

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION
REGULAR SESSION
May 13, 2024

PRESENT: Chairman Brandon Shoupe, 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 10:00 a.m. meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the May 13, 2024, Houston County Commission Regular Session and declared a quorum as a majority were in attendance.

ABSENT: Commissioner Curtis Harvey

Major Linda Payton, Corps Officer, The Salvation Army, gave the invocation and Commissioner Tracy Adams led in the pledge of allegiance.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Shoupe began by announcing that the Dothan United Soccer held their first game over the weekend, and he was told it was well attended. He was unable to attend due to a conflict with another event, but he looks forward to attending a game soon. He asked everyone to be "weather aware" due to possible severe weather in the upcoming days and encouraged citizens to get a weather radio. Lastly, Chairman Shoupe thanked the legislators for doing a great job during a very challenging legislative session. He said there were some discussions on putting a severe cap on property taxes and there was an agreement that was made, that he believes is fair to both the county and the taxpayers, that will put a cap of 7% annual increase. This will allow citizens to have a better idea of what they have to pay year to year. Chairman Shoupe said that there are some very difficult decisions that the legislators have to make, and he appreciates the job they do, not only for the county, but for the citizens.

Commissioner Ivey announced that this past weekend the inaugural Sheriff's Association Rodeo was held for three days and it was a well attended and great event. He added that the bad weather on Friday did not do any damage to the fairgrounds, but they had to evacuate about 100 people to a sturdier structure on the grounds and he was happy to report that they had no injuries or damage. Commissioner Ivey also stated that the money raised was for the Alabama Sheriff's Association and the Alabama Youth Ranch.

Commissioner Adams commented that the Poplar Head's Farmers Market was held on Saturday at the Farm Center, and it was a huge success as most vendors sold out or almost sold out of all their items. They will be there each Saturday through the month of July. He thanked everyone for coming to support this event.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

1. Proclamation – "National Police Week"

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

At this time, Commissioner Ivey came to the podium and asked the Sheriff's deputies that were present to come forward as well. He then read the proclamation and presented it to the deputies. Chairman Shoupe thanked the officers for all they do as in today's world the officers do not get the appreciation or respect they deserve. He added that he was very thankful for the people that take on the job as law enforcement officers.

2. Proclamation – "National Salvation Army Week" – Major Linda Payton, Corps Officer

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the proclamation for "National Salvation Army Week" and Commissioner Herring seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Shoupe then stepped to the podium and asked Major Payton to come and join him. He began by saying that the county has been blessed with great leaders at the Salvation Army for the last several years. He then proceeded to read the proclamation, presented it to Major Payton and asked her for comments. Major Payton began by stating that her goal this week is to thank as many people and organizations as she could as they could not do what they do if it were not for those in the community that support the Salvation Army. She wanted to thank those that volunteer, those that have adopted from the Angel Tree and those that give monetary donations throughout the year. Major Payton added that the Salvation Army could not do what they do without everyone's help. She stated that the Salvation Army has been in the area for 112 years and they are so happy that they can help the people in Houston County and throughout the Wiregrass area. A round of applause was given by all.

REGULAR AGENDA

1. Request to adopt Resolution for Municipal Water Pollution Prevention (MWPP) Program

Commissioner Adams made a motion to approve the request to adopt the Resolution for Municipal Water Pollution Prevention and Commissioner Ivey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Request to approve lease for 144 North Oates Street to Alabama Board of Pardons and Parole and authorize Chairman to negotiate all documents – Peter Covert, CAO

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the lease for 144 North Oates Street and Commissioner Adams seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Request to approve budget amendment for accounting services provided to Gordon VFD for volunteer firefighters eligibility – Peter Covert, CAO

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

4. Request to approve letter of intent related to potential purchase of real property

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the letter of intent related to potential purchase of real property. Commissioner Adams seconded. Chairman Shoupe stated that at this time they had one privileges of the floor request, which is Mr. Trotter. He reminded Mr. Trotter that this request pertains to item #4 only. Mr. Trotter began by saying the term, that he knows for a fact that they are not familiar with, is “transparency”. Mr. Trotter then addressed the Chairman and asked that he not interrupt his ability to say what he needs to say, and the right to say it as his first amendment right and the Alabama open meetings law. He then again asked that Chairman Shoupe to “not interrupt as he has done in the past and let me have my five minutes” and Chairman Shoupe said it is three minutes. Mr. Trotter stated that he would try to stick to this item #4, request to approve letter of intent related to potential purchase of real property. He said that he would like them to answer a couple of questions for the public. He added that he is speaking for “We the People” and not George Trotter. He then asked what is real property and is this a reference to real estate or is it tangible property, what is the definition. Chairman Shoupe answered that it is real estate. Mr. Trotter proceeded and asked to explain why is it so secretive that they cannot tell what property it is or what they plan on using the property for before they consider entering an agreement to buy the property. Chairman Shoupe replied that it is a very good question and he knows it is a concern that a lot of people probably would have. He added that the reason, or the Law, provides them the ability to not disclose the property that they are looking at, is to save the taxpayers’ money. Mr. Trotter said “allows you the ability” but it does not tell them they have to and that is a loophole. Mr. Trotter said that in his mind it is a loophole for the commission to not be transparent with the public with their tax dollars. Mr. Trotter stated that he does not think

there is a law in the state of Alabama that says, “that you cannot, by law, inform the public about what your intent is in purchasing real estate”. Chairman Shoupe that is correct and they are choosing to do this to save every taxpayer in Houston County money. Mr. Trotter then stated he wanted to site an example of what really creates uncertainty and doubt in the public’s eye. He said that about a year and half ago, this same statement was made and he asked where the property was and what was it going to be used for and what is it going to cost the taxpayers. Mr. Trotter reported that he never got an answer to any of the questions except for when he asked the second time, and he was told that the property was 200 acres in the Wicksburg area, and it would be used for solar panels. Chairman Shoupe told Mr. Trotter that his three minutes were up and stated that the commission had never entertained buying property for solar panels. Mr. Trotter said “thank you for interrupting and again denying me of my first amendment right”. Mr. Trotter then commented, “and by the way, this is all recorded” and Chairman Shoupe told Mr. Trotter that he would not interrupt this commission meeting as it is the people’s commission meeting and you will have a respect for the business they are conducting on behalf of the people and if he cannot understand that, Chairman Shoupe said that he would not allow Mr. Trotter to come and speak anymore during the meetings. He asked Mr. Trotter if he understood and Mr. Trotter continued by talking and Chairman Shoupe said that it is the last time he is going to tell Mr. Trotter this and the next time he interrupts him, he will ask the deputies, the fine gentleman they had just honored, to escort him out of the building. Mr. Trotter responded, “Do it”. Mr. Trotter sat down.

When called for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

5. Request to award bid for Hot Plant Mix to lowest bidder meeting specs – Road & Bridge

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the awarding of the bid for Hot Plant Mix to lowest bidder meeting specs and Commissioner Adams seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

STAFF REPORTS

Chief Administrative Officer – No report

County Engineer – 6 closed roads: Ashford Rd., Hicks Rd., Prevatt, Jack Bruner, Ebenezer, Pansey. County Engineer Kirkland said this is down from 17 closed roads.

Chairman Shoupe commented that the Road & Bridge Dept. is doing a tremendous job and he appreciates what they do.

County Attorney – No report

Adjourned