

The Russell County Commission
Russell County Commission Chambers
Meeting Minutes March 11, 2020
9:30 A.M. EST

An adjourned meeting of the Russell County Commission was called to order by Chairman Lee.

The invocation was given by Reverend David Hendrix, Trinity Methodist Church.

Chairman Gentry Lee led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Lee welcomed elected officials, department heads, media and guests. He also thanked Cable T.V. of East Alabama and The Citizen News for their coverage of the Commission Meeting.

County Administrator LeAnn Horne called roll. Members present were Chairman Gentry Lee, Commissioner Peggy Martin, Commissioner Ronnie Reed, Commissioner Cattie Epps, Commissioner Chance Corbett and Commissioner Larry Screws. Commissioner Carl Currington was absent. Also, present was the County Attorney Kenneth Funderburk. A quorum was established.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chairman Lee requested approval of the February 26, 2020 minutes. Vice-Chair Martin motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Corbett.

County Administrator Horne polled the Commission. The vote was unanimous to approve the February 26, 2020 minutes.

BUSINESS ITEMS:

Commissioner Corbett stated: As we brought forth the item from the February 24th Work Session, we were looking at projects to better the area and Community also our County facilities as well. Due to a leadership trip I made in looking for ways to enhance communities and one project came to our attention were murals. We have done one in Crawford. We have a building here I think is an ideal candidate. That building is the Annex Building on 14th Street which is across the street from the Russell County Judicial Center. It is so much potential to welcome our area. That building is used by our Extension Service and Board of Education. I spoke to Russell County Superintendent Brenda Coley and she is very excited about it.

Commissioner Reed stated: Mr. Chairman, since this is in my District, I would like to table this item. I would like to get two or three different designs before we move on here.

Chair Lee stated: It is my understanding we have not settled on any design. We were going to get three or four different designs. We are just authorizing today to get the designs.

Commissioner Corbett stated: The contract that I am prepared to make the motion today calls for \$1500 contract which is paid for by tourism money. The contract artist has already showed his quality of work in the County. That artist would go and be working with Jennifer at the Extension Office and Dr. Coley the Russell County School Superintendent to help find a design that best suits the community. That design will then come back to the Commission. We will have five attempts to get that to the final design. Commissioners will have a say in everyone of those if they want. Once we get the final design; then we will make a decision on that design and scope of project. The artwork will then become the property of the Commission. I have already cleared that. Even though this artist does the artwork; once we pay for it is ours. If we choose to let another artist do it or even modify, it is our business and we can do that. The design is going to come back here. We can table stuff to death and we can put stuff off but the reason it was put on the Agenda today is because you asked to put it off at the last meeting. We have put it off already.

Commissioner Corbett stated: At this time, I make a motion that we approve the \$1500 contract with Mr. John W. Christian with Go GA Arts. The first payment of a \$1000 upon signing the agreement. The second payment upon completion of the design. Commissioner Martin motioned to second.

Commissioner Epps stated: Mr. Chairman, I am not against the project. I just want to say. I think I understand what Commissioner Reed is saying. If something is in my District and you should come out and see something that needs to be done. Out of respect you should let that Commissioner know what is going on in their district. We all work for the County but we each have a district we work in. I think it would be unfair, for an example, for me to go in District 6, 7, 4 or any other district and see something and put it on the agenda never contacting that person that serves in that District. I think it is unfair to that Elected Official. I think we need to give more respect to each other that serves the Districts.

Chairman Lee stated: The motion is just to authorize the beginning of the artist drawings. We will have chances to change those drawings; or do whatever we want when it comes back to the Commission. Talking about District's, this is a County Commission building so technically it is in all County Commissioners District. It is not a building that stands alone. It is a county commission building. I could see if we were going to do something to a building that was not owned by the County; then, we need to get that Commissioner involved to help work out the lease or details. This is a County commission owned building.

Commissioner Corbett stated: I am not trying to disrespect Commissioner Reed. This building we are in right now is a County Commission Building and it is in Reed's District. We don't come to him and ask if we can put a roof on it. This is a County Commission facility. Bring an idea to the table and let's better our community. That's all I am trying to do. What I keep getting frustrated about is when we come with good ideas and because it is somebody else's idea, we automatically go against it for personal reasons. That is not what this County and the tourism dollars are about. We are supposed to be promoting tourism and promoting our County to make it better for the people and community. You have people who go to the Extension Office everyday that will see this mural and not to mention the amount of people that go to our Board of Education building. This will enhance the building in the area. It is not about disrespecting someone. Here is the other thing Mrs. Epps, I put this on the agenda on the last Work Session and I brought it to Commissioner Reed. Commissioner Reed asked me to put it off one meeting so Commissioners can have time to think about it and I did. Now, I have brought it back and Monday night it was on the agenda at the Work Session. Nobody said a word during the work session about this being an issue. Just magically when the TV cameras are running, now everybody has an opinion. All I am asking for is let's let the artist bring us back some designs. If Commissioner Reed doesn't like it, then maybe, we won't even vote to do the mural. At some point everybody at this Commission can have a say at what that design will be. I am just trying to progress our community. We can sit on this money we take from our taxpayers' dollars and do nothing with it. I think it is a testament that I am not just in my District improving those areas but trying to better this County. I am trying to better the County as a whole.

Chairman Lee stated: Let me state again, we are not approving putting a mural on the wall. All we are approving is obtaining some designs that we may put on there.

County Administrator Horne polled the Commission. The vote was unanimous to approve to pay \$1500 to artist to obtain designs for a mural on the Annex building.

Commissioner Corbett stated: It was brought to my attention that we had made an appropriation to the Soccer Team in the City. The coach that brought that to us is no longer a coach. He had laid out a plan for us on how that money would be spent on projects. We agreed to fund that based on those projects. It has been told to me by a former Commissioner, Ben Baker, that the new coach does not plan to pursue those projects. I have asked Mr. Morrison to come and speak today to that project from Russell County Soccer program at the Russell County High School. I would like to make a motion when Tommy is finished to actually change that appropriation to go to the Russell County Soccer League.

Tommy Morrison stated: I was told Monday that maybe will may be receiving \$3500. That means a lot to our program. We are not a very big program being in the County. Thinking about what we could buy, it would be equipment for our players that we see other schools already have. At the County, we have to cut our own grass and line our own fields. We can definitely use this money to obtain and enhance equipment for the team.

Chairman Lee stated: The main question is if we change this appropriation since it was designated for soccer at the Jr. High, High School level will it be used for the soccer team? Tommy Morrison stated: Yes sir, it will take a burden off of the coaches and team.

Commissioner Corbett stated: Mr. Chair, at this time I would like to make a motion that we redirect the allocation to the Russell County Varsity Soccer team. Seconded by Commissioner Martin. County Administrator LeAnn Horne polled the Commission. The vote was unanimous.

County Administrator LeAnn Horne stated: The sheriff provided information in your packet requesting to send out Jail Food Bids. He is requesting we send them out March 13, 2020, and receive / open bids on April 2, 2020 at 3:00 P.M. EDT in the Commission Chamber. He's requesting Commission office send out the packets he has prepared.

Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. County Administrator LeAnn Horne polled the Commission. The vote was unanimous.

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney stated: I have for you today a memorandum of agreement between the State and Russell County for our federal aid fund exchange. Part of the gas tax we were will receive \$400,000 from the State every year (in lieu of \$533,000) of federal money. We have got to bid out projects and do all the plans in house to save money and do more work with that money. Before we can get that money, we have to deplete our current federal aid account. The State has agreed for any County that has under \$300,000 in their current federal aid account that we can do a 75/25 percent with that money. Currently we have \$276,060.46 in our Federal Aid account. With this agreement it would allowing us to get the \$207,045.35 for that 75/25 swap from our current federal aid. We would also get the \$400,000 in the next month or two months.

Chairman Lee stated: I am going to do this a little differently. Are their any questions before we make a motion. Normally, we make a motion first, but do we have any questions?

Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Martin. Commissioner Corbett stated that he did speak to the engineer already. He has projects identified that could use this money now. They are ready to go, and this is better use of his time and the County funds. County Administrator LeAnn Horne polled the Commission. The vote was unanimous.

County Attorney Kenneth Funderburk stated: It is not on the schedule, but it is a matter to be discussed since apparently this has occurred many times. I got a call from the news media yesterday stating that a certain Russell County Commissioner called them and had an extensive discussion about a matter which may have come before the County in Executive Session. It was represented according to the news media that the

Commissioners said information about this item in Executive Session and its said to be in the local paper. I need to remind the Commissioners and the people who attend Executive Sessions the rules for Executive Session is the matters that are discussed in Executive Sessions that it is against the Ethics laws and rules to discuss any of those with the news media, with your wife, your first cousin, your coworkers, or with anybody else period. Most of you have been on the Commission a long-long time and know better. If the Commission comes back into session and takes action, of course then whatever action the Commissioners take is public and conducted in public.

Where matters are brought to the Commission and no action is taken on those matters that are indication. This isn't the first time this commissioner has shared executive session information and I've informed them of the rules. It is unusual for the Commissioner to be named and go to the media in person as I understand it. I am just putting on notice to the news media where it is audible or think they can rely upon information that is being disclosed against the ethics rules is information that needs to be questioned at minimum. I would remind everybody there are rules and if they are broken serious consequences one more time. There are rules governing what I can suggest going into Executive Session in fact and topics. When you vote to go into Executive Session you know the rules and all of you voted to convenience into session. When none of those matters are discussed in the public; then, whatever the matter was cannot be discussed with the news media, cousin, wife, boyfriends, girlfriends, or others period. I think if you get that kind of information one should consider that as improper and probably cannot be relied upon or shouldn't be relied upon or that it is reflective upon the entire commission.

Commissioner Corbett stated: I just want to make a comment, that is the first I have heard of that and I am very disappointed. We can't name the Commissioner that is involved because I would like that to go on record. Has the paper been published? If that has happened or is happening; that is so improper, and it may be unethical. I would like to see if it is true and then I would like to pursue that because we all know that is wrong.

Secondly, I was approached as I was walking in by one of the members of Cable TV of East Alabama saying they have the capability of making our meetings go live. Something we may need to consider in a future meeting and vote on that. This is something for you to start considering now. I don't really have a problem with it. I think everybody should be in a position to be thinking about that. Live means as it is happening not being able to edit.

Announcements were made.

Vice Chair Martin motioned to adjourn the meeting.

Meeting adjourned.