

MINUTES OF HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION
SEPTEMBER 8, 2008

PRESENT: Chairman Mark S. Culver, Commissioner Curtis Harvey, Commissioner Bobby R. Snellgrove, Commissioner Frances M. Cook, Commissioner Phillip L. Forrester, Pat Jones, Acting Attorney, Barkley Kirkland, Acting Engineer, William J. Dempsey, Chief Administrative Officer

ABSENT: Gary Sherrer, Attorney, Mark Pool, Engineer

Chairman Mark S. Culver called the 10:00 A.M. meeting to order, established that a quorum was present, and welcomed everyone. Dr. John Fain, Pastor, First 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

Chairman Culver reported that the State of Alabama has unclaimed property or monies they keep a record of. He pointed out if any of the county's citizens have a claim they can go to the treasury department, and he stated Judge Luke Cooley had informed him of a link on the county's web site of a list of those that are out there. He stated citizens could go to www.houstoncounty.org, to check to see if they have any unclaimed property. The chairman encouraged anyone in the county to check to see if they think they are owed any money. He thanked Judge Cooley for bringing it to the commission's attention.

Chairman Culver reported it appears once again that our area will be spared of any damage from Hurricane Ike. He stated the county will be prepared to provide assistance if it does hit the county's neighbors in Mississippi or Louisiana.

Chairman Culver reported after the meeting on Thursday, two liquor license requests were received and they are on the agenda. He pointed out it takes unanimous consent and he asked if anyone had any objections to Items #6 & #7 being added to the agenda? He stated hearing no objections, the items would stay.

Chairman Culver reported the Houston County queens had their "Good Luck Reception" at the Courthouse on September 7th. He stated it was the first time in many years he was unable to go but Commissioner Snellgrove attended. Commissioner Snellgrove reported there were some beautiful young ladies from Houston County. Chairman Culver stated the commission wished them the best of luck as they get ready to compete in the National Peanut Festival pageants. The chairman pointed out the ribbon cutting for the National Peanut Festival is October 31st.

Awards and Presentations

1. Update of Tri-Rivers Waterway Development – Mr. Billy Houston, Executive Director, Tri-Rivers Waterway Development

Chairman Culver reported Mr. Houston is the Executive Director, and he continues to put forth a yeoman's effort to try and protect our waterways in this part of the country.

Mr. Houston stated he brought greetings from the Board of Directors and on their behalf he thanked the Commission for allowing him to be on the agenda. He then reported the Tri-Rivers membership was made up of counties, municipal governments, chambers of commerce, business and industry as well as individuals from SW Georgia, SE Alabama, and NW Florida. Mr. Houston personally thanked the commission for their membership, and encouraged their participation in the organization. Mr. Houston reported he had included a copy of the original By-Laws for the chairman. He stated he had made copies of the original charter members for the rest of the commission. Mr. Houston pointed out the first President was Mr. Eustace Bishop from Dothan. He then read the original By-laws dated February 9, 1960, and asked everyone to see if they thought they were applicable today? Mr. Houston stated the original mission statement in the 60's was very similar to the current mission statement. Mr. Houston then gave a brief history of the organization. Mr. Houston also discussed the development of a Water Policy for the State of Alabama, and asked the commission to get involved in a series of meetings to be held. Mr. Houston stated he would like to meet at anytime with anyone regarding the water and river issues as far as what has been done, and what can be done in the future. Chairman Culver thanked Mr. Houston for the update and he stated the commission appreciates the Tri-Rivers organization from the beginnings when Mr. Bishop was involved to the present day when issues certainly are different; but they are significant issues. Chairman Culver stated the commission appreciated Mr. Houston's efforts to make it work better.

Consent Agenda

1. Re-appointment to Dothan-Houston County Airport Authority – Dick Bell
2. Re-appointments to Houston County Port Authority – Hugh Wheelless and James Etheredge
3. Re-appointment to Houston-Love Memorial Library Board – Mrs. Pam Summerford

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the consent agenda to approve the re-appointments of Dick Bell to the Dothan-Houston County Airport Authority, Hugh Wheelless and James Etheredge to the Houston County Port Authority, and Mrs. Pam Summerford to the Houston-Love Memorial Library Board. Commissioner Cook seconded the motion. The chairman stated Mr. Bell has served on the Airport Authority for 30 years. Chairman Culver called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

Regular Agenda

1. Request to approve 4 Day Work Week on a trial basis beginning October 6, 2008.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the 4 Day Work Week on a trial basis beginning October 6, 2008 as per the proposal in the package. Commissioner Forrester seconded the motion. Chairman Culver stated Ms. Sheri Stephenson, Personnel Director, had given him a document she had received from a company called Mercer that has done a study on the impact of the gas prices and done a survey of businesses and other organizations. He reported their survey shows that within the next six months almost one in four employers, or 22%, are for the first time planning to offer the option of a four day work week. Chairman Culver stated this is not an issue that the commission is not too far out in left field on. He reported it is unique for our region of the country, but it is going on all around the country in response to the rising cost of government and the rising cost of fuel for employees. The chairman reported, as was mentioned at the administrative meeting, there are several entities in the state that are going, have gone, or are looking into this possibility. Chairman Culver then read the proposal as approved in the motion:

1. The Houston County Administrative Building will be open from 7:00 A.M. until 6:00 P.M. Monday through Thursday beginning October 6, 2008.
2. The Houston County Administrative Building will be closed on Fridays except in the case of any tenant that occupies space in the building and any temporary arrangements made to allow mail to be delivered to County facilities.
3. This proposal is for an initial term of two months at which time a decision will be made whether to make this change permanent.
4. Each department head will be responsible for working with employees impacted by this change relating to hours of work, breaks, and lunch periods.

Chairman Culver reported they discovered when they met with the Department heads that the Admin Building's mail clerk carries all the mail to the Sheriff's office and the Courthouse. He stated if the four day work week stays permanent then something will have to be worked out, but the mail clerk has agreed to come in on Friday mornings and get the mail to them and then she will leave.

Commissioner Snellgrove asked if the building was going to open at 7:00 A.M. and close at 6:00 P.M.? He asked if business will begin at 7:00 or would it be 7:30 A.M. and quit at 5:30 P.M.? He stated he knew some offices have to have a window there to close out. Judge Cooley stated work would begin at 7:00 A.M. Commissioner Snellgrove asked if that meant they would take customers at 7:00 A.M.? Judge Cooley reported they would be operating business as usual except they would be open earlier and staying later. She reported the departments that have to bank out close 30 minutes early and with the new 4 day work week they would close at 5:30 P.M. Commissioner Snellgrove stated Probate will be open from 7:00 A.M. until 5:30 P.M. Chairman Culver stated each office will be different. The chairman asked Starla Matthews, Revenue Commissioner, if her department had to close early in order to bank out? She stated no. He stated Sanitation, Accounting, and Revenue will be open from 7:00 A.M. until 6:00 P.M.

Judge Cooley reported because in the Probate Office there are time sensitive filings, they are working on a system to be able to allow attorneys and individuals who need to make time sensitive filings to be able to do so on Fridays. Chairman Culver reported that is one of the issues that came up and several attorneys had told him that it was not a significant issue other than they needed the ability to do it. He stated in the Federal Courthouse, they have a time stamp and the information is time stamped, dropped in a box and it is considered filed at that point.

Commissioner Snellgrove asked Judge Cooley about the schedule for going out into the municipalities to sell tags? The Judge reported they are working on a new schedule. She stated some municipalities may get more service out of the change. Commissioner Snellgrove asked about the time for their service to begin? Judge Cooley stated it would at 8:00 A.M. but it could extend longer than 12:30 in the afternoons. She stated they are working on the schedule and with those people who receive the services.

Commissioner Snellgrove asked if the department would be open for lunch? Chairman Culver stated Sanitation is now open and all of the departments are pretty much open for lunch. Chairman Culver asked Judge Cooley to publicize the new schedule for the municipalities? She stated the towns are really good about putting it on their water bills, and her staff goes to the community centers to advertise. Judge Cooley stated it is a time to reassess what they have done and where they have had the biggest impact and the least impact.

Commissioner Snellgrove stated it was mentioned this would be on a trial basis. Chairman Culver reported it will be for two months and will end the first week in December. Commissioner Cook stated it is on a trial basis and if it does not work then the employees will go back to the 5 day work week in the Administrative Building. She stated she did not want everyone to think it is a done deal and she stated they wanted to be sure everything is covered for the public and the county's employees. Chairman Culver then called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Culver reported the commission was going to have some publicity issues over the next month or so to be sure that people know the Administrative Building will be closed on Friday. He stated you can run it on the radio, put it on television, and print it in the paper and people will still show up. The chairman reported the commission will do the best they can to get word out to everyone. (Please see attached in Minute Book)

2. Request to approve proposal to change Sanitation billing.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the proposal to change Sanitation billing. Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion. The chairman called on Mr. Dempsey for comments. Mr. Dempsey reported they had received 5 or 6 questions; and he went over the questions.

1. **Beginning January 1, 2009, even though there will not be a one month discount for doing so, can I pay my sanitation collection fees one year even several months in advance?**

If you receive your electricity from the City of Dothan and Houston County picks up your garbage – YES

If you receive your electricity from Alabama Power and Houston County picks up your garbage – YES

If you receive your electricity from Wiregrass Electric and Houston County picks up your garbage – NO

REASON: Wiregrass Electric customers will receive their electricity and sanitation bill on the same statement each month. Any excess payment would be applied as a credit to the combined electricity and sanitation bill.

City of Dothan and Alabama Power customers will receive only sanitation charges on their bill so additional payments can be applied directly to their sanitation fees.

2. If I have a meter solely for an electric fence or a pump will I have to pay sanitation fees for this electrical service?

NO. Sanitation fees will only be applied to electric bills where a residence is located. Electric bills for pumps, wells or other non residential locations will not receive a sanitation charge.

3. Prior to January 1, 2009, if I have already paid my sanitation bill one year in advance, will I receive credit for this advance payment?

YES. Regardless of whether you receive your electricity from Alabama Power, Wiregrass Electric, or the City of Dothan, you will not begin receiving a sanitation bill from Wiregrass Electric until your current credit has expired.

4. I am a landlord with several tenants. In the past, if the tenant failed to pay the sanitation bill Houston County made me responsible for payment. Under this new billing system, will I be responsible for my tenants bills in the future?

NO, unless you are also responsible for your tenants electrical bill. The party paying the electrical bill will also be responsible for the sanitation bill.

5. If I am late paying my sanitation bill, how long will it be before I am turned over to the collection agency?

When payment is approximately 60 days past due, collection will be turned over to the collection agency. Houston County will receive payment in full with an additional 25%~30% late charge added to the bill as a collection fee.

6. Why is Houston County making this change to their sanitation collection process?

Most of our sanitation customers pay their bills on time and help the county to keep an up to date sanitation billing list. It is important that we identify all of our customers and receive payment on time in order to cover our sanitation collection costs. Houston County provides professional sanitation pickup services, however, we do not have an efficient infrastructure in place to identify non paying customers or collect from late paying customers. As a result, we too often try to collect through small claims court. Our studies indicate that the most cost effective and efficient way to process invoices and

collect past due accounts would be to use outside agencies since these agencies are the most up to date and cost effective ways to identify customers and collect past due accounts.

He reported the county expects this change to lower cost and improve efficiencies by more than \$225,000 per year. This will allow the county to minimize or postpone future sanitation collection rate hikes as long as possible.

Commissioner Snellgrove stated he had received some of the same questions, and commended Mr. Dempsey on answering them. Chairman Culver asked if it would not be less confusing for everyone to pay their bill monthly and not have any annual payments rather than having some customers that can and some that cannot? Mr. Dempsey stated it would certainly be less confusing but in the case of someone having a utility bill that is \$200 or \$300, people are obviously not going to pay several months in advance. Mr. Dempsey stated he felt many people would find it more efficient for them to pay several months in advance instead of writing a check in the amount of \$15.00 each month. Mr. Dempsey reported he thought people would rather go ahead and write a check for a year in advance and have it out of the way. He recommended it if they want to do it. Chairman Culver stated that will be the only bill those customers will be receiving whereas the others will be tied into their electricity. Chairman Culver stated he understood.

Commissioner Snellgrove stated a problem in the past has been for those customers that pay 12 months in advance, need to know that notices are not sent out that their 12 months is up and they need to start paying their bill. He reported that will be the responsibility of the individual to pay the next 12 months. He asked Mr. Dempsey if he understood it correctly that they will only get a monthly bill? Mr. Dempsey stated that was correct. Mr. Dempsey reported they are still working out the operational issues with Wiregrass Electric but they will begin billing again at the appropriate time if someone does pay in advance. Commissioner Snellgrove reported he had gotten involved with a customer who had paid in advance and they stated they did not receive their notice to pay their 12 months. He reported he wanted to make it clear that the county will not mail out notices when a customer's 12 months is up; and it will be the individual's responsibility.

Chairman Culver commended Wiregrass Electric for recognizing through the media a problem the county had and came forward to offer these services. He also complimented Mr. Dempsey and his staff and Commissioner Cook who made several trips doing the research on this. He stated he thought this was exciting and long term it would be a much smoother way for the county. Chairman Culver called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously. (Please see attached proposal in Minute Book)

3. Request to adopt Resolution in support of Highway #231 Project.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to adopt the Resolution in support of the Highway #231 Project. Commissioner Forrester seconded the motion. Chairman Culver reported he knew Commissioners Cook and Forrester made it to the presentation last Thursday at Westgate Park. He stated this is a different and unique approach and will cost about 1/3 of just the amount for the right-of-way. Chairman Culver reported the important thing, assuming they get the public's support and others from the meeting last

week, this project will be let in December. He stated the citizens should see it moving forward quite quickly. Chairman Culver pointed out the following construction phases:

Phase 1 - just north of Odom Road to the Ross Clark Circle on Highway 231

Phase 2 - from Highway #231 to Bauman Drive on the Ross Clark Circle

Phase 3 – Highway #84 intersection over the Westgate Parkway

Phase 4 – Bauman Drive to Highway #231 South

He reported this is all part of the total plan to correct some of the deficiencies on the circle.

Commissioner Snellgrove asked if the state is fully committed to do this and when they will start? Chairman Culver stated Phase 1 will be let in December. He asked acting engineer, Barkley Kirkland, when they let a project the timeframe before they begin work? Mr. Kirkland stated usually 3 to 4 months after the project is let. Chairman Culver stated there are 4 phases to the circle project, and phase 1 used to be from Highway #231 to Bauman Drive. He reported he thought due to the traffic concerns created for various reasons on Highway #231 know it is basically a parking lot.

Commissioner Snellgrove asked if there was any reason anyone in the city or county would object to the project? Chairman Culver stated he could not think of any reason, but there is always a possibility. He reported the State Department of Transportation had met with residents of the neighborhoods on both sides of Highway #231 and it was his understanding the response was positive.

The chairman reported Alabama Department of Transportation had asked the county and the City of Dothan to adopt this resolution of support. He pointed out the City of Dothan has it on their agenda for their meeting on September 9th. The chairman called for the question; it carried unanimously. (Please see in Resolution Book)

4. Request to approve Homeland Security Grant for BZPP @ Farley through EMA & Sheriff's Department (100% grant) and the appropriate budget amendment.

Commissioner Snellgrove made a motion to approve the Homeland Security Grant for BZPP @ Farley through EMA and the Sheriff's Department (100% grant) and included in the budget. Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion. Chairman Culver reported this will be included in next year's budget so it will be included in the budget and not a budget amendment. Mr. Dempsey reported this is just a pass through. Chairman Culver called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

5. Request to award bid on new Disaster Debris Removal Contract.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to award the bid on the new Disaster Debris Removal Contract to Bamaco, Inc., the low responsible bidder meeting specs, in the amount of \$83,900.00. Commissioner Snellgrove seconded the motion. Commissioner Snellgrove asked if anyone knew if the low bidder was local? Ms. Nancy Bristow, Accounting Manager, stated they were not. He asked if any of the bidders

were local? Commissioner Snellgrove stated there was a big spread between the lowest and highest Ms. Bristow reported Bamaco, Inc. is named because the owner is originally from the Ft. Payne area, and he and his father have this business. She stated they are located just north of Daytona Beach, Florida. She reported he came to the pre-conference and the bid opening, and is very interested in this area. Chairman Culver asked if the contract had an out in case the county is not pleased with the work? It was reported there was an out. Chairman Culver then called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously. (Please see attached Bid Summary Sheet in Minute Book)

6. Request for Retail Beer License (Off Premise Only) – Beach Country Convenience Store LLC, 14341 S. U. S. Highway 231, Cottonwood, Alabama.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the request for a Retail Beer License (Off Premises Only) for Beach Country Convenience Store LLC, 14341 S. U. S. Highway 231, Cottonwood, Alabama. Commissioner Snellgrove seconded the motion. The chairman asked if there was anyone present who objected to the request? There being no one, the chairman called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

7. Request for Retail Beer License (On or Off Premises) – Joseph Mixon d/b/a The Back Porch, 2005 S. Brannon Stand Road, Dothan, Alabama.

Commissioner Forrester made a motion to approve the request for a Retail Beer License (On or Off Premises) for Joseph Mixon d/b/a The Back Porch, 2005 S. Brannon Road, Dothan, Alabama. Commissioner Cook seconded the motion. The chairman asked if there was anyone present who objected to the request? There being no one, the chairman called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

Staff Reports:

Chief Administrative Officer

Mr. Dempsey stated the budget was complete and waiting a decision on a possible cost of living increase. He stated he reported at the last commission meeting that Mr. Paul Clark was working on getting the policies on the internet. He stated they are out, and he thanked Mr. Clark and his staff for the work they had done. Mr. Dempsey reported when he and Commissioner Forrester were at the NACO Conference in Kansas City they saw an idea on lowering the county's certified mail cost. He stated he asked Mr. Clark to pursue it, and they had a meeting last week with various departments that use certified mailing. He pointed out it will lower the mailing cost and save the county approximately \$4,000 - \$7,000 per year.

County Engineer – there was no report.

County Attorney – there was no report.

Commissioner Snellgrove stated he understood that the county crews would begin September 9th picking up debris from Tropical Storm Fay. Mr. Kirkland, Acting Engineer, stated he understood they

would begin September 15th. He stated the county crews would pick up all the debris from Tropical Storm Fay beginning September 15th.

Adjourn.

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