

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION
REGULAR SESSION
September 14, 2020

PRESENT: Chairman Mark Culver, Commissioner Curtis Harvey, 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 September 14th, 2020, Houston County Commission Meeting and called the 10:00 a.m. meeting to order. He declared a quorum as all commissioners were in attendance.

The invocation was given by Judge Patrick Davenport 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 Siquefield. The motion passed unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONER

Chairman Culver asked EMA Director Chris Judah to comment on the current weather situation. Mr. Judah stated that at this point it looks like a lot of heavy rain and thunderstorms and possibly some severe weather from Hurricane Sally.

Chairman Culver announced that as Houston County is the awarding county for the Alabama County Commission Association bids, state wide, and the bids have been submitted, received and opened and they plan to award the bids in the near future.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

1. Presentation – Southeast AlabamaWorks – Melanie Hill and Madison Kimbro

Chairman Culver commented that the commission is honored to have Melanie Hill and Madison Kimbro in attendance as they approached the podium. Mrs. Hill stated that they appreciated the commission having them today and they wanted to let everyone know what Southeast AlabamaWorks is all about. She stated that they cover ten counties to include Barbour, Butler, Coffee, Covington, Crenshaw, Dale, Geneva, Henry, Houston and Pike County and their mission is to identify and address Region 6 workforce needs and their vision for the future is to develop a dynamic and comprehensive workforce. She reported that, as they are during industry tours, they are hearing that employers cannot find employees. Mrs. Hill remarked that is contrary compared to what they see in the media sometimes about loss of jobs, but they have a lot of businesses looking for employees. She also stated that Ms. Kimbro is a great graphics person and is currently putting out an unemployment chart for all the counties and region. Ms.

Kimbro reported that the unemployment chart will state what the unemployment is, how many claims have been submitted and if that is up or down for the week and this will be for each county. Mrs. Hill stated that their main goal is to partner with people, partner with businesses and industries, partner with the three local junior colleges which include LBW, Wallace and Enterprise State, and to make sure that we have a dynamic work force in this area so that they can help the existing business and new businesses. The WOW career event that is held each year for eighth graders entertains about 5,000 eighth graders from across the region and the event will probably not happen this year due to COVID restrictions but the schools have accepted to hold this event on the individual school grounds. They hope to be the hub for workforce development in the area.

Chairman Culver thanked Mrs. Hill and Ms. Kimbro for coming and added that the organization has been around for about six years and they do a great job.

2. Proclamation – “Hunger Action Month” – David Hanks, Executive Director, Wiregrass Area Food Bank

Chairman Culver asked Mr. Hanks to come to the podium and asked Commissioner Harvey to read the proclamation. Commissioner Siquefield made a motion to approve the proclamation and Commissioner Herring seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Commissioner Harvey then read the proclamation and it was presented to Mr. Hanks. Chairman Culver thanked him for the tremendous job that the food bank does and the commission looks forward to next year’s softball game/food drive as it was cancelled this year due to COVID restrictions. Mr. Hanks thanked the commission for their constant support as they have been there since day one which has been going on thirty-one years now. He also bragged on the staff of the food bank and the agencies that have been distributing food during these times. Mr. Hanks reported that typically they distribute about 50,000 lbs. of food per week, but since March, during the COVID, they have been distributing 100,000 lbs. of food per week. He added that they are good on perishables, but it is the dry goods that they need help with during this time. He thanked the commission again.

3. Proclamation – “100th Anniversary of the Kiwanis Club of Dothan” – John Taylor

Chairman Culver asked Commissioner Siquefield to read the proclamation as Mr. John Taylor approached the podium. Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the proclamation and Commissioner Herring seconded. The motion carried unanimously. Commissioner Siquefield then read the proclamation and presented it to Mr. Taylor. Chairman Culver asked Mr. Taylor for comments. Mr. Taylor began by thanking the commission for the proclamation and stated that they are not the largest club around but what they lack in numbers they make up for in longevity with one hundred years of continuance service here in Dothan and the members are proud of that. He reported that the Kiwanis Club raises about \$40,000 to \$50,000 each year which goes back into the local community. These monies are raised through their annual pancake breakfast and the annual golf tournament. This money helps to support the Houston County Cattleman’s Assoc. Steer Show, Farm City Week, Kiwanis Park, the walking trail at James Oates Park, and other charities such as the Boys & Girls Club, Girl’s Inc., and many others. Mr. Taylor thanked the citizens of Houston County for their support as well as the commission.

Chairman Culver thanked Mr. Taylor and commented that the Kiwanis Club has been an interval part of the community for a long time and the club is appreciated for all they do and their commitment to the community.

REGULAR AGENDA

1. Request to approve the 2020-2021 Budget – Peter B. Covert, Chief Administrative Officer

Chairman Culver began by stating that the first item on the agenda is a request to approve the 2020-2021 Budget to include an \$18,000 addition for a feasibility study contracted through Contract Services for trails programs. On a motion by Commissioner Shoupe and seconded by Commissioner Harvey, the request was approved unanimously. Mr. Covert began by stating that this presentation is a culmination of six months of work by all department heads and elected officials to help put this budget together. He continued by thanking the Assistant Chief Administrative Officer, Stephanie Chandler, as the presentation would not be possible if it was not for her constant and diligent efforts. Mr. Covert reported that the presentation would be slightly different this year than in the past due to the incorporation of the "Rebuild Alabama" road expenses. He began by stating that in this budget there are seven additional positions that are asked to be approved by the Sheriff's Dept. and one in the Sanitation Dept. The budget would include a 0.6% COLA, which was determined by the CPIU in the Southeastern states and healthcare cost see an increase of 6%. Also, the pension contribution for 2020/2021 would see a slight increase as well. Mr. Covert pointed out that there are some capital and major spending requests to include equipment for the Road & Bridge and Sanitation Dept., computer system for the Probate Dep., eight Tahoe's for the Sheriff's Dept., a vehicle for IT Dept. to be used for mail delivery service, and major infrastructure repairs throughout the county for the County Buildings Dept. He continued by stating that the county is on track and the beginning fund balance should be \$13,714,267. On the consolidating fund balance, the All Funds column includes the Rebuild Alabama money and the General Fund is what the commission is responsible for. In regards to the general fund, the beginning balance for 2020/2021 is projected at \$8,351,225 and with revenues projected at \$24,327,359, expenses \$31,750,788, net at \$927,796, and transfers at \$4,074,739, the ending fund balance is forecasted at \$5,002,535. Mr. Covert then commented on the pie chart which shows the majority of revenue sources coming from the Revenue Dept. at 39% and 19% from sales and use tax. Other revenue is generated from local revenues, Sheriff's Dept. and Sanitation Dept. collections. Mr. Covert mentioned that even through the COVID-19 experience, the county has seen an increase in sales and use tax and he foresees that to continue on into the next year. In regards to Sanitation Collection, he anticipates a slight decrease in sanitation collections primarily due to during the COVID a lot of second cans have been added to households due to the residents cleaning out as they have been home during this time. He expects a lot of those cans to be returned as things get back to normal so a conservative edge was anticipated in this forecast. Mr. Covert reported that with Community Corrections revenue, they continue to provide at least \$1,000,000 to the commission for the services that Mr. Weber provides through the community corrections program as appose to those participants being put in the jail system. He highlighted that with Interest Income it was anticipated to be a very

good source of revenue for the county, but unfortunately the interest rates fell dramatically during the last fiscal year so the rate expected to earn was not there.

Mr. Covert then turned to the Expense Proposed Budget chart with salaries and benefits continuing to be about 49% of total expenditures and operations being about 40%. The remaining expenses are debt, capital and agency service and other expenses. He commented that the lease spending has decreased due to during the course of the past year some leases were paid off early to execute a Road & Bridge transaction that they were able to acquire by selling old equipment/trucks that generated a profit to pay off some leases to purchase and/or lease new equipment. The non-salary related expenses include contract services, agency support, debt, special requests, road building materials and supplies, capital lease, principal and interest, fuel and lubricants, electricity, computer related items and repairs and maintenance for motor vehicles.

Mr. Covert pointed out that the health and dental insurance rates would show an increase of about 5.6% for the county, both for individual and family coverage, and an increase of 5.5% for the employee portion contribution. He stated this also includes the retired employees as well. He commented on a chart which shows approved positions for employees as the county needs to staff appropriately.

In regards to the Liability and Worker's Compensation, Mr. Covert stated that the Safety Director, Kelly Crowell, continues to bring savings to the county through the safety programs in which she monitors and does a fantastic job. He reported that from ten years ago, those expenses have been cut by almost a half a million dollars, respectfully. He added that recordable medical cases over the last ten years have decreased tremendously from about 60 cases ten years ago to 16 cases in 2019/2020 and ultimately the real goal is to save people's lives.

Upon the conclusion of the presentation, Chairman Culver asked for comments and questions from the commissioners. Commissioner Shoupe asked about the Industrial Park service charge budget of about \$4,000 in revenue but shows expenses at \$24,000 which shows that we are spending a lot more than what we are making in terms of revenue. Commissioner Shoupe commented that he understands that we are providing a service to the industrial park but his question is are we charging an appropriate rate for the use of the waste system. Mr. Covert responded that one of the issues that has come up in the last year and a half is that one of the businesses at the park has closed and the question is should the service charge be reallocated to the existing businesses or try to find a replacement for that business which closed. He also stated that the existing distribution center may have a long term agreement and Chairman Culver remarked that they are also tied into the rest area located on 231 North. Chairman Culver added that the expenses are related to the maintenance, labor and the sewage treatment facility had extensive repairs this past year as it had not had any work in almost twenty years. Commissioner Shoupe stated that his thought is to see if we can determine the market rate is and Chairman Culver commented that had been done when the rest area was included and the rate was established. Commissioner Shoupe asked about the sanitation revenue showing the projection as \$2.3 million dollars and expenses projected at \$2.2 million plus another \$25,000 in collection fees and depreciation of the trucks, are we losing money. Mr. Covert answered that we are breaking even or close to it. He added

that the state examiner's office looks at that and it should not be a net income source for the county and it should be covering expenses. Chairman Culver commented that a few years ago the county was paying \$18 per ton to dispose of garbage and then some issues arose with landfill disposal and the amount went to \$39 per ton. He stated that effective this month the price will be \$37.50 per ton and the alternate location, in case we do not go to the \$37.50, is \$41 per ton. Commissioner Shoupe commented that he is excited that a .06% COLA will be included in the budget for the employees and the decrease in lease expenses but feels that we need to hold the line on the number of employees. He stated that he realizes that the Sheriff's Dept. has been requesting deputies for a long time and it is needed and it should get us where we need to be in that department. Commissioner Shoupe added that he is super excited about the trails that is being talked about and he feels this is a step in the right direction for the citizens.

Commissioner Sinquefield had one point of interest concerning the liability and worker's compensation and he congratulated all the department heads and employees for their conscious effort of safety during their working hours as not only does it save lives but we see a great reduction in our premiums. He continued by stating that while looking back on 2010-2011 when Mrs. Kelly Crowell began to implement a lot of safety and safety incentive discount programs, the county is looking at \$423,000 in savings which is an increase in revenue and an increase in protecting our employees, citizens, bringing in revenue and saving lives. He commended Mrs. Crowell for a job well done.

Chairman Culver commented that according to the capital budget, he did not see the EMA vehicle and asked Mr. Covert if that was in the budget. Mr. Covert responded that he could not answer that and Chairman Culver stated that he was sure it was in there as it was never taken out. He added that the sanitation revenue needs to be further discussed as he does not understand why the situation with the cans would create a decrease in revenue. Also, he mentioned the county buildings as they are getting older and Sean Curtis is doing an outstanding job with what he has to work with. Chairman Culver reported that the county is working down a path that Mr. Curtis has laid out to try to address a lot of things in the buildings and Chairman Culver is hopeful that there will be an opportunity this year to make a positive step in possibly unloading a couple of buildings that will help in future costs. He stated that this will save in the long term which is always a positive move. He added that the buildings are assets to the citizens of Houston County and we are charged in taking care of these buildings.

Chairman Culver commended Commissioner Herring, Sheriff Donald Valenza and his staff, and the Houston County School Board for working together and coming up with a collaborative plan to hire seven new employees for the Sheriff's Dept., which is more than normal, but this was made possible due to the School Board's willingness to work with the county to help pay for these deputies and in turn it provides more resource officers in the school system. He stated that this is a win-win for everybody involved and the important thing is to make sure the children are safe. Lastly, Chairman Culver mentioned the Houston County Department Heads, who every year work so well with the Commission on the budget process with being reasonable in their request but also at year end, being conscious of their budgets. He stated that they are very frugal with their money and they do realize that it is tax money sent to us by citizens of the county and they take that very serious. Chairman Culver reported

that when there are funds left at the end of the year, they transfer forward to the next budget year and makes the new budget easier to start so that the needs can be filled. He again thanked the department heads and the employees for all they do.

Chief Administrative Officer Peter Covert stated that the EMA vehicle is in the budget.

When called for the vote, the motion passed unanimously.

2. Request to approve Resolution for temporary polling place change from Taylor City Hall to Taylor Senior Center – Patrick Davenport, Judge of Probate

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the resolution for the temporary polling place. Commissioner Shoupe seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

3. Request in-kind services for road repair at Landmark Park – Laura Stakelum, Executive Director, Landmark Park

Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to approve the request for in-kind services and Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion. Chairman Culver commented that Mrs. Stakelum had reported that they are going to come up with a permanent repair for this problem but in the meantime the county will help with this. He asked Mrs. Stakelum who was going to ask the city for help and she commented that she would. Engineer Kirkland asked about the gravel needed for the project and Chairman Culver stated that Mrs. Stakelum was going to ask the City of Dothan for it. When called for the question, the motion passed unanimously.

4. Request to allocate CARES Act funding to the Houston County Volunteer Firefighters Association and the Houston County EMS Association for purchase of equipment and materials pending approval by State of Alabama – Chris Judah, EMA Director

Commissioner Sinquefield made the motion to approve the request and Commissioner Herring seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Request approval of assignment of inmate phone system vendor from Legacy to NCIC – Peter B. Covert, CAO

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the request and Commissioner Shoupe seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

6. Request approval of assignment of juvenile ankle monitor vendor from SLS to SuperCom, - Peter B. Covert, CAO

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the request and Commissioner Sinquefield seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

7. Request to acknowledge Sheriff's approval of agreement with Permittium, LLC. – Maj. Bill Rafferty, Sheriff's Dept.

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the request to acknowledge Sheriff's approval of agreement with Permittium, LLC. and Commissioner Sinquefield seconded. Commissioner Shoupe asked if the public will still be allowed to come in person for a concealed weapon permit and Major Rafferty answered that they would. When called for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

8. Request to approve repair of X-ray machine at Courthouse – Maj. Bill Rafferty, Sheriff's Dept.

Commissioner Shoupe made a motion to approve the request to repair the X-ray machine and Commissioner Harvey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

9. Request to approve final plat for Park Ridge Subdivision, Phase 4B – Road and Bridge

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the final plat for Park Ridge Subdivision, Phase 4B and Commissioner Sinquefield seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

STAFF REPORTS:

Chief Administrative Officer – No report

County Engineer –Closed Roads: Boys Club Rd. and Pleasant Grove

County Attorney – No report

Meeting adjourned