

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION
REGULAR SESSION
December 9, 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 December 9, 2024, Houston County Commission Regular Session and declared a quorum as all commissioners were in attendance.

Pastor Ricky Plummer, from Bethel Baptist Church, gave the invocation and the pledge of allegiance was led by Commissioner Tracy Adams.

The minutes of the previous meeting 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 calling EMA Director up to talk about the possible severe weather threat for our area. Mr. Powell reported that we will all need umbrellas for the next few days as it will begin raining today and continue until Wednesday morning. This will include several days of heavy rainfall and severe weather threat. He added that we could have at least 4 inches of rain and he reminded everyone to keep up with the weather in the next few days.

Chairman Shoupe announced that some of the commissioners attended Christmas parades over the weekend as did Revenue Commissioner Greg Holland. The Town of Gordon, Ashford and Rehobeth all had well attended Christmas parades and they still have Wicksburg to go. Chairman Shoupe did announce that the Commissioners will be out of town for a few days this week for the ACCA Conference in Montgomery.

Commissioner Adams announced that the Dupree School Christmas Event will be held on December 19th as it was delayed due to the possible weather threat this week.

AWARDS & PRESENTATIONS

1. Recognition – Service Anniversaries – Sheri Garner, Personnel Director

Chairman Shoupe asked Ms. Garner to come forward to give her presentation of the service anniversaries. Miss Garner then invited all that were in attendance to come forward and join her. Those being recognized are as follows. (most were in attendance.)

Angela Martin	Probate Dept.	20 years
Carol Smith	Probate Dept.	20 years
Monica Lee	Sheriff's Dept.	20 years
Joshua Jackson	Road & Bridge	20 years
Veronica Goins	Road & Bridge	25 years

A round of applause was given by all and Chairman Shoupe thanked them all for their dedication and hard work.

REGULAR AGENDA

1. Request to publish the Houston County year-end unaudited financial report to include county, fiduciary and other Special Trust Funds – Peter Covert, CAO

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the publishing of the County's year-end unaudited financial report to include county, fiduciary and other Special Trust Funds. Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

2. Request to award ACCA Joint County Bids for Debris Removal to DRC Emergency Services, LLC and Debris Removal Monitoring to Tetra Tech, Inc.

Commissioner Herring made a motion to approve the joint county bids and Commissioner Adams seconded. When called for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

3. Request to approve rehab services agreement with Southeast Alabama Youth Services, Inc.

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the agreement and Commissioner Adams seconded. Chairman Shoupe mentioned that this was talked about on Thursday and asked for any questions. There being none, he called for the vote and the motion carried unanimously.

4. Request to reconstitute the Houston County Public Building Authority and appoint Jim McGhee, Forrest Register, and Susan Wilkins as the Board of Directors

Commissioner Adams made a motion to approve reconstituting the Houston County Public Building Authority and Commissioner Harvey seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Request to award bid for the Houston County Farm Center renovations to Lewis Construction, LLC

Commissioner Adams made a motion to approve the awarding of the bid and Commissioner Ivey seconded. The motion passed unanimously to award the bid to Lewis Construction, LLC for the Houston County Farm Center renovations.

6. Request to approve resolution requesting drafting of local legislation regarding increase in salary for Houston County Sheriff and Houston County Coroner and authorization for advertising same

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the resolution and advertising of same. Commissioner Adams seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

7. Request to award bid for Houston County Jail meal provider to lowest bidder meeting specs and authorize Chairman to negotiate and execute contract – Peter Covert, CAO

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the request and Commissioner Adams seconded. Chairman Shoupe stated that there will be some questions and discussion on this item as on Thursday the Commission requested that the bidders come to the meeting for questions. He asked if anyone was present for Summit Food Service and if so to come forward. Representative came forward and stated his name as Tony Stewart and he is the District Manager with Summit Food Service. He continued to say that they service several facilities in Alabama to include Baldwin County Jail, Madison County Jail in Huntsville, City of Mobile Jail and Tuscaloosa Jail. He also mentioned that they are expanding their services throughout Alabama and they look forward to the opportunity to service Houston County again. Mr. Stewart stated that in the past they had serviced Houston County when they were under a different company but were bought out by Summit some years ago. He mentioned that he toured our jail facilities last week and it seems to be the same as when he was here in the past. Commissioner Herring commented that he is in the learning process of all this so he asked about the preparation process of the food and how it is distributed, how long it stays warm, cool and what temperature is it when served. Mr. Stewart responded with the process of the food prep to include the casserole type meals and the documentation of each step up to the time when it is served. He did say that depending on what type of tray it is served on will, this determine the temperature, which is checked and documented. The trays are then stacked and delivered within 20 – 30 minutes and they will stay up to temperature during that time. Mr. Stewart said it is basic food and they have two different menus to include a less expensive to more expensive. The cold meals are frozen then thawed out, sliced, panned and bagged to distribute. He also mentioned that he understands that they serve the city jail meals too and they will bag those up as well and the city can pick up for their facility. Commissioner Ivey

asked what their hours of operation are and Mr. Stewart said it depends on the building schedule and feeding schedule. For a 6:00 a.m. feeding, they will be at the facility by 4:00 a.m. to give them two hours to prepare the meal and have it out on time. On most occasions, the staff is out by 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon as the last meal is prepared and stored in the coolers. He said it all depends on the Sheriff's Dept. schedule and all meals are scheduled around court time, medical visits and whatever may be going on at the jail itself. They will adjust and accommodate those needs while meeting federal guidelines between feedings and will coordinate with the jail administrator. Commissioner Harvey asked Mr. Stewart if they always have insulated trays and Mr. Stewart answered that the trays are provided by the jail and if they feed immediately, they can use cafeteria trays with no problem. But, if it sits for 10 minutes or so, it needs to be in the insulated trays in order to be served at the right temperature. Commissioner Harvey also asked what the difference is in the meals and Mr. Stewart said that the RFP meals are the cheaper of the meals as it is mostly casseroles and each includes a meat in the casserole. Also, those meals include a hot, hot, cold, which is a hot breakfast, lunch and cold dinner (sandwiches) as that way they can put in the cooler to serve at night. That concluded all the questions for Mr. Stewart.

At this time, Chairman Shoupe asked if anyone was present from Trinity Services Group and for them to come forward and state their name. Mr. Jeff Smithchin, with Trinity Services and Christina Mira, Regional Sales Director for Trinity Services Group were present. Mr. Smithchin began by saying that they had been in business for over 30 years and that they only do correctional facility food service. Chairman Shoupe asked if there were any questions for the Trinity Group and Commissioner Ivey began. He stated that Trinity Services has been serving the jail for over six years and for these six years there have been multitudes of complaints. Commissioner Ivey continued by saying that one of the complaints is the billing and invoicing as there have been several occasions where they have to track down invoices after the billing has been done to correct the company's errors. Mr. Smithchin said that if there is ever an issue with billing, usually the jail commander will get with them and they are always able to pull the invoice. Commissioner Ivey stated that another issue is the employees that they employ. In one instance, they have had one just walk off the shift one day and nobody to relieve them. Also, on an occasion their employees have shown up late and the officers had to start preparing the breakfast for the inmates. Mr. Smithchin said that he is not aware of that but what they have done currently is to increase the wages on this current bid in order to keep help. Ms. Mira commented that based on experience with other facilities what they have seen in the past few years that the wages costs have significantly increased. In order to keep up with that, they implemented an increase for this new pricing model not only based on experience of other facilities, but also a wage study of our area to see what it is going to take to attract and retain these employees as they are essential to the operations.

Commissioner Ivey commented that in regard to the employees of Trinity Group there were a few instances of them having relations with the inmates that working in the kitchen. He continued to say that is why we cannot continue as a county to go on, especially when it's been going on in the past. Mrs. Mira said that have initiated ongoing training with this going forward. Commissioner Ivey reported that another issue that was brought up is with an employee that is with their company asked about bringing some cleaning supplies but never followed through with proper procedure. By not doing so, it has resulted in a medical problem as the cleaning supply contained metal pieces that were swallowed by the inmates. Mr. Smithchin claimed that the employee was under the impression that she had permission to bring in the tools and he was just informed of the issues this morning pertaining to the medical issues of the inmate. Commissioner Ivey stated that they should have a checklist of what supplies can be used to clean the equipment and the employees should follow those procedures.

In addition, Commissioner Ivey questioned the Trinity Group on their procedures of temperature checks and they responded that it was similar to what the Summit Group Representative stated that they do. Ms. Mira said that it sounds like this all goes back to training and it sounds like a lot of these issues pertain to that and maybe they should do more training on the employees with the go forward plan. She also said that with the last six years of a working relationship, it sounds like some of these issues have escalated more than they need to and they will address them with the regional team. She said that the onsite team is responsible for the day to day operations, but ultimately Jeff and his team are here to make sure all of these things are going the way they should be.

Commissioner Ivey asked how often do they make site visits and they responded that at a minimum they visit quarterly, between them and the general manager. Ms. Mira said that if it needs to be more, and it sounds like it needs to be more, they can do that.

Commissioner Herring asked what their vetting process is when they vet their employees to come and serve with a jail facility. Mr. Smithchin said they run through a talent acquisition and questions and what not. They ask if they are serve-safe certified, what type of food service background do they have, if they have transportation, etc. Commissioner Herring asked if there are criminal histories run on the employees and Mr. Smithchin said they do not run criminal history reports. He said that is done when Houston County does the background. He also said they are asked if they know anyone that is in the facility to include any family members that are incarcerated in the facility and they go by that as they are advised to be honest.

Chairman Shoupe asked what surrounding counties do they serve and they responded that they have Montgomery City Jail and Birmingham City Jail in the state of Alabama. In Florida, they have Graceville CI, Bay C.I., Gadsden C. I., and Franklin County.

Commissioner Harvey commented that getting back to the RFP, that he does not think it is a difference in meals, but stands for the Request For Price, but Mr. Smithchin said Request For Proposal. Mr. Harvey said that he is just trying to understand what it is. Mr. Smithchin said that the RFP dictates the number of calories that the county is looking for and then the dietician puts together the meals based on that. He added that they can always go to a higher calorie count, but based on the RFP specifications, it is 3000 calories which is standard.

Commissioner Adams asked that with the issues that have come up with jail, and if they are given this contract, can the working relationship between the company and the jail improve as Commissioner Adams understands that they were not aware of some of the issues and they cannot fix it if they are not aware of it. Mr. Smithchin responded that within the last month and half they have obtained a new food service director that will be more hands on.

At this time, Major Rafferty approached the podium for input of the Sheriff's Dept. for comments and questions. Commissioner Herring began by asking the Major that, after he heard from both entities and with the issues that has gone on in the jail and what the Director of the Jail has been dealing with, Commissioner Herring asked what is there take on all this and what they would like to see happen in the future. Major Rafferty responded that the current company has had the contract for the last 6 years and there has been issues with personnel like Commissioner Ivey stated. He also said that the main issue is that the food is ice cold before the inmates even get it as it sits for two hours before they are served. They prep and then are ready to leave and they have been using Styrofoam instead of the trays that are provided by the jail. The reason for this is so that they do not have to stay and clean and wash as they are required to stay until the kitchen is totally cleaned up. Major Rafferty added that this has been an ongoing issue. He also said that he understands that they are working on the personnel, but the personnel has been a major problem during the whole situation. This includes not showing up for work on time, walking out and leaving inmates in the kitchen, setting off the sprinkler fire extinguishing system, and that cost a large amount of money to get cleaned up and back in service. He added that on top of this now they have the issue of the inmate that has ingested pieces of wire/metal from cleaning supplies that an employee brought in without authorization. Major Rafferty said that it has just been a bunch of things over the last several years to include billing and employee issues as the top factors.

Chairman Shoupe stated that the way he looks at this the agenda item states "Request to award bid for Houston County Jail meal provider to lowest bidder meeting specs and authorize Chairman to negotiate and execute contract". Chairman Shoupe asked that if they vote on this in the affirmative, the lowest bidder meeting specs would be Trinity Services Group, who is the current provider. But, Trinity is a non-responsible bidder and with any vote, would the commission need to vote on that or would there need to be a substitute amendment. Council

advised that a substitute amendment would not be necessary to just say “Request to award bid to Summit Food Service”. Council confirmed that it would need to be stated that they are awarding bid to Summit Food Service. At this time, Chairman Shoupe said that the bid would be awarded to Summit Food Service and declares Trinity Services as not being responsible enough to bid. He called for the vote and the motion carried unanimously to award bid to Summit Food Service.

8. Request to award bid for bulk cement to lowest bidder meeting specs

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the request to award bid for bulk cement to lowest bidder meeting specs and Commissioner Harvey seconded. The motion, when called for the vote, carried unanimously.

STAFF REPORTS

Chief Administrative Officer – Mr. Covert reported that it is standard practice of the county to review the banking relationship every three years. He said that they went through that process not too long ago, however he did get a lot of feedback from the department heads that due to the ongoing projects going on to include the timekeeping system and the accounting system, he feels that it is too much additional burden on the admin. staff to change banks. He suggests that they delay changing. Chairman Shoupe asked for comments and Commissioner Herring asked that if something works, what is the use in changing of banks and the other employees/departments that are dealing with the banking need to be part of the decision. He added this for future reference; they need to be included in the decision as they are the ones working with the bank on a regular basis. If the county will be saving money, he understands the need for change. Chairman Shoupe added that the difference in staying with the current provider versus going with another is about \$300,000. He said he realizes that money is important, but overloading the staff and the risk could really hold up the swap over of the accounting software.

County Engineer – Closed roads: Bruner, Leo Pynes, Strong

County Attorney – No report

Adjourned