

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION
REGULAR SESSION
September 23, 2024

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 10:00 a.m. meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the September 23, 2024, Houston County Commission Regular Session and declared a quorum as all commissioners were in attendance.

Pastor Clark Cornelius, from Grace Anglican Church, gave the invocation and Commissioner James Ivey 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 carried unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Shoupe asked for any comments from the commission and with there being none he asked EMA Director Mark Powell to come forward to give an update on the approaching storm system. Mr. Powell began by saying that what really worries him about this storm is that they do not have a lot of definitive information. He said that they have information but there is not a lot of clear-cut thoughts from the National Weather Service on exactly when the storm will hit. Mr. Powell said that as of right now the approaching storm is called Invest 97L with Invest meaning investigative area and 97 is the rotating number and L indicates that is from the northern Atlantic Ocean. He added that as it stands right now, there is a 90% chance of development over the next three days as the system is not yet formed and even though the system is organized, it does not have a defined center at this time. Mr. Powell reported that they do expect it to strengthen as it moves over the Gulf of Mexico and our area can begin seeing an impact as early as Wednesday night. He added that this system is fast moving, and our area can expect heavy rainfall, flooding and strong winds by Wednesday night. Mr. Powell said that the forecasted rainfall from Wednesday night to Saturday could be anywhere from 4 to 6 inches. He also said that once that center forms the forecast will become more certain with the timing and intensity and what it will be, and they are in hopes of getting that timeline sometime today. They do predict that this can be anywhere from a category 1 to a category 4 hurricane. Mr. Powell suggested that everyone prepare for the worse and to prepare for a hurricane. The model is showing that it is a fast mover, and it could be gone by Saturday. At this time Mr. Powell reported that they are having an EOC Core Group meeting to make plans

and then on Tuesday there will be an 8:30 a.m. and a 1:30 p.m. webinar to discuss more defined updates. He reminded the public of the 3 A's of weather information which include Awareness, Apps and Alerts. Mr. Powell said that being aware, downloading the various apps and to be alert by turning on the alerts to ensure that messages and alerts are given. He added that the agency will be sending out information through these apps, so he stressed that it is important that people download them and turn them on.

Upon completion of the EMA report, Chairman Shoupe asked Mr. Powell where the citizens could get more information as the week progresses. Mr. Powell said to follow them on social media, download the app and that the EMA website will have updates and other information such as check list and weather preparedness information.

AWARDS & PRESENTATIONS

1. Recognition – Houston County Schools – Brandy White, Superintendent

Chairman Shoupe announced that this particular item will be cancelled due to the guest of honor being out of town on work related business. They will be coming to a future meeting.

2. Recognition – 3rd Quarter Anniversaries – Sheri Garner, Personnel Director

At this time Ms. Garner came forward and asked the employees in attendance to come forward as well. She commented that this is one of her favorite things to do each quarter and that is to recognize the employees that have service anniversaries. Those celebrating anniversaries this quarter are as listed. (Some were not able to attend the meeting)

Vanessa Howell, Jail Dept.	5 yrs.
Caleb Hamilton, Sheriff's Dept.	5 yrs.
Jason Myers, Sheriff's Dept.	5 yrs.
Brandon Barnes, Sheriff' Dept.	5 yrs.
Chris Braman, Sheriff's Dept.	5 yrs.
Sidney Tucker, R & B	5 yrs.
Trevor Benefield, Sheriff's Dept.	5 yrs.
Mike Lolley, Sheriff's Dept.	5 yrs.
Leck Killingsworth, Sheriff's Dept.	10 yrs.
Barry Tucker, Sheriff's Dept.	10 yrs.
Heather Helms, Probate Dept.	10 yrs.
Anisa McKenzie, Personnel	15 yrs.

This is a combined 85 years of service between 12 employees. A round of applause was given by all.

Chairman Shoupe noted that on the upcoming 4th Quarter Anniversaries, Sheriff Donald Valenza will celebrate his 45th anniversary with the Sheriff's Dept. A round of applause was given by all.

3. Proclamation – Commander David Asbill – Sheriff Donald Valenza

Chairman Shoupe recognized Sheriff Valenza and asked him to come forward. Sheriff Valenza thanked the commission for recognizing Capt. David Asbill today and said that Capt. Asbill just graduated from the FBI National Academy, which is a very prestigious opportunity to attend as only one-half of 1% of law enforcement in the United States and 26 foreign countries attend. Sheriff Valenza stated that Capt. Asbill is a proud member of class 291 and that is how they identify each other. Sheriff said that he had the opportunity of attending in 1998, which was class 193. He also mentioned that in regard to the academy, there have been several that attended and gained their undergraduate and master's while attending the academy, which is the University of Virginia. Also, he mentioned that there are a consistent 47 states, 26 foreign countries, 7 military organizations and several civil organizations that have attended and it is a very prestigious opportunity to attend and as of today, since 1935, there has been 55,404 officers that have completed the program at the academy. He congratulated Capt. Asbill on his accomplishment. Applause was given by all.

4. Presentation – Sean Gibson, Southeast Alabama Emergency Medical Services

Chairman Shoupe asked Mr. Sean Gibson to come forward and stated that on Thursday he mentioned that he was excited that this program got started as his father passed away suddenly from cardiac event about a year and a half ago. He also mentioned that the Southeast Health Foundation has invested heavily in this program with the idea from CEO Rick Sutton leading in this project. He then turned over the presentation to Mr. Gibson to let us know how Houston County can become a heart safe county.

Mr. Gibson began by thanking the commission for the opportunity to come and speak on this important initiative and said that it was initiated by Southeast Health. He said that it is a collaborate effort between the City of Dothan with the Dothan Fire Department and Southeast Alabama EMS. Mr. Gibson reported that this began in 2019 with the focus on secondary prevention for sudden cardiac arrest. He also reported that over 350,000 Americans a year suffer a sudden cardiac arrest, and he is not talking about chronic disease, as this includes the kids on the football field all the way to the parents. Mr. Gibson noted that an interesting thing to remember is that 70% of the 350,000 cases happen in the home and this effort is to implement secondary prevention and educate on how to minimize the impact of our loved ones suffering from sudden cardiac arrest, or even ourselves. He stated that to do this, three very important things need to happen with one being initiating the emergency response system,

initiate good chest compressions and use an AED (Automated External Defibrillator) to defibrillate. Mr. Gibson said that just chest compressions improve survivability by 30% but the use of an AED increases survivability by 50% and without someone taking those two very important steps, the outcome is about 4% survival. He also said that what the Heart Safe Initiative does is put experts in the community to increase the number of people trained, which is a one-hour program, free of charge. Mr. Gibson said that getting the equipment is the most important piece to the initiative. He also reported that the Southeast Health Foundation has completed a lot of fundraisers, and they support providing AED to communities, industries, campuses, businesses, and churches. They encourage everyone to spread the word that this is free training, and it is a very simple and safe training program. Mr. Gibson again thanked the commission for inviting them today and informed everyone that they are growing the program, and it is only going to get better as new things are to come. He asked that everyone share this information out in the community.

Chairman Shoupe asked Mr. Gibson that if someone wanted to become a Heart Safe facility, whether it is a church or business, etc., who do they need to contact. Mr. Gibson said that the best way is to go to Southeast Health Foundation's website and click on the Heart Safe icon and all the instructions are on that website. He added that they have created a taskforce within the communities in Houston County and through this taskforce, a time will be set up that is convenient for the organization to initiate the program. Chairman Shoupe thanked them for coming and mentioned that he completed the training recently and it was great training and information.

5. Fiber Loop Project Update – James Brannon, Poly Inc.

As Mr. James Brannon approached the podium, Chairman Shoupe said that this has been a saga with a lot of mistakes made by others not to include the County or Poly, Inc. Mr. Brannon began and said that the project is 98% to 99% complete. They are scheduled for a walk through on Wednesday, and if everything is correct, the county could begin using the loop. Mr. Brannon reported that this has been a very frustrating project with little communication from the contractor. He also said that the county still owes the contractor \$127,320.59 and he has not approved any invoicing since the month of May, so the contractor has not been overpaid. Mr. Brannon added that when they are finished, they will go over the closeout of the project. Chairman Shoupe thanked Mr. Brannon for his communication between Poly, Inc. and the commission as they have both been frustrated. Chairman Shoupe did say that the contract allows them to holdout \$500 per day and they were to be completed in June. Mr. Brannon said the completion date was set for June 4, 2024, and the number of days past is 111 as of today. Chairman Shoupe thanked Mr. Brannon, and they look forward to the project being completed as Mr. Brannon said he will be too.

6. Revenue Department Update – Greg Holland, Revenue Commissioner

Chairman Shoupe asked Revenue Commissioner Greg Holland to come forward. Commissioner Holland began by stating that on Sept. 26th, tax bills will be sent out and he wanted to remind everyone that the tax bills will become due October 1st and will be delinquent on December 31st. He added that this gives the citizens three months to pay the taxes owed on their property. After December 31st, the tax is delinquent, and fees will be accrued on that amount that was billed. Commissioner Holland said that the citizens can go online and pay the tax, or they can come into the office, or they can mail payments in. The website is Houstoncountyal.gov/revenue and there is a link there to pay. He also stated that the link will not be active until October 1st. Commissioner Holland asked the public to be patient as they just recently switched to a new appraisal collecting and assessing software and they just went live with it this last week.

Chairman Shoupe congratulated Commissioner Holland for his recent appointment and he knows that things are going great.

7. Proclamation – “Dress in Confidence, F.R.E.E. Your Anxiety Day” – Taylor Jones, Founder

Chairman Shoupe approached the podium and asked Miss Taylor Jones to join him. Chairman Shoupe said that Miss Jones has experience being here as she was Miss Houston County three years ago. Miss Jones stated that she was Young Jr. Miss, Junior Miss Teen and Miss Houston County.

Chairman Shoupe asked for a motion for this proclamation and Commissioner Ivey made the motion and Commissioner Adams seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Shoupe read the proclamation and presented it to Miss Jones and asked her for comments. Miss Jones began by introducing herself and stating that she is currently a junior at Troy University. She said she adopted this platform because she has always experienced anxiety and had to battle this in her everyday life. Miss Jones said that choosing to take her life back and choosing to dress in confidence has helped her accomplish so much more than choosing to hide back and not talk about things that she was experiencing. She added that she is currently in the elementary education program at Troy and while going into the field of education, she sees that there is certainly a big need to talk about things that are important in the world today. Miss Jones said that is why she fostered this platform to teach children to choose to dress in confidence and take off those negative traits and to be who they are not matter what the world thinks of them. She also stated that through her partnership with the mental health coordinator of Houston County Schools and the children book which she

published and adopted, she will continue going through schools and encouraging everyone to be their best selves no matter what everyone thinks of them.

Chairman Shoupe said that he loves seeing young people do amazing things and that he himself has battled with anxiety, specifically social anxiety, his entire life and still struggles today. He knows that it can be debilitating as anxiety creeps up on you and grabs a hold of you and it is hard to shake loose. He thanked Miss Jones for what she is doing and congratulated on her accomplishments. Applause was given by all.

REGULAR AGENDA

1. Request to appoint Jennifer Stephens to the Houston County Department of Human Resources Board

Commissioner Herring made the motion to approve the appointment of Jennifer Stephens to the Houston County Department of Human Resources Board. Commissioner Adams seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

2. Request to approve resolution to extend the temporary polling place change in Cottonwood for the November 5th General Election – Patrick Davenport, Judge of Probate

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the resolution to extend the temporary polling place change in Cottonwood and Commissioner Adams seconded. Chairman Shoupe commented that the Probate Judge came and spoke about this item last Thursday. With no discussion or questions, the motion carried unanimously.

3. Request to adopt resolution authorizing participation in the ACCA Worker's Compensation Self-Insurers Fund through September 30, 2027 – Peter Covert, CAO

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

4. Request to approve Request for Information (RFI) for management of the Houston County Farm Center Arena

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the RFI and Commissioner Harvey seconded. Chairman Shoupe mentioned that this was spoken about on Thursday, and they are looking forward to the farm center project being completed but there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done. They are in hopes to be finished in a year or so. Chairman Shoupe said that

he has asked Ms. Jackie to post this RFI on the website, if it is approved. With their being no other questions, the motion carried unanimously.

5. Request to approve Interlocal Agreement between the City of Dothan and Houston County for the 2024 Bryne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program Award

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the agreement for the JAG program award and Commissioner Ivey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

6. Request to adopt Resolution Regarding Fire Protection Service Fees Withholding From Certain Volunteer Fire Departments

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the resolution and Commissioner Adams seconded. Chairman Shoupe commented that they talked about this on Thursday and stated that there is one department in the county that has not met the requirements to receive taxpayer funding so the commission cannot legally give anything of value to a private entity. So, if you are not a non-profit, you are a private entity. He added that they are in hopes that they get this fixed and this request came from the Volunteer Firefighters Association. Commissioner Adams reported that six months ago they had six volunteer fire departments that were not in compliance and now five have gotten their compliance initiated and completed. Chairman Shoupe said they did not realize that in the past money was given to organizations that were not non-profits, but that has been cleared. Commissioner Ivey wanted to reiterate that this was a request from Jason Reneau, president of the Houston County Volunteer Firefighters Association and it is through that agency that this request came before this commission. Chairman Shoupe commented that the organization is doing better, and he appreciates Mr. Reneau's leadership. Chairman Shoupe also said that if anyone knows a volunteer firefighter or volunteer rescue team member, please give them a hug as they have saved the county millions of dollars for years. Not only are they saving lives, but they are saving the taxpayers millions of dollars as the county would have to fund this if they did not do what they do and that would cost the county millions of dollars per year. When called for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

7. Request to adopt resolution relating to the transfer of real property to the City of Dothan

Commissioner Herring made a motion to adopt the resolution. Commissioner Adams seconded. Chairman Shoupe stated that this has to do with industrial work that was completed by the county on a road and now that the work is complete, and they will turn it back over to the City of Dothan. When called for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

8. Request to approve a re-plat of Chase Ridge Subdivision Phase V – Road & Bridge

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the re-plat and Commissioner Ivey seconded. The motion carried unanimously when called for the vote.

9. Request to sell the following items on GovDeals:

- a. 2004 Ford F150 (Road & Bridge)
- b. (2) 2012 Chevrolet 1500 (Road & Bridge)
- c. 2005 Chevrolet 1500 (Road & Bridge)
- d. 2001 Dodge Ram 3500 (Road & Bridge)

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve selling the items on GovDeals and Commissioner Harvey seconded. Commissioner Ivey said that he had a request from Bay Springs Fire Dept. to have one of the vehicles donated to them. He added that the fire department is going to come and look at the trucks and possibly come back to the commission and see if one of the trucks can be donated to be used as a special response vehicle to help with EMS calls and for storm response. Chairman Shoupe said they are always glad to support them, and he asked counsel if they did donate one, that would need to be voted on during a commission meeting and counsel responded yes. Chairman Shoupe then reiterated that at this time they are approving all the vehicles to be sold, but one of them will not be sold and will come back to the commission for possibly transferring to the asocial in Bay Springs. With there being no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

STAFF REPORTS

Chief Administrative Office – No report.

County Engineer – 3 closed roads: Middleton, Junction & Leo Pynes

County Attorney – No report

Adjourned