

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION  
REGULAR SESSION  
January 24, 2022

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

Chairman Culver called the 10:00 a.m. meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the January 24, 2022, Houston County Commission Regular Session. He declared a quorum as all commissioners were in attendance.

Commissioner Harvey gave the invocation and Commissioner Herring led in the pledge of allegiance.

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

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Culver began by reporting that the GIS system, which is on our website, is currently being updated and changed over to in-house posting, and is currently down. They are in hopes to have it back up and working in a couple of days. The Revenue Commissioner and the IT Department are working diligently to expedite the corrections.

#### AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

##### 1. Presentation – Dothan Area Chamber of Commerce Update – Matt Parker, President

Chairman Culver began by stating that the Commission is always glad to have their annual presentation from the Chamber. Dean Mitchell, from the Chamber of Commerce, approached the podium and stated that they are dividing the presentation into three parts as he will begin with talking about chamber operations, Ann Carr with Southeast Alabama Works will talk about workforce development and Matt Parker will finish with his report. Mr. Mitchell began by stating that 2021 was a great year for the Dothan Area Chamber of Commerce and in April they will be celebrating 103 years in the community. He added that they are appreciative of the partnership with the City of Dothan and Houston County. Mr. Mitchell reported that the chamber is a membership based organization and they continue to grow each year. They have a goal to reach 1200 memberships this year and that will be the highest point of the chamber organization. Also, state and national accreditation is very important to the chamber as it

shows their pursuit of high professional standards. There are currently 102 chambers in the state of Alabama and 21 have received state accreditation and Dothan is one of three that has received that twice. There are over 7,000 chamber organizations in the United States and only four in the state of Alabama have received the highest accreditation and Dothan is one of the four. Mr. Mitchell stated that Ann Carr will be talking on workforce development but a couple of highlights include partnering with several community businesses to include Cooks Saw, Eagle Eye Outfitters and Townsend Building Supply. These businesses are actively partnering in all workforce development programs and using the resources that are available in making a difference in building the workforce in the area. They are also partnering with Wallace Community College, Dothan Homebuilders and Dothan City Schools for basic construction classes with eight graduates and earlier they partnered with Alfred Saliba Family Services Center and Wallace College for a mobile welding unit at the center. They had three graduates from that partnership. Mr. Mitchell reported that "SHOP LOCAL" was a big focus in December and "25 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS" in which they highlighted twenty-five local businesses. He stated that they were pleased to work with state legislation delegation to stop the extra \$300 in federal unemployment and stabilize the SUTA rates for local businesses. He added that they will celebrate the Dothan Business Hall of Fame 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Banquet in April and honor 5 new inductees to include Chairman Mark Culver. Mr. Mitchell was glad to report that Leadership Dothan had raised \$32,000 for Girls Inc. and the Dothan Area Young Professionals group had increased their membership as well. The Chamber had ninety-four ribbon cuttings last year and he is happy to say that 5% were minority owned. Mr. Mitchell ended his presentation by stating that the chamber is in good shape and continues to grow and he thanked the commission for partnering with and helping the Chamber do what it does.

Ann Carr, with Southeast Alabama Works, then approached the podium and reported on the workforce in the area. She stated that for Houston County, the available labor force is around 46,500 with 45,000 actually employed and about 1,500 unemployed. This would put the county's 3.2% unemployment rate close to the state average and where it was prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The labor force included anyone age 16 and up who is able to work. She added that job opportunities are there with healthcare leading with most jobs available. Ms. Carr did mention that they are seeing a rise in unemployment at local facilities as some medical professionals are choosing to contract out and getting paid a higher rate of pay which is hurting the local workforce in filling those positions. Ms. Carr stated that there are currently about 3,000 jobs on the Alabama Works website but only 1,600 candidates with active resumes. She emphasized that they have got to find out where the people are to get them back into the workforce and whether they stay out of the workforce due to child care, lack of skills, or caring for elderly family members. She added that they are working with the Chamber and local agencies to try to hold job fairs and the job fair held recently in September was a success with eighty vendors and approximately 500 attendees. They continue to work with agencies and will hold more job fairs in the future. Ms. Carr announced that the Southeast World of Works will

be held March 9-10 at the National Peanut Festival and this year they will host 8<sup>th</sup> grade students and 11<sup>th</sup> grade career tech students from the area. This is a great event and a great opportunity for employers to advertise what they can offer. She asked that any employers reach out to Alabama Works so they can help fill their job vacancies.

Mr. Matt Parker, President, Dothan Area Chamber of Commerce, approached the podium. He began by stating that they have had a good year as the Dothan metropolitan area added 2,000 jobs over the last year compared to the previous year with five hundred of those jobs in the manufacturing industry and over six hundred were in the leisure and hospitality industry. He added that wages were up by 6%, according to the Department of Labor, and sales tax continue to be up for the county and the city. There are currently industrial projects in process and potential projects as at least ten retail and commercial projects are active or prospective. Mr. Parker reported that the main concern, and a priority for 2022, is to find more space for industrial development and the necessary infrastructure. He stated that there is not a building on the market that is over 100,000 square feet, which is needed for industrial development. He thanked the commission for their partnership and the entire county team, especially the Road & Bridge Department for all they do.

Chairman Culver thanked Mr. Parker and his entire staff for what they do. He said that Matt and Dean both mentioned the word “partner” many times and he feels it is important to continue to recognize that if there were not these partnerships in the Wiregrass area, that many things could not be accomplished as we are not a Huntsville, Opelika, or some other areas that have the resources that they do, and without everyone pulling together the commission could not do the things they do and it is extremely important. Chairman Culver added that we are fortunate to have capabilities that we have at Road and Bridge along with other departments and the city and other counties to create better opportunities for the citizens of Houston County. Commissioner Sinquefield asked if the Southeast Works will have the 11<sup>th</sup> grade participating this year and Ms. Carr answered yes and that this year will be the first year that they split the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders in different times. Commissioner Shoupe commented that with 25% of the new jobs created in manufacturing, what do they attribute that to? Mr. Parker responded that a little bit of everything contributed to that with first the supply chain disruption over the last couple of years due to the pandemic they saw people change their supply chain from overseas to local areas. In addition they have a very active regional workforce that is investing in prospects from Alabama Works, which is labor driven. Also, during the pandemic people from the northern states began to migrate south which brought in more people looking for jobs. Commissioner Shoupe added that his son is on a skeet team this year and they have a student that is on the team and they had moved here from Michigan after they had researched and made the decision, based on political climate, weather climate and business climate, and he knows that the Chamber played a big part in that and he congratulated them.

Commissioner Herring thanked Mr. Parker and his staff for what they do as they work hard. He mentioned that the property on State Line Road is being looked at and he is in hopes that they continue to keep that moving along and hope to get some infrastructure in place as he hopes to get some distribution and/or manufacturing plant to create jobs and revenue. Chairman Culver stated that a top project they will be voting on soon will be to improve and enhance that park on State Line Road and increase the ability for Mr. Parker and his staff to do their job effectively.

## 2. Presentation – Road & Bridge Completed Work/Projects FY20/21 – Barkley Kirkland, County Engineer

Mr. Kirkland began by reporting that they had ten completed projects with over eighteen miles of road resurfaced, thirty-six miles of shoulder work completed, forty-seven cross drains were replaced and they currently have two projects in progress. He stated that the resurfacing work was by contract and the remainder of the work was completed by the county. Approximately 2.3 million dollars was spent resurfacing and they have 2.3 million dollars left to complete County Road 7, 8 and 75N. Mr. Kirkland pointed out the various roads that were completed, and their costs, and also included a subdivision that was resurfaced. (see report attached to original minutes) He added that the county came in under budget by about \$40,000 and that county saves a tremendous amount of money because the R & B Dept. is able to do a lot of the work themselves instead of contracting out the work. Mr. Kirkland reminded everyone that during the FY20/21, our area suffered a hurricane and there several sites (FEMA and non-FEMA) that required work. There were a total of twenty-seven FEMA sites at a cost of 1.5 million dollars and they laid over a thousand feet of pipe and a FEMA project is waiting that is on Taylor Place in Ashford that is under litigation. Mr. Kirkland stated that during the FY20/21, they had the Rebuild Alabama work, hurricane Sally work and had to deal with the COVID pandemic and constantly having 12-15 open positions at his department. He reported that if things take a little longer to get to is because they have been extremely busy. In terms of refundable money, FEMA and FHWA money are refundable as FHWA they get 100% refunded, if completed in a timely manner, and FEMA is refundable at 75% and they receive another 10% from the state when the project is completed. Mr. Kirkland reported on a new project from the state called “Highway Safety Improvement Program Project” and Houston County was the first county to get a project for this program and it is a 90/10 reimbursable grant. They applied for it for the Taylor Rd/Campbellton Hwy. round-about as the total cost was \$677,000 and out of pocket for the county was \$67,000. He added that the state estimated this project to cost 3.5 million dollars and the county completed it a lot cheaper and now the state is trying to partner with the county to do this work. Mr. Kirkland also reported on MPO completed projects and special projects as well to include the Rehobeth Schools parking lot.

Chairman Culver told Mr. Kirkland that they do great work and they are appreciated. Commissioner Herring stated that this report is an eye opener as people do not see the day to day work and they have had several obstacles to overcome. Mr. Herring told Mr. Kirkland to let his department know that he appreciates all they do and to continue to do as they do.

## REGULAR AGENDA

1. Request to award bid for asphalt and paving products for county parking lot projects to the lowest bidder meeting specs – Sean Curtis, County Buildings Maintenance Manager

Commissioner Shoupe made the motion to approve the bid and Commissioner Sinuefield seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Request to approve in-kind services for the Moody Hospital Redevelopment Project – City of Dothan

Commissioner Sinuefield made a motion to approve the in-kind services and Commissioner Harvey seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Request to sell the following items on GovDeals:

1. (1) 471 Massey Ferguson Tractor
2. Miscellaneous items (old torches, chemical tanks, etc.)

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve to sell the items on GovDeals and Commissioner Shoupe seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

## STAFF REPORTS

Chief Administrative Officer- No Report

County Engineer- 2 Closed roads: County Rd. 75 and Suggs Rd. with 4 cross drain replacements and will take approximately a month and half to complete.

County Attorney- No Report

Meeting adjourned.