

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION
REGULAR SESSION
September 11, 2023

PRESENT: Chairman Brandon Shoupe, Commissioner Curtis Harvey, Commissioner Tracy Adams, Commissioner Ricky Herring, County Engineer Barkley Kirkland, 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 September 11, 2023, Houston County Commission Regular Session. He declared a quorum as a majority of the commissioners were in attendance.

ABSENT: Commissioner James Ivey

Chairman Shoupe announced that today is 9-11 and it is the 22nd Anniversary of the 9-11 terrorist attacks. He said that he is sure that date is ingrained in everyone's mind and they can remember where they were when it happened. He asked that everyone take a brief moment of silence to remember the victims, the member of the military, their families and their sacrifices, and as well as the first responders.

Pastor Jonathan Sorensen, from Cowarts Baptist Church, gave the invocation and Commissioner Curtis Harvey led in the pledge of allegiance.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Shoupe stated that as he mentioned it earlier, it is the anniversary of 9-11 and he encourages everyone to attend an event acknowledging this.

Commissioner Adams announced that the "Memorial Vietnam Wall" is at the Peanut Festival Fairgrounds for a few more days. He added that this is the first time it has been in the Wiregrass Area and he encouraged everyone to visit this event. Chairman Shoupe said he had heard that this is the largest traveling wall in existence.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

1. Proclamation – "Family Day" – Dana Booney, Executive Director, (334) Prevention Project

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

Chairman Shoupe asked Ms. Booney to join him at the podium. He then read the proclamation in its entirety and presented it to Ms. Booney. Chairman Shoupe said that this eating dinner with the family was a tradition that he grew up with but now it is more unusual than normal. Ms. Booney said yes it is very unusual for families to sit down together as families are busier than ever. She said that there are many ways for families to have success and to decrease risk factors and establish protective factors and families choose to focus on meal time as it is the most consistent time available. It has been proven that twenty minutes eating with your family is the most powerful time in the life of a family in their day to day activities and they encourage every family to take full advantage of it. Ms. Booney added that during these twenty minutes it can help to increase self esteem, improves cardiovascular health, reduces risk of substance misuse and depression, teen pregnancy, obesity and improves communication with more confidence and reports show fewer problems as a result of bullying. She also said that red flags are more easily recognized during this time by parents because they are focused on listening to the child. Ms. Booney stated that they are here to bring awareness to this opportunity and they are having a social media campaign called “Disconnect to Connect” and they encourage everyone to disconnect from their phones. There will also be an event at Kiwanis Park on Sept. 26th, at 6:00 p.m. and until the food runs out. She said that they will have speakers and give a ways and they encourage everyone to eat together and spread the word of the importance of this. They believe strongly in the power of prevention.

2. Proclamation – “Hunger Action Month” – David Hanks, Chief Executive Officer, Wiregrass Area Food Bank

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the proclamation for “Hunger Action Month” and Commissioner Herring seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Shoupe asked David Hanks, Chief Executive Officer of the Wiregrass Area Food Bank, to come to the podium. Chairman Shoupe thanked Mr. Hanks for being in attendance today and then proceeded to read the proclamation in its entirety. He then presented the proclamation to Mr. Hanks and asked him for comments. Mr. Hanks began by thanking the commission as in 1990 when the food bank was started; the commission was there in the beginning. Mr. Hanks reported that in the first month, 4,000 pounds of food was distributed and today they distribute about 10,000 pounds a day. Mr. Hanks said that recognizing “Hunger Action Month’ is another way to help the food bank as you never know who will need help from this agency. There are so many people that are affected by hunger that are very proud and they will not ask for assistance. He added that this is one way they can bring attention to the

hunger problem in Houston County as one out of six people are in a food emergency and five out six can help those in need.

3. Presentation – Third Quarter Service Anniversaries – Sheri Garner, Personnel Director

Chairman Shoupe announced that Ms. Garner is not present today but Anisa McKenzie will be presenting today. Ms. McKenzie thanked the commission for the opportunity to recognize the employees that have extended service with Houston County. She then asked those employees in attendance to come to the front for the presentation. Ms. McKenzie stated that this is an awesome group of employees and the Personnel Dept. loves to acknowledge that they have served the county with their time and they are appreciated. She announced the service anniversaries as follows:

5 YEAR ANNIVERSARIES: SLADE STEWART
 BOBBY ALDRIDGE
 MURRAY RODRIGUEZ
 JOHNATHAN BERRY
 LARON JOHNSON
 DUSTY OSWALT
 BENJAMIN PARRISH
 CHRIS SUMMERLIN
 GRAHAM LEE
 WALTER LEWIS

10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY: JENNIFER PEARSON

15 YEAR ANNIVERSARIES: SHERRY DOUGLAS
 RONI PHILLIPS
 CYNTHIA TELFAIR
 FRANK CANNON

25 YEAR ANNIVERSARY: BROCK CODY

A round of applause was given by all for these employees and for their service to Houston County.

Chairman Shoupe thanked Ms. McKenzie and thanked all the county employees of Houston County and stated that nothing would happen if it were not for the team members that we have.

REGULAR AGENDA

1. Request to award the 2023-2024 ACCA Joint County Bids for Bulk Cement, Concrete Pipe, HDPE Pipe, Herbicides and Liquid Asphalt

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve awarding of the Joint County bids and Commissioner Adams seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Request from the Personnel Board to concur in the 2024 County Holiday Schedule – Sheri Garner, Personnel Director

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the 2024 County Holiday Schedule. Commissioner Adams seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

3. Request to approve budget amendment in the amount of \$5,500 to assist Webb and Madrid Volunteer Fire Departments with maintaining their status as an “eligible volunteer fire department”.

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

4. Request to adopt resolution in support of the Department of Human Resources to construct a new facility at 172 Prevatt Road

Commissioner Herring made a motion to adopt the resolution and Commissioner Harvey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Request to adopt resolution authorizing purchase of real property related to economic development and/or acquisition for public utility or public works purpose as part of a single project and authorize Chairman to negotiate contract related to said property

Commissioner Herring made a motion to adopt the resolution and Commissioner Adams seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

6. Request to approve 2023-2024 Budget – Peter Covert, CAO

Commissioner Adams made a motion to approve the 2023-2024 budget and Commissioner Harvey seconded. Chairman Shoupe asked Mr. Covert to begin his presentation of the budget.

Mr. Covert began by thanking all the department heads and elected officials who aided and assisted in putting together the budget as without them it would be an impossible task. Also, the feedback and the information that both the commission has provided is appreciated as well. Mr. Covert stated before the commission is the executive summary of the highlights of the budget presentation. During the presentation Mr. Covert conveyed the following:

- The budget includes the recent wage study and full implementation.
- The department heads worked hard to accommodate the wage study by sacrificing various things in their department
- The wage study is about a \$2.2 million dollar budget item and (3) departments eliminated a position in order to accommodate this wage study implementation.
- A 6.5% increase in health care was included as well as the Tier I and Tier II contribution rates from the RSA
- Capital items were reduced at the R & B Dept. to be able to accommodate the wage study as they will not be requesting their normal 16 dump trucks
- The projected fund balance was presented as well as the proposed ARPA Funds projects.
- The fund balance for the end of next year is projected to be just over \$13.5 million
- Mr. Covert commended the commission for their allocation and use of ARPA Funds in a timely manner as other counties have not been so conscious of this.
- Revenue contributions were presented with the Revenue Commission being the leader of the contributions as well as Sales and Use Tax, State Income and Probate revenue
- Sales and Use Tax includes SSUT and general brick and mortar sales tax but SSUT is beginning to decline in its' growth compared to the last 4 years.
- Expenditures without ARPA will be about \$31.4 million dollars
- Expenditures were cut due to the wage study
- Lease spending is being limited in order to decrease the debt for the purpose of borrowing in the future.
- Road and Bridge continues to be a major expenditure for the county due to road replacement projects which includes road material, contractors, fuel and maintenance upkeep on the equipment.
- Long term debt was highlighted with the maturity dates of the bonds.
- Bond and lease payments were shown as the county is committed to these items for the next few years.
- Anticipated healthcare and dental insurance rates will see less than the anticipated 6.5% increase for the new fiscal year, as Mr. Covert received a letter last week that the county would see a 3.5% increase.

- Liability and workman's compensation continues to be under control due to the work of the Safety Director and the employees.

Mr. Covert concluded and Chairman Shoupe thanked him and asked for any questions or comments from the Commission. There were none so Chairman Shoupe began by saying that throughout this budget process it has been painful for a lot of the department heads due to various cuts in order to support the wage study. He is in hopes that this can be avoided in the future by better provisioning regular cost-of-living increases for the work force, as in the past that was not the case and it leads to painful years of cuts. Chairman Shoupe also stated that it does depend on the economy, revenue and other things to be able to adjust those increases. He added that there are a few things coming up in the future that were not covered in this budget and those are three major financial projects. This includes the road system; as in the past they were on a 100 year cycle for resurfacing and that cannot continue. There is extra money invested in this budget for roads to try and get it down to a 33% cycle. Another major project is the Administration Building. Luckily, the window project was covered by ARPA, but the interior needs a major renovation and it will need to be done within the next decade. And lastly, the jail is in dire need of expansion or to build a new facility. Chairman Shoupe noted that Sales and Use Tax is budgeted to be up by 3% and Ad Valorem will be up 1% but the wage study is an increase of 7.4% in this budget. He said that the department heads had to sacrifice a lot for this wage study and they cannot continue to ask the department heads to sacrifice at this level and expect services not to be impacted. Chairman Shoupe reported that the cost of living will not be decreasing and they need to be prepared for that in the future.

Chairman Shoupe announced that his main focus is to not sacrifice and to find ways to run the county in a more efficient manner. They are looking at consolidate services to include internet, phone, electricity, printer contracts and other services. He added strategic planning to the budget and all department heads are urged to participate in this endeavor as the commission funds the county but they do not run it as the department heads do this and do a great job.

Chairman Shoupe thanked Mr. Covert and his staff for their hard work on this budget and thanked the department heads for working with the commission to fund the wage study as nothing gets done without employees

When called for the vote, the motion carried unanimously to approve the 2023-2024 budget.

7. Request to approve Chairman to sign Right-of-Way Easement from Wiregrass Electric Cooperative, Inc. – Road & Bridge

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the request. Commissioner Harvey seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

STAFF REPORTS

Chief Administrative Officer – No report

County Engineer – No closed roads at this time but paving preparation will begin on Lynn Jarvis, Enon, Enterprise Church and West Cook

County Attorney – No report

Adjourn