

MINUTES OF HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION  
JUNE 11, 2007

PRESENT: Chairman Mark S. Culver, Commissioner Curtis Harvey, Commissioner Bobby R. Snellgrove, Commissioner Frances M. Cook, Gary Sherrer, Attorney, Mark Pool, Engineer, and Roy Roberts, Administrator

ABSENT: Commissioner Phillip L. Forrester

Chairman Mark S. Culver called the 10:00 A.M. meeting to order. Commissioner Curtis Harvey gave the invocation. Commissioner Bobby 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

Chairman Culver announced that the Personnel Board voted last week to authorize a sick leave bank for county employees. He reported the county had been discussing this issue for about two years. The chairman pointed out there is one employee he knows of that the county has some employees that want to donate their time. He reported the Personnel Board voted and set up policy and procedure.

Commissioner Snellgrove reported a public hearing would be held at 6:00 P.M., June 14<sup>th</sup>, at Bethel Church located on the Cottonwood Road concerning the intersection. He stated some changes would be made in redesigning that intersection and it would be a joint effort by the state, city, and county. Chairman Culver encouraged everyone in that area to attend.

Awards and Presentations

1. Introduction of Houston County Queens – Mrs. Sue Hicks, Altrusa Club

Chairman Culver asked Mrs. Sue Hicks, Altrusa Club, to come forward and introduce the Houston County queens. Mrs. Hicks recognized Mrs. Dorma Granger, the incoming president. Mrs. Hicks reported Ms. Chasilyn Sawyers, Future Little Ms. Houston County was unable to attend. She then introduced the following: Little Ms. Houston County – Torrie Lynn Anderson, Junior Ms. Houston County – Hayley Searcy, Teen Ms. Houston County – Hillary Ann Anderson, and Ms. Houston County – Ashlee Silavent. Mrs. Hicks reported Ms. Silavent had won a scholarship to the University of Alabama.

Chairman Culver recognized Mrs. Kelley Anderson, the mother of two of the queens. He reported she has 7 girls and she home schools them. He pointed

out there have been two other daughters who have been in this pageant, and have been recognized at commission meetings. He thanked her for her patience and all she does in raising 7 girls.

Ms. Silavent reported she was an honor graduate of Houston County High School, and in the fall she would be attending the University of Alabama. She reported she was very excited to be Ms. Houston County and representing all of the commission as well as the citizens of the county. Chairman Culver wished Ms. Silavent and Ms. Torrie Lynn Anderson the best of luck in the National Peanut Festival Pageant. The chairman thanked all of the queens for attending.

2. Envision Update – Dr. Thomas Harrison, Dothan Area Chamber of Commerce, Dr. Barbara Alford, Chairperson, P-16+ Education Task Force.

Chairman Culver reported this is a quarterly Envision update, and Dr. Thomas Harrison has been gracious to come every three months and let us know where we are in the Envision program. At that time, Dr. Harrison stated they appreciated the county's continued support of the Envision process. He stated they are at a point where they actually are identifying projects and people to lead those projects. Dr. Harrison reported at this point, when they start working on changes that need to be made he stated he hoped the commission would understand there are some issues they have to deal with in order to bring about that change. He reported these things might not be quite as easy as they had hoped they would be. Dr. Harrison pointed out they are hopeful with the leadership they have that they will be very successful.

Dr. Harrison then introduced Dr. Barbara Alford. He stated she had probably provided as great a leadership and put as much time and work as anyone in the Envision process.

Dr. Alford thanked Chairman Culver and the members of the commission. She stated the P-16+ Education Task Force basically means from the cradle to the grave. Dr. Alford reported this is a 36 member task force and Commissioner Harvey represents the Commission. She pointed out there are only 5 people in that group who are actually employed in the education arena, and that was by design. Dr. Alford reported they wanted insider information along with the perspective of people who are vested in education in different ways but who are not necessarily part of the "system." She reported the Task Force met individually with school superintendents to add their impressions and suggestions to the data already collected via research and public input. Dr. Alford pointed out the following three primary themes leading to projects emerged, and these will be the focus of Task Force activity for the next three years:

Project #1: Using the WorkKeys initiative as a center point, expand and strengthen the business/industry-education interaction into meaningful, sustained

partnerships that increase student interest, persistence, performance and placement.

Project #2: Sponsor an annual Arts Festival that will showcase student art in the broadest possible sense. The festival would involve as many students, parents and teachers in Dothan-Houston County as possible and would demonstrate that “art” is an integral part of everyone’s life.

Project #3: This project is being determined and directed by a student team consisting of student leaders from Dothan City and Houston County high schools. The team has identified a need to create active mentor/outreach programs in each of their high schools, bringing together students who need assistance with students who are willing and eager to provide assistance. Students for Students (S4S) will provide academic aid, advice, friendship, mentoring and (where needed) referral for fellow students. Their goal is to insure that all students attending area high schools interact in meaningful ways with at least one other student on their campus-thereby increasing the prospects of student success, graduation and satisfaction. The students will work this summer to gain administrative approvals on their campuses, select their teacher-sponsors, identify and recruit initial members of the S4S mentor squads at their schools, design logos/fliers/t-shirts and have the programs ready in each high school by the beginning of Fall Term 2007. They plan to be able to explain S4S to parents and students at their high school freshman orientation programs. The leaders will meet twice during the summer to share ideas and to insure that the program continues to enjoy the city-county unity that has gotten it to this point. One of the area private schools is likely to join the project in a few weeks. (Please see attached report in Minute Book)

### 3. Economic Development Update – Mr. Matt Parker, Dothan Area Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Matt Parker gave the commission an economic update. He reported sometimes people forget about how much progress has been made over the last several years with the economic development efforts. He then showed a slide presentation. Mr. Parker reported in April, 2006, there were 64,300 people employed, and in April, 2007, there were 65,800 people employed in the Dothan Metropolitan market. He stated 1,400 jobs have been added to our area economy. Mr. Parker reported when that is broken down on the Houston County portion, another 1,041 people are employed as compared to a year ago. He reported the unemployment rate has dropped to 2.4%, a .3% drop which is well below the state and national average.

Mr. Parker reported recently, our area was identified as one of the top areas to retire in the *Retirement Life Styles Magazine*. He pointed out a lot of people have relocated from the Midwest and the Florida area. Mr. Parker reported the cost of living is an indicator that is used for business and bringing people in to take some of the harder to fill jobs in the skilled areas. He pointed out they look

at the ACCRA, an index that well over 300 of the metropolitan areas are doing on a quarterly basis. He reported things are priced in a 3 day period each quarter and it could be from a can of tomatoes to a cost of a healthcare bed to milk or egg prices, housing, etc. Mr. Parker reported the study shows how our area stacks up and currently we are at 14% below the national average in costs. He pointed out our area is 20% below the national average in health care costs, 18.7% in utilities, and 30% below the national average in costs on housing. Mr. Parker reported these are great indicators to bring people to Dothan/Houston County and with the economic numbers our area is seeing with the employment indicators that is helping a lot. Mr. Parker reported there are 369 metropolitan areas in the country and 87% of all the GDP for the country is generated. He pointed out our area has the fifth lowest unemployment rate in the country. Mr. Parker reported that is a very positive indicator and he sees it continuing. He reported income is one of the more important issues to families, and our area is in the top two as far as the percentage of income growth per family incomes rising in the family at 5.7% this year based on the research with the Center for Business and Economic Research, University of Alabama. He reported our area is second in job growth at 1.9%. Mr. Parker reported those are very positive indicators for our market. Mr. Parker reported Houston County is growing at 8%, the State of Alabama 3%, and the United States is 6%. He pointed out that our area is well above the state and national averages in growth. Mr. Parker reported he felt by the 2010 period, Houston County will have grown 12 to 13% on current pace. He stated Houston County grew 9.2% over the previous ten years.

He reported there have been 19 new and expanding industrial projects in the metro market representing well over \$42 million in investment and announced jobs with full operational capacity over the year was 1,000. Mr. Parker pointed out they are currently working on a distribution project in Westgate Industrial Park. He stated logistically, that is where the company needed to put their project and there are a few smaller projects that are looking at expansions and new developments. Mr. Parker reported they are in the first initial cut for a distribution project in the distribution park at the county line. He pointed out it will take some time to determine where the project will go. Mr. Parker reported the building inventory has been short and in the last few days, they had an opportunity to work with Slocumb to put a project in there in the building product manufacturing arena. He stated they are closing that project out at this time and they will be utilizing a 52,000 square foot building with 50-100 jobs when they become fully operational. Mr. Parker reported it has been a challenge. He stated the activity has been good and it has pretty much taken a lot of the building inventory. He reported there is no building product from 30,000 to 120,000 square feet in our market and about 85% of the projects are looking for existing buildings. Mr. Parker reported having that inventory is very important for the economic activities. He pointed out there is research being done on putting speculative projects.

Mr. Parker reported there are currently three AIDT programs. He stated over the past two years the AIDT program has been recognized nationally as having the top training program in the nation. Mr. Parker reported that is quite an accomplishment. He stated AIDT is probably one of the strongest incentives in Alabama.

Mr. Parker reported they are very excited about the partners in Mobile with the TK project, the largest private investment in the U.S. that they know of at any one time, representing about \$3.7 million of investment when it is fully operational. He stated with that kind of output and production of steel related products, he felt it would provide a lot of ample opportunities in our area to grow more building manufacturing, machining manufacturing, and other types of steel production fabrication processing that is needed as we look down the road.

He reported since the creation of the Dothan-Houston County Micro-Loan Program there have been 8 loans and they have helped to create or save 161 jobs, helped entice and encourage private investment of over \$500,000. He stated this is a small loan program, \$10,000 or less in size, which was a gap that they identified in the market a few years back. Mr. Parker reported they had the resources to address those projects from a financing standpoint from \$10,000 up to \$1 million with local and federal resources but they did not have anything for that small micro-loan gap from \$4,000 to \$10,000. He reported they have an application in to fully fund this program, and should have some news within the next 30 days. He stated they will reach their full level of capitalizing the program. Mr. Parker reported this was a local effort because they did not qualify for federal funding they worked with the business and banking community to create the resources with that and Mr. Tom Solomon, SE Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission, to seed that and cooperation from the county and the city to do that. He reported it is a good financial resource to help business grow and expand .

Mr. Parker reported RLF is the program for the Revolving Loan Fund program which has helped numerous companies here with the gap financing to help make deals happen. He reported the bill did get refunded in this past legislative session. Mr. Parker reported the SE Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission will receive \$1 million to reseed that program and it will help to do more projects now.

Mr. Parker reported the county has been an instrumental partner in the downtown master plan along with the city and other entities in the community. He stated they are looking at the Flex Loan Program. He pointed out there is a special niche and opportunity to create a new program to help with doing projects in the downtown core area where the initial discussions to create the program would be more of a subordinated type program to work in concert with private lending activities. He reported existing industry efforts continue. He stated last week they had celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sony and their contribution to our area. Mr. Parker reported that Perdue had their community meeting and he

thanked them for their contribution. He also thanked the county for their supportive efforts.

Mr. Parker then gave an activity report on the calls, walk-ins, and re-location packets at the front desk of the Chamber. Mr. Parker reported retiree attraction is part of the overall economic development plan because the community needs to be diversified and not top heavy in any one particular area. He pointed out the retirees are primarily coming from South Florida, the Midwest, and Texas.

Mr. Parker thanked the commission for all their work, support and assistance. He reported Chairman Culver is always there to represent the county when they need to meet with someone, and he thanked him for his positive economic efforts.

Chairman Culver thanked Mr. Parker for a good report and stated the commission appreciates everything he does in keeping them advised, updated, and involved.

#### Regular Agenda

1. Request to award bid on sign posts.

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to award the bid on galvanized U-channel sign posts to Newman Traffic Signs, low bidder meeting specs, in the amount of \$26.19 each. Commissioner Cook seconded; and the motion carried unanimously. (Please see attached bid summary sheets in Minute Book)

2. Request from Alabama Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Homeland Security to appoint National Incident Management System (NIMS) point of contact – Clark Matthews.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the request from the Alabama Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Homeland Security to appoint Clark Matthews as the National Incident Management System (NIMS) point of contact. Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion; and it carried unanimously.

3. Request from Community Corrections to purchase replacement vehicle.

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the request from Community Corrections to purchase a replacement vehicle. Commissioner Cook seconded the motion. Chairman Culver asked the commission to recall on Thursday it was reported the insurance money will be used to replace the vehicle and the commission had asked them to look into current vehicles that are out there. He reported he had a memo from Rachel in the Community Corrections Department, stating she had contacted Jim Jordan, Road and Bridge Department, and all of

the vehicles out there have over 200,000 miles on them and the vehicles either have transmission, motor and /or exterior body damage. He stated it was felt none of the vehicles would work in this situation. He stated the motion would be to grant the request and the request would remain as submitted. The chairman called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

4. Request from Town of Columbia for three (3) loads of gravel for boat ramp.

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the request from the Town of Columbia for three (3) loads of gravel for the boat ramp. Commissioner Cook seconded the motion. Commissioner Snellgrove asked if this request was not per the county's policy? Chairman Culver stated this is a request for three loads of gravel at no charge to the Town of Columbia because it is a public boat ramp. Commissioner Snellgrove asked the engineer what the county's cost would be? Mr. Pool stated the total cost would be \$1,755.00. The chairman called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

Reports from Staff:

a. County Administrator

Mr. Roberts reported the sales tax report showed the tax slightly down. He stated he thought the county is in a flat period right now, and he hoped the fall would be better.

b. County Engineer

Mr. Pool reminded the Commission on June 26<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 A.M. the stop signs at Prevatt Road and Forrester Road would be swapped around. He reported paving was being done on Frith Hill Road and Barbara Lee Road. Mr. Pool stated he felt they needed to develop some type of communication where department heads are automatically notified when a quality vehicle or some other item is placed on GovDeals.com., and if they are interested, the item can be pulled off. Mr. Pool reported that he would get with the administrator. The chairman stated there would be a department head meeting in the near future and that would be something that could be discussed.

c. County Attorney – there was no report.

Chairman Culver asked Mr. Pool for a report on the activity at Chattahoochee Park? Mr. Pool reported business is up by approximately 50% over last year. He pointed out construction is under way on a new handicapped accessible fishing pier. Mr. Pool stated they are getting positive reports. He reported he keeps receiving requests for bathrooms on this side of the lake in the suggestion box. Mr. Pool reported Mr. Sean Curtis is working on a design for some more cost estimates. He pointed out they had not had any luck in getting a grant.

Adjourn.

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