

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION  
REGULAR SESSION  
October 10, 2023

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

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

ABSENT: Commissioner Tracy Adams

Ms. Leticia Gordillo, Director of Hispanic Ministry at St. Columba Catholic 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

Chairman Shoupe thanked Commissioner Harvey for leading the meeting on Thursday as he was unable to attend. He stated that he heard that Commissioner Harvey did a great job as always. Chairman Shoupe mentioned that Commissioner Harvey will also need to lead the next Administrative Meeting as he will be out of town.

Commissioner Ivey announced that he would like to bring awareness for October being “Breast Cancer Awareness Month” and to recognize those that have been affected by this. He added that September 15 – October 15 is “Hispanic Heritage Month”.

#### AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

1. Presentation – Theresa Strachan, President/CEO – Dare 2 Care

At this time Chairman Shoupe asked Ms. Strachan to come to the podium and welcomed her back as she was in attendance last Thursday as well. She began by introducing herself and stated she is the President of Dare 2 Care, Inc. She said that she had presented the commission with a packet for an event called “State of Emergencies C-Spire, Stop the Violence”. Ms. Strachan said this event is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, December 2, 2023 to bring the

community together with celebrities, law enforcement and high school ball players to play in a basketball game. They will have victims' families in attendance, to include one solved murder and one unsolved murder, and also have city and county leaders there as well. Ms. Strachan said they would have a celebrity signing session along with picture taking, a slam dunk competition during halftime among other things. She reported that the overall objective of this event is to show peace and unity, which will be the names of the two teams playing in the game. Ms. Strachan said that her organization is putting in \$15,000 for the event and they are trying to raise another \$15,000 to insure that everything is covered. They are asking for assistance in helping to get law enforcement involved in the activities, assistance with security for the event and also for financial assistance from organizations.

Chairman Shoupe commented that they have certainly seen a rise of violence in the community in the last few years and he appreciates citizens like Ms. Strachan stepping up and trying to take ownership over the situation and trying to make it better. Commissioner Harvey asked Ms. Strachan where the other events will be held and she said they are having an event in Birmingham, Huntsville, Montgomery, Mobile and Dothan. She added that each individual city will have their own commercials as the celebrities will differ per city. Commissioner Herring clarified that the organization is contributing \$15,000 per city for a total of \$75,000 from the organization.

Chairman Shoupe thanked Ms. Strachan again and stated that more frequently when there are problems in a society, the people turn to the government to solve those problems but these days it is people that have to step up and make things happen and he added that it is amazing that she is doing this. Ms. Strachan said that unfortunately celebrities are the people that are raising kids during this time either through their music or the sports talent, and with her being in the music industry for over thirty years, she has meet a lot of celebrities. She said some are friends and when she speaks to them about this project she asked them to wave their booking fees.

## 2. Presentation – Visit Dothan

Chairman Shoupe asked Ms. Hannah Shiver to come forward and introduced her as the new Executive Director of Visit Dothan and he thanked her for being here. She began by stating that she is very excited to take over this role and she plans to continue to partner with the county and to further build that relationship in any way they can to facilitate projects and events. Ms. Shiver said that she has spent a little over a decade in the hospitality industry and she hopes to bring in a breath of fresh air into the office from a business standpoint.

Mr. Shoupe congratulated her on her new position as he knows that LBA was sad to lose her but he knows she will be a great addition to Visit Dothan. He thanked her and congratulated her on this new venture.

### 3. Presentation – Chairman Brandon Shoupe

At this time, Chairman Shoupe stepped to the podium and asked Mark Powell, EMA Director, to join him. Chairman Shoupe stated that Director Powell has already received his CLEM Certification and they have received that letter of certification. Chairman Shoupe read the letter and said he wanted to formally recognize Mr. Powell for his quick progress with this certification. He then asked Mr. Powell for comments. Mr. Powell began by stating that he came from the fire department where certifications meant everything. He was glad to complete this for the county and ready to support them in any way. (Round of applause given by all)

### 4. Presentation – Youth Sports Facilities

Chairman Shoupe asked Mayor Kimberly Trotter to come forward to begin this presentation. She began by saying that she wanted everyone to think of her as Kimberly Trotter, member of the community, mother of 5 and a parent of those coming up in various sports programs in Houston County, instead of Mayor Trotter today. She added that she has worked very closely with some of the area recreational leaders and some are here today which include Wicksburg Parks & Recreation member Danny King, Ashford Recreation Director Jeff Speed and Mayor Carol Barfield is in attendance as well as Jonathon Whitehurst from Cottonwood Rec. Program.

Mrs. Trotter began with a slide show presentation and stated that today they are here to hi-lite some of the shortfalls that, as parents, they have seen in the youth programs over the last few years and it is not a new problem. She also said that most all of the programs are run by parent volunteers. Mrs. Trotter reported that there are four recreation programs that serve Houston County children and none of these programs are run by their individual city or town, with the exception of Ashford as it is run by their recreation director, Jeff Speed, but they still rely heavily by volunteers there as well. She added that Wicksburg is an unincorporated community but what they have been able to accomplish speaks volumes as they do not have any source of funding. Mrs. Trotter had some slide pictures showing the different communities and their recreation parks and spoke about what all has to be done to bring the parks up to code in the way of electrical, plumbing and most importantly, ADA compliance.

Mrs. Trotter stated that Cottonwood has made a complete turnaround with their program and they had started football and cheer this year after a nine year hiatus. They had 160 children to participate this year and the town only has 136 kids between the ages of 5 – 14. That means

that they are pulling from a lot of rural areas and they are completely parent run. With the pictures she presented, their needs are very extensive with no lighting, no storage and several code issues. She then presented the Rehobeth facility that needs to be brought up to code as well. Mrs. Trotter mentioned that they have three fields in Rehobeth and one in Taylor. Their plans are to build a new park in Rehobeth, in addition, as they need one more field due to the growing population there. She added that the fields were recently given to the Town of Rehobeth from the Houston County Board of Education. Mrs. Trotter then went on to the next area which is the unincorporated area of Wicksburg. To play at Wicksburg, you just have to attend Wicksburg School and it happens to be one of the fastest growing schools in Houston County. They recently had 256 baseball players in their recreation program. The current field is owned by the Board of Education and they have taken it over to expand the school due to the growing population in that area. But the school has given land to build a new park, but they cannot fund the construction of a new field or facility. Finding the funds for this will be a struggle as it is an undertaking that cannot be tackled by the volunteers.

Mrs. Trotter reported that obviously the financial restraints for the children they have to serve are not just from one municipality and it is the responsibility of the parents to take care of them. Also, there are very limited grant opportunities and especially for Wicksburg as they are unincorporated. For Rehobeth, grants are hard to obtain as well because they have a high income in their town limits. She mentioned that Cottonwood will be the very same way as there are unlimited options for them as well. The current issue is that all the programs are volunteer run programs and eventually the current parents will have children that will outgrow the programs and other parents will have to step in. Also, the funds that are being raised are being put directly back into the organizations and the kids for uniforms, umpires and all other expenses so saving it is not an option for these programs.

Mrs. Trotter closed by saying that the importance of youth sports cannot be underestimated. She said that studies have shown that it lowers the level of depression in children and the work force is better for children that grow up in youth sports as they can deal with loss, defeat, time management and their confidence is better. Mrs. Trotter also commented that for a lot of these children it is an escape for most and it could possibly give them a mentor, in the way of a coach, as for some children this is the only men in their lives that are teaching them a sport but also teaching them life skills. It is important that we continue investing in these programs for the children that need these things. Mrs. Trotter said they are asking the commission to realize what is going on behind the scenes in youth sports and see the need in investing in their future.

Chairman Shoupe thanked Mrs. Trotter for this great presentation. He also said that there is no doubt the impact that the coaches have with the youth in the programs. As his dad recently passed away, he has lost count of all the grown men that have commented to him on what an impact his father had on them in growing up while coaching them in football. Chairman Shoupe

stated that he knows people will be asking where the money is going to come from and he believes there is an opportunity for funding and they will talk about that in bit.

Commissioner Harvey asked Mrs. Trotter what their vision is in bringing this to light. She said that it is to inform the commission that they (volunteers) cannot do it all and the burden of the children in Houston County is a shared burden and responsibility of the entire County. On another note, as a parent of youth sports children, it is nice to have the children play near their homes instead of having to drive into the nearest city (Dothan). She also noted that these parks include infrastructures and as with all infrastructures, they need to be updated. Commissioner Harvey asked if they were trying to upgrade infrastructure or build new facilities and Mrs. Trotter answered that Wicksburg would have to have a new building, but the other municipalities need functional fields to include good lighting and infrastructure that needs updated plumbing and updated ADA code compliance. Commissioner Harvey stated that they are in Legislative Session and Chairman Shoupe can speak on that.

Commissioner Herring asked if anyone might know the cost of what these improvements would be and Mrs. Trotter said that she does not but according to what the pictures show it is mostly the infrastructure and not so much the fields as the volunteers have done an excellent job of maintaining the fields over the years. But, it could possibly be several million dollars just in Rehobeth as they will also be building another field.

At this time David King came forward and stated that he represents the Wicksburg program. He said they are in a critical situation as their fields have been taken back by the school. They do have 22 acres of land but they have to build a new facility from scratch and it could cost close to 3 million dollars to get them where they need to be. This would include fields for baseball, softball and soccer and as to the operational side, everything is run by volunteers. But the monthly expenses are still an issue as all the revenue each season goes into the uniforms, etc. Mr. King did mention that they have applied for several grants and they have gotten \$5,000 from RC&D but millions is needed.

Commissioner Ivey added that to follow up with Mr. King, Director Boswell has visited Wicksburg and looked at the facility as has Senator Chesteen. Both are trying to see what kind of funding could be available for Wicksburg to help with this project. Commissioner Herring added that he is a big advocate for youth sports as he grew up his whole life in Cottonwood and played sports. He said that youth sports organizations builds structure with the kids as some of them need this. Commissioner Herring also feels that the commission and the parents need to come together and figure out how they are going to generate the revenue and to also make sure that the citizens understand that this revenue is going to be spent on the youth facilities and not anything else. He does feel that this can happen and to use the funds for that purpose. Commissioner Herring said he is on board with what needs to be done and they all need to get

together and make it happen. Commissioner Ivey added that thanks to Engineer Barkley and his crew they have already gone and cleared all the trees that need to be cleared on the Wicksburg property and have the site ready to a degree. Mrs. Trotter stated that they would be getting some actual numbers to the commission and she will email the pictures in the presentation.

Mrs. Trotter then introduced Brandi Williams and Jonathon Myers and they came to the podium. Chairman Shoupe thanked them for being present today and they began their presentation. Ms. Williams began by thanking the commission and said she is here on behalf of the Rehobeth community and has been there for three years and she sees the kid's needs. She continued by saying that this past year was the first year that Rehobeth had a Track and Field Team and they were lost as to what to do. They had one coach that coached over 30 student athletes and he led them to state finals which was very exciting. This made her think what could really happen if they had appropriate facilities for the kids to practice on as the parents got very involved in supporting not just their own kids, but kids from the other schools. Ms. Williams said that the youth has nowhere to practice to get better and they see a need for this as the closest one is Enterprise or Andalusia. She started a petition and within a week they had over 522 signatures in the community to support the need for this facility. Ms. Williams stated that she consulted with her boss Mike Schmitz and he advised her to reach out to all the school coaches in Dothan and Houston County and none of them have the facilities and as parents and adults, we need to do better for our children. Mr. Myers thanked the commission and said he is here today because he spent the last year following Coach Parker to all the cross country meets. They enjoyed them and they are attended by 1,000 – 2,000 people at each meet. They also wondered why Houston County does not have a facility for these kids and if they add Dothan, and add the middle schools, there are well over 1,000 kids with no facilities. Mr. Myers said that as parents and citizens they see the need. As with infrastructure and economic development, people that are looking to move to our area always inquire about the schools and what do the schools do to support the youth of the community. He added that Houston County and Dothan have a wonderful base and support the kids and if they had a track facility they would have the ability to practice on them and excel in these sports.

At this time a video was shown that was made by the kids in the community. Chairman Shoupe then began by stating that they see the need and at this time they are working on some potential funding and essentially there is an opportunity to do a "hotel room tax" that would also apply to AIR BNB's in the area. This could be a \$2 per room fee that would be used to fund these needs for the parks and recreation facilities only. Chairman Shoupe added that based on some preliminary numbers it could be enough to provide three-quarters of a million dollars to each of the five projects that have been spoken about today. Even though this amount will not build a brand new facility in Wicksburg, it is better to have \$750,000 than to not have it. He understands that this will not build a track, but it would go a long way to getting one started

and there possibly could be opportunities for private donations and grants. He feels that this should be considered but at this time no action is needed as this is an informational time to get the ball rolling. This will require a local bill and legislation does not go into session until February or March. He also mentioned that the money will be bonded out by the county.

Commissioner Ivey asked if any locations had been looked at for the track and field and Mr. Myers said they are working with some people on budgets and have looked at a few places. They will have more information on this within the next 30-60 days and will be happy to share this information as they are actively working on this. Commissioner Ivey said there was a track at one time in Wicksburg and he ran on that track. He can see the need for this for the kids along with a facility for other sports. Mr. Myers said they are in hopes of building a facility that would be capable of holding events not only for high school level but for collegiate level too and that would generate revenue for ongoing expenses.

Commissioner Harvey said he is on board with all of this as he graduated from Dothan High in 1988 and they have been talking about a track facility since then so it is much needed. He commended Mayor Trotter and the others for their diligence with this.

Commissioner Herring added that statistically, people in places and communities that have places for our youth to keep active, crime rates go down and it is very important that we consider and think about that as they move forward. It is an obligation and the commission should be behind this and think how it will decrease crime rate and help families in general.

Chairman Shoupe said that with a potential hotel fee, the citizens in Houston County would not have to pay this unless they stay in a local hotel. Commissioner Harvey added that for over 15 years they have been talking about a one cent sales tax and even though they do not want to talk about that, it would bring in a lot of revenue and more could be accomplished with that. He feels that the conversation needs to be had in each of the communities and the districts and show them where the dollars are going and what is needed. Chairman Shoupe thanked everyone that attended today and for their input and hard work on this project.

##### 5. Service Award Recognition – Barkley Kirkland, Road & Bridge

Mr. Kirkland came forward and asked Jason Harper to come forward. He added that this is bittersweet for him as with Mr. Harper they are losing 31 years of experience and he will be hard to replace. He has worked his way through the ranks and has been a supervisor for the last 10 or 12 years. Mr. Kirkland said he is proud for Mr. Harper but he will be missed and he personally thanked him.

Chairman Shoupe added that they have all had the pleasure of working with Mr. Harper and he will be missed. Round of applause was given by all.

## REGULAR AGENDA

### 1. Request to award revised ACCA Joint County Bid for herbicides

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the awarding of the revised ACCA Joint County Bid for herbicides and Commissioner Ivey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

### 2. Request for 010 Lounge Retail Liquor License – Class 1 – River Lounge II, located at 3042 W. State Hwy. 92, Newton, AL 36352

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the request for the Lounge Retail Liquor License and Commissioner Herring seconded. Chairman Shoupe asked if there were any questions or discussion amongst the commission. There being none he then asked if anyone was present that wished to speak against the request. There being none he called for the vote and the motion carried unanimously.

### 3. Request for 040 Retail Beer (On or Off Premises) and 060 Retail Table Wine (On or Off Premises) License – Ramu Enterprises, LLC, d/b/a JR's Pizza Palace located at 14634 W. US Hwy 84, Newton, AL 36352

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the request for the Retail Beer and Retail Table Wine License and Commissioner Herring seconded. Chairman Shoupe asked if there were any questions for discussion amongst the commission. There being none he then asked if anyone was present that wished to speak against the request. There being none he called for the vote and the motion passed unanimously.

### 4. Request to approve budget amendment to add additional community support Agency requests to the FY-2024 Budget – Peter Covert, Chief Administrative Officer

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

### 5. Request to approve budget amendment in the amount of \$2,800 to assist Gordon Volunteer Fire Dept. with tax exempt eligibility determination –Peter Covert, Chief Administrative Officer

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the request for the budget amendment and Commissioner Herring seconded. Chairman Shoupe reminded everyone that this is to help pay



for the policy made in 2018 to aid the agencies in accreditation. When called for the vote, the motion passed unanimously.

6. Request to approve Resolution for Expenditure of American Rescue Plan Act Funds for Sewer Infrastructure Project in the Town of Kinsey and approve accompanying Sub recipient Agreement

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

7. Request to adopt resolution to enter into an agreement with Northstar Engineering Services for the Design, Surveying and Inspection for Homeland Security Building Site and Building

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the request to adopt the resolution to enter into an agreement with Northstar Engineering Services and Commissioner Harvey seconded. Commissioner Ivey stated that on Thursday he made a comment that he would have questions about this item today but after speaking with Engineer Barkley and Mr. Covert, his questions have been answered. The motion carried unanimously.

Chief Administrative Officer – No report

County Engineer – One closed road; Garrett Road

County Attorney – No report

Adjourn