 87 days until the election and because of the COVID-19, the Ashford Depot size is of concern. Commissioner Sinquefield asked about the notification to the voters of the change and Judge Davenport stated that, like the Cowarts polling place move, the Probate office is not providing notice, however the State will provide notice in the Registrars as they update their records. They will also put up signs and markers signifying the change in polling place. When called for the question and vote, the motion carried unanimously.

3. Request in-kind services to construct parking lot at old IGA building for the City of Ashford – Brad Kimbro, Ashford Downtown Redevelopment Authority

Chairman Culver reported that they have been working out the details on this project for quite a while as the building was demolished several months ago with the help of the county and they are now ready to move forward. The ADRA engineer and County Engineer Barkley Kirkland have worked together on the plans for this project. Mr. Kimbro began by stating that he is here to represent the City of Ashford and the ADRA and he appreciates the county partnering with them on several projects and because of that the city of Ashford is growing with new retail and new home construction. There are a few new restaurants that have opened up and a new coffee shop and they are excited about these additions. He added that as the downtown area continues to improve and develop, parking is already an issue and this will increase due to a larger issue as the downtown area continues to grow. The Broad Street parking is very limited and fills up very quickly and the businesses are in desperate need of additional parking that is convenient and safe and that would be easy to navigate to the businesses. Mr. Kimbro stated that they would like to take this old IGA property and construct a parking lot for downtown businesses as it would be a continuation for economic development and further growth for the City of Ashford and stated that what is good for Ashford is good for Houston County. He thanked the commission for all they do for the citizens of the county. Chairman Culver reported that the ownership of the property is currently the ADRA (Ashford Downtown Redevelopment Authority) and the cost breakdown is about a \$220,000 project with the materials being about \$65,000. Chairman Culver asked who would be paying for this and Mr. Kimbro responded that the city has committed \$39,000 already and the ADRA board meets this week for discussion. Chairman Culver stated that the county would bill the city for payment for this project if it is approved. He also noted that curbing and lighting is not included in the project. Mr. Kimbro commented that Mr. Kirkland is wonderful to work with and they appreciate all that he and his department do. Mr. Kirkland stepped to the podium and reported that there are no sidewalks, no lighting and no curbing including. He also commented that there is some paving that is shown that is on private property but that the county cannot include that area. Mr. Kimbro stated that the area mentioned is about five feet and is on the Masonic Lodge property. The Masonic Lodge has given them permission in writing that they can pave that property. Chairman Culver, again, stated that the County cannot work on any private property and the only way that it can be done is if the Masonic Lodge transfers that five foot area to the ADRA. He added that if this parking lot project is approved, specifics and finalization will be forwarded to the ADRA.

Commissioner Siquefield made a motion to approve the request as stated and Commissioner Shoupe seconded. The motion carried unanimously. Chairman Culver thanked Mr. Kimbro for all they are doing for Ashford.

4. Request to enter into an agreement with Home Oil Company to allow landscaping and maintenance on county right-of-way

Chairman Culver began by reporting that an “outstanding” round-about has been put in place at the intersection of S. Park and Taylor Road and that there is one section where the original plans called for a cement island on one of the corners and both the business and the city would like to see this dressed up a little more, which is the landscaping. He stated that the county does not maintain landscaping, just asphalt and concrete. The agreement presented today is for the business (Home Oil Co.) to maintain the area and the city has requested this. He added that as of this morning there was an issue regarding the drainage of this landscaping. Engineer Kirkland began by reporting that when the island was originally built, the only green space was going to be in the center of the round-about and the city would maintain it. He continued that during construction an island was added in front of one of the business which is owned by Home Oil Corporation. Mr. Kirkland reported that this was not designed to be a green space as it will not drain properly unless holes are put into the back of the curbing and then water will cross the parking lot and eventually cause damage. Chairman Culver stated that in the agreement, it is written that the County will not be responsible for damage to the private property. Mr. Kirkland stated that the only discussion that he has had on this is with the City and that he has not spoken to the owners (Home Oil). County Attorney Pres Register approached the podium and stated that Section 3 of the agreement was put in to address the responsibilities of the said company and essentially the company will be responsible for anything that is done in the green space, any issued related to what happens in that green-space in terms of drainage, any issues that the county would see that would need to be addressed as the county right-of-way that would come from that green space, and they would be responsible for any issues that come from the water that goes into the company parking lot. Mr. Kirkland stated that the agreement states that the said company has to put in piping or anything that is required to do that. Mr. Register commented that it is the company’s responsibility because it is theirs to maintain. Commissioner Siquefield asked that if this agreement is with Home Oil, then when will it be discussed with them. Chairman Culver stated that if this agreement is approved today that it will be sent to the City and Home Oil Corporation and that the City is really driving this as they have the position that they want things to look nice. Chairman Culver also stated that if the agreement protects the county, then he has no problem with it. Commissioner Siquefield stated that he is a little concerned about not discussing this with Home Oil and Chairman Culver stated that it is a timing thing as this project is moving quickly and he has only been approached by the City on this agreement. Engineer Kirkland reported that the City is beginning to build the islands and that is why this needs to be finalized. Engineer Kirkland is concerned that a private company will be maintaining this area. Chairman Culver stated that he does not have a problem with a private company maintaining as long as the county is not held responsible. Commissioner Herring asked Engineer Kirkland for his professional opinion. Mr. Kirkland responded that the county does not gain anything from the agreement but he is

afraid that in the future that if damage happens that the county will be called as we are responsible for county right-of-way but if the agreement is approved Home Oil will be responsible. The County Attorney stated that the agreement is written so that they have a license and are required to maintain the green space. The county owns the island and the right-of-way and the county has the final decision and discretion as to what happens to that island. Commissioner Herring asked the question that if a wreck happens and there is damage to the island who is responsible for the green space. Mr. Register stated that the way the agreement is written that if there was a shrub that was damaged, Home Oil will be responsible if they choose to replace the shrub. If the curbing (cement) is damaged, it is the county's responsibility for repairs. The agreement states that if Home Oil chooses to put in a green space, they are required to maintain what is green and any issues from the water that comes from that green space. Commissioner Shoupe asked what if the company that the agreement is with goes out of business or sells, what happens to the agreement. Mr. Register stated that the agreement would cease. Commissioner Sinquefield stated that he is all for the agreement and the beautification of the island, but he is concerned about the company not having information on the agreement and that they need to know prior and be aware of what is in the agreement. Commissioner Shoupe made a motion to approve the agreement request and Commissioner Herring seconded. Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to table the request until the next meeting. Commissioner Herring seconded the motion to table the request and it carried unanimously.

5. Request for a 011 Lounge Retail Liquor – Class II (Package) License – Sanderi Krupa, Inc., d/b/a Pansey Package Store located at 13075 Highway 84 East, Suite 2, Ashford, AL

Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to approve the request for the license and Commissioner Shoupe seconded. When called for the vote, the motion passed with two YEAS and one NAY.

6. Request for a 050 Retail Beer License (Off Premises Only) – Sanderi Krupa, Inc., d/b/a Pansey Grocery located at 13075 Highway 84 E., Suite 1, Ashford, AL

Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to approve the request for the license and Commissioner Shoupe seconded. When called for the vote, the motion passed with two YEAS and one NAY.

7. Request to approve resolution to authorize notice of public hearing, public hearing, and meeting to address vacating a portion of Barton Road

Chairman Culver commented that this request is to approve the notice of the public hearing, the public hearing and the meeting to address the vacating a portion of Barton Road. County Attorney Pres Register came to the podium and stated that this is in Commissioner Sinquefield's district and this is a portion of a dirt road; the owner is the owner on both sides of the road. Chairman Culver clarified that what we are doing today is adopting a resolution for the process at this point. This is not authorizing the vacating but authorizing the process. Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to approve the resolution to authorize the process of vacating a portion of Barton Road and Commissioner Herring seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

8. Request to authorize Chairman to execute the temporary addendum to the contract for the Dothan City Jail food service – Peter Covert, Chief Administrative Officer

Mr. Covert stated that if the Commissioners may recall that several months ago, the county was contacted by the food service provider for the county jail due to the extremely low population count at the jail. The food service provider was not even able to cover their fixed cost so they requested a temporary increase in their per meal fees during this period of reduced population. He reported that the county was able to work out an arrangement where we entered into an agreement with the commission's approval. Also, the county provides jail meals for city inmates at the City of Dothan Jail and there is a contract in place with the city for this and the county has asked the city for permission to increase their rate during this same temporary period as our rates were increased at the county. The City of Dothan approved this at their last city commission meeting so this request is to approve the temporary increase for the meals provided to the city jail.

Commissioner Shoupe made a motion to approve the temporary addendum to the contract for the Dothan City Jail food service and Commissioner Sinquefield seconded. County Attorney Pres Register clarified that this is an addendum to the contract that we currently have with the city and the only change is what Mr. Covert already explained. Major Rafferty approached the podium and stated that inmate numbers are increasing at the county jail and as of midnight last night the count was up to 343. After a call for the question and vote, the motion carried unanimously.

STAFF REPORTS:

Chief Administrative Officer – No report

County Engineer – County Road 33 for cross drain replacement.

County Attorney – No report

Meeting adjourned