

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION  
REGULAR SESSION  
March 27, 2023

PRESENT: Chairman Brandon Shoupe, Commissioner Curtis Harvey, Commissioner Tracy Adams, Commissioner Ricky Herring, Commissioner James Ivey, County Engineer Barkley Kirkland, Chief Administrative Officer Peter Covert and County Attorney Pres Register.

Chairman Shoupe called the 10 a.m. meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the March 27, 2023, 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 the allegiance.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Shoupe began by congratulating the new Houston County Queens as they held their pageant on Saturday and crowned a lot of young ladies. He added that unfortunately he did not have the names of the winners but will have them present at a meeting in the very near future as it is always one of the commission's favorite meetings of the year and they look forward to that.

Chairman Shoupe commented that it is a bad idea to get into a shoot out with the Sheriff as he went to the range with him on Friday. He had a good time and said that Sheriff Valenza is a really good shot as he witnessed that on Friday and the Sheriff is also ambidextrous. In regards to the inclimate weather that the county had recently he was happy to announce that there were no injuries but there were some straight line winds that occurred in the Hodgesville area. Chairman Shoupe encouraged everyone to continue to pay attention to the weather as there is still some activity in our area.

Commissioner Adams commented that the Dupree Project fundraiser that was held on Saturday was well attended with 600-700 people. He thanked the Road & Bridge Dept. for closing the road for this event and he thanked the Sheriff's Dept. for their help as well and they raised several thousand dollars for the Dupree project.

Commissioner Harvey commented that he had a handsome young fellow with him today. He is a nine year old third grader that attends Slingluff Elementary School and it just so happens to be his grandson Kason.

## AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

### 1. Presentation – Employee Survey Results & First Quarter Service Anniversaries – Sheri Garner, Houston County Personnel Director

Chairman Shoupe began by introducing Sheri Garner, Houston County Personnel Director, and stated that she is going to go over the results from the Employee Survey and will also announce the First Quarter Anniversaries.

Ms. Garner began by reminding everyone that she was not hired for her presentation skills but was hired for her people skills (laughter). She reported that Survey Monkey is used for the survey and she does not figure any of the percentages as the software tabulates everything and when they begin to analyze the results it pulls all the figures into a presentation format. Ms. Garner stated that Survey Monkey also gives the anonymous comments by department. The report's first ten questions were multiple choice so solid results and percentages were attainable. She had to extract the data from the open ended questions at the end of the survey and then she categorized those answers depending on the subject matter. Ms. Garner stated that she forwarded, to the department heads, the comments that were related to their departments. She proceeded with the slide presentation and reported that there were some good and some bad results and pay is the first topic. Ms. Garner added that in regards to pay, the current wage study should be completed by May. The Personnel Board and Commission will review it, as it is a joint decision between the Personnel Board and the Commission, to determine what can be implemented. Ms. Garner reported that the south region CPI (Consumer Price Index) for February was 6.4% over last year. In August of 2022, Houston County employees did receive a 9% COLA and depending on inflation over the next few months, that is one of the factors that is considered in regards to pay and also what funds are available. She said that the employee's pay is on the minds of the Commission and the Personnel Board as well as the employees.

Ms. Garner proceeded to the next topic on the survey which was benefits and the majority of the responses feel that our benefits are as good as, or better than, other employers. Some feedback included comments on sick time buy back, free and better health care, and employee relief funds for those in need. Ms. Garner responded that on the vacation and sick buy back topic, she currently is in a state organization for HR Directors and she has asked for policies concerning this topic. She said that some entities are doing this and some are not and that this could be looked at but the funding would have to be there. Ms. Garner stated that free or better health care was mentioned a lot and she wanted the employees to realize that currently, at the family coverage rate, the county pays almost \$1,000 per month towards family coverage in order to keep the cost lower to the employees.

Ms. Garner stated that another topic in the survey was concerning recognition and the responses were positive overall. Some of the suggestions from the survey concerning recognition were that some employees would just like a simple thank you from their supervisors. She mentioned that they are doing service recognition today and will continue to do so in the future. The survey also showed that 95% of the employees enjoyed their job and 42% have a sense of belonging. She feels that a better job needs to be done to have a more inclusive work culture and include everyone in the department as no one likes to feel excluded. In addition, in the way of growth opportunities, a mentor program will be kicked off next month for the Road & Bridge Dept. and a program for career paths should follow in Probate and Revenue in the future. Ms. Garner also emphasized that this is the generation of the “Great Resignation” as a majority of the baby boomers are getting ready to retire. With this, she said there must be succession training implemented to transfer the necessary skills.

The next subject discussed from the survey is reasonable work balance between work life and personal life. Ms. Garner said the county scored very well as only 11 out of 181 responses disagreed. In regards to the item of receiving adequate information from boss or upper management, above 50% were positive and management is working on more and often communication. This will include apps to get information out to the employees quicker in instances of emergency situations as well as positive information. Another positive factor was that employees feel that their input is valued to upper management with only 19% feeling that they are not valued at all. Ms. Garner stated that as supervisors and management the focus will be to listen and engage the employees more. When asked the question if the employee is considering leaving, 57% are not considering leaving, 27% did not answer and 28 people are considering leaving employment. She reported that this could be for other opportunities, relocation, family situations or retirement.

Ms. Garner continued and said that the next survey question was on what they liked most or least about their job and her favorite answer is that someone responded that they liked knowing that they may be able to help someone on their worst day. On the question of “Is there anything you would like personnel or commission to know” and the responses were very positive and they included comments such as the commission/personnel is trying to take care of the employees, it’s a great place to work, and they enjoy the food truck.

At this time, Ms. Garner concluded her report and asked for questions from the commission. Commissioner Harvey said that he thought it was a great presentation and asked about the inclusiveness and the succession rate and retention rate and where does that put the county at. Ms. Garner said that in regards to retention they are addressing that subject beginning by pulling reports over the span of ten years to see at what year the employees are leaving. During pre-pandemic, the results showed that no one was leaving during their first three years but between years four and five, they began to see people leave at that point. The employees

were making career changes. But with post-pandemic, between the years 2019-2022, there were 67% that were leaving in the first three years and 75% leaving in the first four years. Ms. Garner said they need to grab them and keep them for four years. In the last three years, they have hired 77 people that did not even stay a year and some did not even stay to be eligible for insurance. Commissioner Harvey asked what she thought the problem was and Ms. Garner stated that there were too many jobs on the market and employees were leaving to go for more money. She added that it was a constant rotation of hiring and leaving. At this time, Ms. Garner is doing a ten year study on turnover rates by department. Commissioner Harvey asked if she thought that the pay rate is still one of the main reasons they leave and where is Houston County in relation to other counties. Ms. Garner answered that the wage study is going to tell them a lot of where the county is. As of today, Ms. Garner feels that we are low in the pay scale but are closer than they have ever been in comparison to other counties. She also stated that compared to the City of Dothan, the county is low but the county can never compete with the City. She added that it would be nice to get close and create a great environment and a great place to work and that is the best they can hope for. Commissioner Harvey then asked about succession planning and inclusiveness and Ms. Garner reported that on the succession planning she presents a Retirement Eligibility each year and the report shows those with 10 years of service and are 60 years of age or 25 years at any age and this shows the department heads the eligibility of retirement within the next five years. This has to be budgeted for vacation/sick time payout in the budget year. This also gives the department head a chance to see what is coming up and allows the department time for cross training and get things prepared. Ms. Garner feels that the career paths will have a lot to do with that and will help in that situation. She also encourages those that are preparing to retire to begin building their manual for the next successor. Commissioner Harvey stated that he agrees in preparing and he also believes in-house elevation. He also commented that he feels that Barkley is doing an outstanding job in preparation for when he retires with the work he has done with his department. Ms. Garner said that in the way of inclusiveness, she is not sure where they stand on that but with the 19% of those that responded she is curious if it is because they feel inclusive because they do not get invited to the lunch with the girls or is it that they feel like nobody is listening to them. She plans on including this topic in the next survey to see what they were trying to tell management. Commissioner Harvey stated that no matter what sector you are in that there is going to be clicks amongst peers because everyone is different and he said this was a great survey and thanked Ms. Garner.

Chairman Shoupe commented that the county does not have an option to go out of business so they have to have employees and if they are going to have employees they need to pay them what they are worth. He is committed to the wage study and fully funding it unless they just cannot absolutely do it. He also feels that they need to get the employees past the four year mark. Chairman Shoupe thanked Ms. Garner for the hard work that she does and for the hard work of her staff and thanked her for the report and her dedication to Houston County.

Commissioner Adams asked if they can do exit interviews and she answered that they had done them a long time ago but they stopped and they plan on starting back.

At this time Ms. Garner said they will be recognizing service anniversaries and asked the employees to come to the front. These are the service anniversaries that were recognized today:

5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Colin Paramore, Kurt Lanzendorfer and Breanna Patterson

15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Ami Denault & Ashley Clements

20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Kim Wilson

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Bart Blackmon & James Lee

30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Jason Harper

(Applause was given by all)

#### REGULAR AGENDA

1. Request to award bid for bituminous surface to lowest bidder meeting specs – Road & Bridge

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the request to award the bid for bituminous surface to lowest bidder meeting specs. Commissioner Ivey seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

#### STAFF REPORTS

Chief Administrative Officer – No report

County Engineer – 2 closed roads; West Cook Rd. and Roney Rd.

County Attorney – No report

Adjourned