

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION
REGULAR SESSION
January 27, 2025

PRESENT: Chairman Brandon Shoupe, Commissioner Tracy Adams, 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 January 27, 2025, Houston County Commission Regular Session and declared a quorum as a majority of commissioners were in attendance.

Chairman Brandon Shoupe gave the invocation and the pledge of allegiance was led by Commissioner James Ivey.

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

ABSENT: Commissioner Curtis Harvey and Commissioner Ricky Herring

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Shoupe began by announcing that they will begin a series of four meetings called "County Conversations" that will be held in each district. The first one will be on February 3rd in Rehobeth for District 3 and the second one will be held on February 6th at Walton Park for District 1. He added that the third meeting will be held on February 11th at Pilgrim Home Baptist Church for District 4 and the last one will be held on February 13th at the Houston County Farm Center for District 2. Chairman Shoupe stated that the time for these meeting will be from 6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. and there will be representatives from the Road & Bridge Dept., Sheriff's Dept., Probate Dept., and the Revenue Commissioner will also be there. There will be a lot of good information at these meetings and Chairman Shoupe encouraged everyone to attend. It will be a come and go event to make it convenient for everyone.

Chairman Shoupe continued by commending the entire county, to include employees and the public, for doing a great job in handling the snow that we recently had. He reported that it was the most snow that has fallen since the 1880's as we had 6" in some areas or more. Chairman Shoupe stated that he was constantly on the phone with the Road & Bridge Engineer, Barkley Kirkland, as they were out with the motor graders scraping ice off the roads. He was also in contact with the Sheriff as they had deputies stationed throughout the county. The EMA Director was on top of things as well and each department was on social media sharing

information as it seems to be the most effective way of communication. Chairman Shoupe also stated that the public did a great job of not getting too stir crazy having to try to stay inside during the weather. He wishes that some of the businesses would not have opened so quick as that would have kept people off the roads. Other than essential employees, others should have delayed opening another day as the roads were iced over. The Sheriff's Dept. was out helping motorist that had slid into the ditches due to the black ice. But overall, Chairman Shoupe said it was handled well considering our area is not used to this amount of snow. He commended the Law Enforcement, Road & Bridge, EMA and the public in their handling the situation in hand.

Chairman Shoupe then announced that the State of the County/City presentation has been rescheduled to February 6th at the Chamber of Commerce. He and Mayor Saliba will be there for the presentation. He recognized a few people that had passed away recently and those included John Summerford, a community leader in the Ashford area and the county lost an employee last week as Joe McLean, from the County Buildings Dept., passed away unexpectedly.

Commissioner Ivey added that O. W. Roney had passed away as well. Mr. Roney was the Chief of Police in Gordon for numerous years. Condolences to all the families.

Commissioner Adams reported that there was a 12 car wreck two weeks ago on 84E. He wanted to recognize the Ashford Volunteer Fire Dept and Cowarts as they stayed until 4:30 a.m. to get this cleaned up. There was zero visibility due to a fire which in turn caused the accident. He also thanked Engineer Kirkland and his staff as they came in with a backhoe to bury the fire and they also stayed until 3:30 a.m. working on this situation.

AWARDS & PRESENTATIONS

1. Snowstorm Update – Mark Powell, EMA Director

Mr. Powell came forward to give a recap on the recent snowstorm situation. He began by saying that when this all began as a potential weather event, he watched the reports and when he saw the predictions of the snowfall for the area, he called the weather service and asked when had this happened in the past and they could not answer him as they had to look it up. Mr. Powell said that the best way he could describe it was it was a protect-in-place situation which meant to tell people stay put all the while advising them to stay off the roads. Mr. Powell reported that for the most part, people did listen and that helped the entire situation. The messaging worked coming from the weather service, the city and county and the volunteer agencies. Another vital part was the warming shelter downtown as at one point they had about 60 people taking shelter there. He added that it was a 7 day warming shelter, which is unprecedented in our area, and everyone did a great job coordinating volunteers and meals

and all they had to deal with. Mr. Powell stated that the weather service is not always perfect but they pretty much got this snow prediction right. He reported that Pansey had the most with 8" and it was projected to be 6" or more. Another bit of advice he received was the more snow the better meaning that yes there would be ice on the road, but the more snow the less ice. Mr. Powell said that did help even though they did have ice on the roads, but if they had less snow, they would have had more ice on the roads for a longer period. He also stated that the ice was on the roads through Friday and it could have been even longer if the snow would have been less. He feels that everything went well and thanks to social media, it helped. The public listens to press releases and videos and it really paid off this time with the messaging opportunities. He added that overall, it was successful and nothing major besides some wrecks, which was a good thing. From EMA, they were functioning in pretty much a virtual capacity as his concern was that if they get out there to the EOC, they may get stranded there. In this regards, the warming shelters could have been stuck with no food if things were different with the amount of snow. This brought Mr. Powell to another item, is a new technology called VEOC, Virtual EOC where you can set up each department with their own log in and everyone can put in information for all of them to share and see at the same time. He will be looking into this feature. Mr. Powell also commended the IT Dept. as they had set them up on the new phone system, which was available, and all office calls were able to be forwarded to their cell phones as they were tied in that way. He also said that they set up a hotline where people could call in and give EMA information as it came in. Mr. Powell said that they prepared for something that had never happened before and everyone did a great job. He feels that the encouragement to the people to stay home and stay off the roads worked and it helped tremendously.

Chairman Shoupe commended Mr. Powell and his staff for a job well done.

REGULAR AGENDA

1. Request to replace 2021 Ford Explorer and approve accompanying budget amendment – Major Bill Rafferty, Sheriff's Dept.

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the request to replace the 2021 Ford Explorer and approve accompanying budget amendment. Commissioner Adams seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

2. Request to approve Resolution and Order Authorizing Certain Action with Respect to General Obligation Warrants of Houston County Alabama

Commissioner Ivey made a motion to approve the resolution and Commissioner Adams seconded. Peter Covert, CAO, commented that he was asked to verify the rate of the bond and

he reported that it was 3.59% and he does not anticipate that rate to change. When called for the vote, the motion passed unanimously.

STAFF REPORTS

Chief Administrative Officer – No report

County Engineer – Closed roads: Crawford Ford, Leo Pynes and Harper Joy

County Attorney – No report

Adjourned