

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION
REGULAR SESSION
July 24, 2023

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

Chairman Shoupe called the 10:00 a.m. meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the July 24, 2023, Houston County Commission Regular Session. He declared a quorum as all commissioners were in attendance.

Pastor Clay Greathouse from Memphis Baptist Church 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 passed unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONERS

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

1. Recognition – Houston County Queens

Chairman Shoupe began by asking all the Queens to come forward and he introduced each one and asked them of their interests to include sports, school and their hobbies. The queens that were in attendance are as follows:

Future Little Miss	Emerson Stinson, 1 st grade at Rehobeth Elem.
Little Miss	Keegan Knight, 2 nd grad at Wicksburg Elem.
Young Jr. Miss	Avery Hughes, 4 th grade at Wicksburg Elem.
Junior Miss	Paisley Hall, 6 th grade at Northside Methodist
Teen Miss	Callie Thompson, 11 th grade at Northside Methodist
Miss HC	Regan Valenzuela, 12 th grade at Rehobeth High

At the conclusion of the introductions, Miss Houston County, announced that she would be hosting a fund raiser in September called “Winning for Wilcox Initiative” and she is partnering with Alex Wilcox’s family. She continued by stating that Alex Wilcox was from Brantley, Alabama and played softball for Brantley High School. Miss Wilcox continued on to Mississippi State and continued playing softball on the college level. While at college, she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2016 and passed after her freshman year at Miss. State. The family is

trying to bring awareness to this disease as if she had spoken about her symptoms sooner, things may have been different for her. Miss Valenzuela added that some of the symptoms are abdominal pain or bloating in the abdomen, back pain, bladder feeling full and loss of appetite. She feels that it is very important to know the symptoms of ovarian cancer as it is a silent killer for women. Miss Valenzuela said that this fundraiser is a softball tournament compiled of local high school players from different schools. She added that the Florida State Softball Team will be in attendance helping out with the tournament and a few players from the University of Kentucky. Miss Valenzuela said this would take place on Sept. 2nd and there will also be a homerun derby and anyone 18 years and younger can participate. They have already received a \$500 donation for the winner of the derby. She encouraged all to attend and asked softball players to participate.

2. Presentation – Dothan Houston County Library System Update – Chris Warren, Director, DHCLS

At this time, Mr. Chris Warren approached the podium. He began thanking the commission for the opportunity to speak and that he feels a bit underdressed as he left his tiara and sash at home (laughter by all). Mr. Warren stated that he has provided each commissioner with a copy of their annual report from the last fiscal year which summarizes their key initiatives and accomplishments from the past year. He wanted to highlight that last year patrons in Dothan and Houston County borrowed a total of 186,314 items through the public library and this includes books, e-books, audio books, DVD's, and any other kind of media format that they provide. Mr. Warren added that out of those over 186,000 items, 124,271 print books were borrowed and 43,622 e-books. He reported that they welcomed 283,000 visitors throughout their locations; they hosted 566 programs for children, teens and adults which were attended by over 15,000 people. Mr. Warren stated that last year with their summer reading program they had 1,600 children, teens and adults registered and they read a combined total of 16,000 books and this year they have had a 10% increase in the program with over 1,800 people in the program. He then updated everyone on their Ashford Library progress and the board has approved a US Dept. of Agriculture Community Facilities Loan which will allow them to get started on the Ashford Library Building sooner than later. Mr. Warren reminded everyone that this is a loan and not a grant so they will be making payments on this but the interest rates are very good as it is a federal program loan and there are no penalties for pre-payment on this particular loan. He is also happy to say that they are already at 31% of their fundraising goal and looking ahead they should be able to put the project out for bid this fall and begin construction in the beginning of 2024 and hope to be completed by the fall of 2024. Mr. Warren is very excited about this means to the library and what it will mean for Ashford and Houston County. The facility will be twice the size of what they currently have in Ashford and it will be located in the heart of the community in the downtown area and it will have finishes equivalent to what they have in the main libraries. Mr. Warren stated that he started with the

library about 3 years ago during the height of COVID and he is excited for what all they have done and excited for what will come next. Chairman Shoupe thanked Mr. Warren for being present today and giving this presentation. He asked Mr. Warren about the capital campaign being at 31% and what is their total they are looking at. Mr. Warren answered it will take about \$1,000,000 and they have made sure that this includes architectural fees, legal fees, borrowing associated with the loan, furniture, fixtures and equipment. Mr. Warren thanked the Commission for their support.

3. Recognition – Wicksburg 12U Softball Team

At this time, the softball team made their way to the podium. Mr. Shoupe began by saying that he was very excited to have the team in attendance as they will be Team Alabama in the upcoming World Series. Mr. Britton Hughes was in attendance with the girls and thanked the commission for having them. He said that he has the honor of introducing the ladies today and he is here today as a school teacher at Wicksburg and the coaches are at their everyday jobs and could not attend. Mr. Hughes began by stating that this is the Wicksburg 12U Dixie Ponytails All-Star Team and a couple of weeks they won their state tournament to continue on to the World Series. They are leaving Thursday morning to travel to Alexandria, Louisiana for the tournament. Mr. Hughes reminded everyone that Wicksburg is a small community and to get to where they are they had to plan a lot of larger teams and one was Dothan which was their toughest competition. He mentioned that teams from Auburn, Montgomery, Troy, Eufaula and others but Wicksburg kept getting the job done. Mr. Hughes also reported some stats that included during the sectionals and state games they went 8-0 and they have not lost yet. Also, during those 8 games, they outscored 86-16 and excelled in fielding, pitching and hitting. In those 8 games they had a total of only 3 errors and with 41 innings pitched, they had 83 strike-outs. In the hitting aspect, they had a team batting average of .544 with 105 hits and 39 stolen bases. Mr. Hughes was happy to announce that these girls have done the work by practicing in the heat every day. He then introduced the girls as follows to include Lacey, Kaley, Dailen, Reagan, Kinley, Mary, Maddie, Radley, Alex Ann, Taylor, Gracie, and Ellie. Mr. Hughes stated that they appreciate all the support they have received from the Wiregrass area and they do need travel mercies. (Applause was given by all)

REGULAR AGENDA

1. Request to approve a budget amendment for worker's compensation insurance premium adjustment – Peter Covert, CAO

Mr. Covert stated that due to an increase in payroll that was given in 2022 to the employees, this amendment represents an increase in the worker's comp. insurance premium.

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the budget amendment and Commissioner Adams seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Request to approve Interlocal Agreement between the City of Dothan and Houston County for the 2023 Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program – Sheriff’s Dept.

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the JAG Program agreement and Commissioner Harvey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Request to make a contingent offer to Mark Powell to fill the vacant EMA Director position and authorize Chairman to negotiate salary

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the request to make a contingent offer to Mark Powell for till the vacant EMA Director position and authorize Chairman to negotiate salary. Commissioner Ivey seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

4. Request to approve final plat for Mockingbird Hills Subdivision – Road & Bridge

Commissioner Ivey made a motion approve the request for the final plat for Mockingbird Hills Subdivision and Commissioner Adams seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Request to approve preliminary plat for Flowers Plantation Subdivision Phase II – Road & Bridge

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the preliminary plat for Flowers Plantation Subdivision Phase II and Commissioner Adams seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

6. Request to approve the 2023 Rebuild Alabama Contractors Report – Road & Bridge

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the 2023 Rebuild Alabama Contractors Report and Commissioner Adams seconded.

Acting County Engineer Tyler Reeder stated that so far this year they have completed two roads from the Rebuild Alabama and that is National Road and Fortson Road for a total of 3.169 miles and the dollar amount is \$507,703.48. He added that they have a couple more rebuild roads but due to the large MPO paving this year, they have not gotten to those yet but they will be completed in the fall. Chairman Shoupe said that there were some IT difficulties this morning and Mr. Reeder stated that he has a map that he can put up after the meeting. Chairman Shoupe asked for a digital copy to be uploaded to the county website.

When called for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

7. Request to sell the following items on GovDeals:

- a. 26 empty chemical tanks (Road & Bridge)
- b. 7' x 25' Gooseneck Trailer (Bldg. Maint.)
- c. 6'4 x 14' trailer (Bldg. Maint.)

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the GovDeals items and Commissioner Ivey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

8. Request to enter into a settlement agreement with Southern Alabama Surgery Center for tax appeals before the tax tribunal

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the request to enter into a settlement agreement with Southern Alabama Surgery Center for tax appeals before the tax tribunal and Commissioner Herring seconded. Chairman Shoupe stated that the settlement is pretty easy to understand and the amounts are in the report before the commission. Chief Administrative Officer Peter Covert continued that this has to do with the misinterpretation of some of the taxable items that are used in the health systems in the area. He reported that the impact to the county is a total of just under \$11,500 but the way the arrangement is set up is that it will come out of future sales tax proceeds. He stated that it will be about \$1,000 per month that will impact Houston County and part of that is Road & Bridge and part is general fund. Chairman Shoupe thanked Mr. Covert and commented that 70% of the tax goes to education and he personally thanked the Southern Alabama Surgery Center for agreeing to settle without payment of interest. He added that the county is settling but the impact of the Houston County School Board will be just under \$9,800 and the impact to the Dothan City Schools is just over \$13,000. Chairman Shoupe also stated that there is one more of these cases to settle and asked County Attorney Pres Register if there is anything else they need to know and asked for comments. Mr. Register approached the podium and said that he would add that this issue came up several years back and that the company that is used to collect these taxes had a miscalculation or misunderstanding of the law when they interpreted in terms of certain medical devices that are used in the health systems. He said that an update will be made as the agreement says that the first payment will be due in the middle of July and that will be updated. They county will have a year to pay this back without any interest and he feels this is a good agreement for the county as the law provides for interest to be paid back by right and the taxpayer has agreed not to do that so this is a good settlement for the county. Chairman Shoupe asked for questions and Commissioner Ivey stated that the document shows that the county is liable for \$11,486.66. However, in the agreement it has the full amount of \$34,288.53 that is to be paid in twelve monthly installments. He asked if the county will be paying that which was paid to the school and County Attorney Pres Register answered that the

tax would be taken out at the top level and it will never reach either the county or either school systems. He added that the settlement is made on behalf of the county and the law is strange how it is written as the county never touches any of the money that goes to either the school systems but it is the responsible of the county to make sure and control and direct those funds. Mr. Register said the agreement is between the county and the tax payer but all the funds used to pay this back will never come into the county or the school system as it will be taken out at the top level. Commissioner Ivey asked if the county is still paying the \$34,000+ instead of the \$11,000+ and Mr. Register said that the whole amount will be deducted from the taxes that come in through the county system, but the impact will not be seen on the county side. Mr. Covert then spoke up and said that this is a difficult concept to understand. He explained that the county has engaged with Avenue Insights that handles the collection of sales tax for the county and the county provides them with the allocation percentage that is given to the county from the revenue department based upon attendance records and how much of the monies are to be distributed directly from Avenue to the school districts. Mr. Covert said that the county does not actually receive or distribute the money to the schools as Avenue sends it directly. The refund collection will be taken out of the money that is sent to the school systems on future payments and the amount that will come out of the general fund or road and bridge fund, is only \$11,486.00. Chairman Shoupe commented that we are the taxing authority and we passed these sales tax years ago and it does not involve the school systems but it does impact them. Commissioner Harvey said for the record, the county is paying back just over \$11,000.

When called for the vote, the motion passed unanimously.

STAFF REPORTS

Chief Administrative Officer – No report

County Engineer – 2 closed roads: Pea Market & Faulkner. He added that beginning Wednesday, July 26th, Road & Bridge will be changing the traffic pattern of Malvern Rd and S. Park intersection as they are installing a 4-way stop in preparing for the Rehobeth Schools new access road onto S. Park. Mr. Reeder also thanked the City of Dothan for allowing the county to use their message board for advanced warning.

County Attorney – No report

Adjourn