

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION  
JANUARY 26, 2009

PRESENT: Chairman Mark S. Culver, Commissioner Curtis Harvey, Commissioner Bobby R. Snellgrove, Commissioner Frances M. Cook, Commissioner Phillip L. Forrester, Gary Sherrer, Attorney, Mark Pool, Engineer, and William J. Dempsey, Chief Administrative Officer

ABSENT: None

Chairman Mark S. Culver called the 10:00 A.M. meeting to order, established that a quorum was present and welcomed everyone. Pastor Tommy Davis, New Miranda Baptist Church, gave the invocation. Commissioner Snellgrove led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the minutes of the last meeting. Commissioner Cook seconded; and the motion carried unanimously.

Announcements and Public Comments from Chairman and Commissioners

On behalf of the Commission, Chairman Culver extended congratulations to Lori Stutts Collier Ingram, who was recently appointed by Governor Riley as the new District Judge, to fill the vacancy left by Brad Mendheim. He pointed out Judge Mendheim was recently elected as the new Circuit Judge. Chairman Culver reported he planned to set up a meeting with the people in the judicial system in the next few weeks and Judge Ingram will get to participate.

Chairman Culver announced that the property site under the Revenue Commissioner's Office is up and running. He pointed out that anyone who was interested, could go to the banner on the front of the web page at [www.houstoncounty.org](http://www.houstoncounty.org) and access the property site as they did before. He stated the aerials are up and it is operational. He pointed out there are a couple of minor things they are going to add. The chairman reported this system has more information than the previous site including two foot contours, the flood plains, structures in the county. He pointed out the old site just had structures in the City of Dothan. The chairman stated the site had a lot of capability, and he hoped everyone would enjoy it.

The chairman reported the Montgomery County Commission was also meeting at the same time, and they would be addressing the Resolution that the Houston County Commission passed several months ago relating to the Interstate 10 Connector Toll Road Project. He stated Mr. Steve Shaw, Mr. Matt Parker and several other members of Focus 2000 had planned to attend their commission meeting. The chairman reported it was the belief that the Montgomery County Commission would vote to approve the Resolution as Houston County, and Dale and Geneva Counties had done. Chairman Culver reported that he felt it was a significant act because it gives the reality that they are talking about a road from the coast to Montgomery, connecting this part of the corner of the world with the rest of the nation; not just a road from Dothan to the interstate. He stated he did not know about timing because all the issues would have to be

worked out. He pointed out they had to get Pike County on board. Chairman Culver stated they have been trying to develop an outer loop in Montgomery, and the plan will include the outer loop connected to the interstate connector toll road. He stated if Montgomery approves the Resolution, he felt it would be a significant step giving some end to the road that starts at the coast coming through our region. Chairman Culver reported Todd Strange, Chairman of the Montgomery County Commission, had taken this project under his wing and has done a really good job. He commended the Montgomery County Commission for taking this very positive step.

## Regular Agenda

### 1. Request to update Long Range Plan.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the request to update the Long Range Plan. Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion.

Chairman Culver reported that he had made some comments at the Administrative meeting and some of them were taken quite literally, and he had received several phone calls about. The chairman then mentioned some of the changes in the plan.

He stated under capital plan under buildings they still have to evaluate Communications and EMA. He reported it does not appear it is going to be a joint center with the City of Dothan at this time because of funding. Chairman Culver reported the commission was looking at a move to clear up some things in the Courthouse in order to move juvenile into the basement.

The chairman stated he thought one day, and it might not be the current commission, but the county would end up with a unified county system for communications. He pointed out Dale County has that and it appears to work well. The chairman pointed out the Dothan-Houston County E-911 funds that come in, and it makes sense to have one unified system and one dispatch that takes care of the entire county that would work with Dothan, Ashford, all of the volunteer fire departments all together. The chairman stated he would hope that the county would move toward that long term. He pointed out what the commission is doing in the plan is not necessarily that but it is moving the EMA office and Communications to another location.

Chairman Culver reported also on the agenda is to enter into a lease with Pardons and Paroles to occupy the SARCOA building and if the commission approves it, it will generate some revenue for the county.

He stated they had added the water and sewer expansions that are needed down the 231 South corridor. He stated it was not just for the project down there but also for future growth. Chairman Culver pointed out they are looking at grants to do that.

The chairman reported in the Intersection and Road Improvements with the City, they are currently working on the Ardilla Intersection, the light is operational at Brannon Stand and

Murphy Mill. He reported they could probably take it off since it has been completed. He reported the plan contained the following road extensions: 1. Extend Taylor Road to 231 South and 2. Extend Napier Field Road behind the Dothan Pavilion to Odom Road.

He reported the continuation of the commission's top priority, providing water to the citizens of Dothan, and providing water in front of every paved road in Houston County. He stated it is a long term project and also supporting the county's long term water source needs.

Chairman Culver reported he had mentioned the Toll Road connection Montgomery to the Coast.

He pointed out there were a couple of widening projects: Brannon Stand Road and Fortner Street.

Chairman Culver reported under the Operational Plan, the county is getting ready to work on the pay rate study that they hope the county will implement in next year's budget. The chairman stated he thought the commission had always taken the stand that they feel strongly the need to compensate the employees at a market rate even if it means having fewer employees. He stated the county needs to take care of the employees.

The chairman reported there would be some changes made to the budget process that will begin in March.

He stated the county is in the final stages of implementing the Building and Permitting process Building Permits.

Chairman Culver reported on Thursday they had talked about the Safety Program and reducing Workman's Comp costs. He stated he had received four calls and Commissioner Cook had given him one of individuals who had called about the Safety Director's job. Chairman Culver reported he wanted to make it clear that this was a long range plan. He pointed out the county is currently under a position freeze. Chairman Culver reported that this position will pay for itself, but it would be several months before the position is established. He stated they appreciated all of those who have contacted the commission about the position, and they will keep all of the information.

The chairman stated the commission wanted to continue its efforts to provide public access to county government through the media, through being part of things in the community, going out to town council meetings, and Dothan City Commission meetings.

Chairman Culver asked if the commission wanted to take out Item #3 A-2, the Brannon Stand Road and Murphy Mill Road project? Mr. Pool stated it was operational but it was not totally complete but would probably be complete by the next meeting. He reported they have to put another layer of striping material, and just some minor things. Chairman Culver reported they would take that out, and the plan will include everything but Item #3 A-2.

Chairman Culver reported Mr. Forrester had asked about the long term continuation of the siren program. He asked Mr. Clark Matthews to come forward and explain where the county's been, the current status, and where they might be going?

Mr. Matthews reported when they started in 2004, there were around 32 sirens using Farley's sirens. He stated the long range plan that they have identified locations with the most populated areas of Houston County. He reported if they got funding, a siren would go in the Northview area because of the criteria they signed up for in the beginning, the population, and the dangers of most likely getting the most damage. He stated there are a couple of schools that need to be covered because they are on the edge of the present siren coverage. Mr. Matthews reported the next area would be in the Bay Springs area.

He reported grants are harder to come by and they have not had a lot of success obtaining grants. He stated they used Homeland Security funds and HMPG funds for the last set of sirens. He reported those are funds that FEMA sets aside after a natural disaster to do mitigation work, and sirens are considered mitigation work. Mr. Matthews reported he did not submit any for this year's budget because of the criteria the Commission had set forth. He stated they might want to do that when they look at the long range plan. Mr. Matthews stated Homeland Security money is harder to get because they have a lot more strings attached than they did in 2004-2006, and sirens have been removed from that. He reported Homeland Security's biggest concern is protecting infrastructure. He stated he will keep applying for grants. Chairman Culver pointed out a couple of the locations mentioned are in the City of Dothan and they would be responsible. The chairman stated he did not know if it needed to be in the long range plan but the continuation of the pursuit of grants is still there. Chairman Culver reported the two areas, Northview and Bay Springs, that Mr. Matthews mentioned were the two areas he had understood that were needed. The chairman stated they would continue but unless the commission wanted to it would not be a part of the long range plan.

Commissioner Snellgrove stated earlier that the Chairman had mentioned about the communications and the possibility of looking at combining both departments into one central communications center. He reported it seems to work well in a lot of other counties. He stated the question has come up in Houston County about duplicating services. Commissioner Snellgrove stated he thought in the future they should consider having one communications center in order to better serve the citizens. Chairman Culver stated at some point, he felt the E-911 Board will probably want to have discussions. He pointed out he and Commissioner Snellgrove would be involved in that. He stated monies are extremely tight in all areas of government and the private sector and any time you can be more efficient it is something to look at.

Chairman Culver called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

2. Request to approve Lease Agreement between the Houston County Commission and the Alabama Pardons and Paroles for the old SARCOA building, and the appropriate budget amendment.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the Lease Agreement between the Houston County Commission and the Alabama Pardons and Paroles for the old SARCOA building, and the appropriate budget amendment. Commissioner Forrester seconded the motion.

Chairman Culver reported they had talked several months ago about different uses for the SARCOA building. He stated it ultimately went to Pardons and Paroles in order to get them out of the courthouse and clear up some space, and at the same time, generate some revenue for the county. The chairman reported Mr. Sherrer did an outstanding job in negotiating on the commissions' behalf. He stated he got \$2 more a foot than first thought, and he thanked Mr. Sherrer for doing so. The chairman reported the county will receive \$36,000 per year for the lease. He stated some costs will be involved for the utilities. The chairman reported at the present time, the Pardons and Paroles office is not paying anything and there will be a net increase in the county's revenue. He stated also, the building will be providing Marshall Smith, Regional Director of the Veterans Affairs Office, with an office.

Chairman Culver called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously. (Please see attached budget amendment in Minute Book)

3. Request to set County Levies for Alcoholic Beverages.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to set the County Levies for Alcoholic Beverages as presented. Commissioner Snellgrove seconded the motion.

Chairman Culver reported this is annual and customary. He reported there is no increase; the commission is authorizing the present fees. Chairman Culver called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously. (Please see attached in Minute Book)

4. Request to approve Policy #43 for Identity Theft Prevention Program.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve Policy #43 for Identity Theft Prevention Program. Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion.

Mr. Dempsey reported this is mandated by the Federal Trade Commission and has to be in place by May 1<sup>st</sup>. He stated it has been patterned by the ACCA recommendation and by Wiregrass Electric Co-op, the county's billing agent for sanitation. Chairman Culver asked Mr. Dempsey to send a copy of it to the Houston County Water Authority, and make them aware of it. He stated it is probably something they have to do since they bill monthly.

Chairman Culver called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

Staff Reports:

a. Chief Administrative Officer

Mr. Dempsey reported the county is coming to the end of the first month billing Wiregrass Electric Co-op in our Sanitation bill. He reported Ms. Sharon Dempsey has done an outstanding job. He reported they had received some questions but they are slowly being answered. He stated the county appreciated the cooperation of Wiregrass Electric Co-op, and the staff at the county. He stated all is going well.

Chairman Culver reported he had received some calls about it but they have been more positive comments than negative. He stated most of the calls have been about they have not been billed before and now they are being billed, and if they have power, then they get a garbage bill. Chairman Culver stated he hoped everyone understands why the policy is what it is. He stated it is not that the county thinks someone is going to tell them that nobody is living there and then slide somebody in there. The chairman reported the county has to have a way to monitor people moving in and out. He stated there is no way the county has the staff to do that and keep up with it. He stated the county's policy that every house that has electricity will receive a bill at the residence is the way the county has to keep up. The chairman stated he had received a call last week from someone stating no one was living at a residence and he did not want to pay the bill. Chairman Culver asked what was at the residence? He stated there was junk that would be cleaned out. The chairman stated he asked him if they were going to place the junk they cleaned out at the road, and he stated yes. Mr. Culver stated if there is power at a residence there may not be garbage generated there but the opportunity is there.

Mr. Pool reported they had 2, 200 houses they were having to monitor where people were moving in and out. He stated when they left, they would tell the county to cut the bill off. Mr. Pool stated when new people moved in they would not call the county. He reported the new system that Mr. Dempsey has developed has eliminated that completely. Chairman Culver reported that the positive is that the county hopes to collect the monies they are supposed to collect. He stated he was sorry about those that are now having to pay that were not having to pay the county, but hopefully this will keep the county from having to go up on rates for a long time.

Commissioner Snellgove stated if he understood it correctly, everyone that gets a sanitation bill will get a bill from Wiregrass Electric. He stated a gentleman had contacted him over the weekend that had not received a bill, and he has been paying his garbage bill for many years. Mr. Dempsey stated if his electricity is currently provided by Wiregrass Electric, the sanitation charge is actually a line item on the bill. Mr. Dempsey stated if his electricity is provided by Alabama Power and in some cases, the City of Dothan, he will receive a bill from Wiregrass Electric for \$15.00. Mr. Dempsey reported the people who have credits will not receive the bill, and they will receive their credit in full. Mr. Snellgrove stated the man's concern was that if he did not receive a bill, he did not want to wait until the next month or two and get a bill and be charged with a late fee. Mr. Snellgrove was to get with Mr. Dempsey after the meeting. Mr.

Dempsey reported there were approximately 11,000 customers that have been transitioned, and he would like to say it was 100% accurate. He pointed out Ms. Dempsey's goal is to make sure the database is 100% accurate.

b. County Engineer

Mr. Pool reported the intersection of Murphy Mill Road and Brannon Stand Road has made a tremendous difference as far as traffic flow. He reported the plans have been completed on Fortner and Brannon Stand Road and they are taking them to the Highway Department. Mr. Pool stated once the plans are approved, they can start on the right-of-way, which he stated it would take approximately 6 months. He pointed out the money is there. He stated hopefully this time next year they will be under construction on that intersection.

Chairman Culver stated he received a call about the new light at Murphy Mill Road and Brannon Stand Road questioning who controls the timing of it. The chairman stated he was told it was a pretty long light. Mr. Pool stated the county is maintaining the light. He asked if that was the only light the county maintains? Mr. Pool stated they had a light down at McLane's. He reported they would be putting one at Fortner and Brannon Stand and they would be putting one at Trawick and Brannon Stand. Chairman Culver asked if the county contracts with someone to maintain it or if he had developed staff? Mr. Pool reported Mr. Myer Holloway was going to be in charge of it. He stated if there is something they cannot do, they have contracted out before. Chairman Culver stated he did not think the county needed to go buy a bucket truck to service 3 lights. Mr. Pool stated two years ago, they bought a bucket truck off the surplus lot from the Highway Department. Chairman Culver reported a lot of counties contract with the cities to maintain the lights. Mr. Pool stated they were studying that. Mr. Pool pointed out there is a little blip on the light and the contractor that put the traffic signal in is supposed to be out there to fix it.

Mr. Pool reported they were working hard on the Ardilla Intersection and Wiregrass Rehab.

c. County Attorney – there was no report.

Commissioner Snellgrove reminded all employees who drive county vehicles that the price of gas went from \$4.00 a gallon to \$1.40 a gallon and it has gone back up to \$1.70-\$1.80 per gallon and he asked them to be as cautious with fuel consumption as possible because it looks as if gas will continue to climb. Chairman Culver stated the county has a policy about how employees are supposed to drive, and he asked them to be mindful of the policy. He stated the county also has a new fuel system in place that will give the county better control.

Adjourn.

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Snellgrove seconded; and the motion carried unanimously.

