

The Russell County Commission  
Emergency Called Meeting Minutes  
COVID-19 Pandemic  
March 17, 2020  
4:30 P.M. EDT

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

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

Chairman Lee stated: The first item is to cancel the March 25, 2020 Russell County Commission Meeting.

Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve. Seconded by Chairman Lee.

County Administrator LeAnn Horne polled the Commission. The vote was unanimous to cancel the March 25, 2020 Russell County Commission Meeting.

Chairman Lee stated: The next item came up after the first one because the news has been rapidly progressing, we may be the worst of this in three weeks. Instead of calling another meeting I need the Commission to authorize the Chair to cancel Russell County Commission Meetings if that is the recommendation of Emergency Management and the Sheriff.

Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Screws.

Commissioner Screws stated: You have a bullet down stating the Vice Chair too.

Chairman Lee stated: That was in the absence of the Chairman or cannot get in touch with the Chairman the Vice Chair will have the authority. That is common. The motion includes both the Chairman and the Vice Chair. If you can't get in touch with the Chairman or the Vice Chair, then you go to the next longest serving Commissioner which will be Commissioner Epps.

County Administrator LeAnn Horne polled the Commission. The vote was unanimous to give the Chairman, Vice Chair or longest serving Commissioner the authority to cancel the Russell County Commission Meetings.

Emergency Management Director Bob Franklin reviewed the Russell County COVID-19 Pandemic plan with the Commissioners to approve the Russell County COVID-19 plan.

The new coronavirus, COVID-19, is not a flu but a pneumonia-like infection. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) believes at this time that symptoms may appear in as few as two days or 14 days after exposure. The good news is that, except in rare situations, an employee diagnosed with the virus will have no significant long-term health care problems.

Russell County Commission  
COVID-19 Pandemic Plan  
March 2020

**A. PLAN OBJECTIVES.**

- County’s Primary Goal: Protect Employees and Public from COVID-19 in conjunction with maintaining Government operations providing public services to citizens.
  - ✓ Reduce the spread of disease among staff.
  - ✓ Protect people at higher risk for complications.
  - ✓ Maintain critical operations.
  - ✓ Minimize impact on your residents, customers and businesses.
  - ✓ Be proactive, rather than reactive, by taking small measures now to minimize risk.
  - ✓ **This plan will supersede all other County policies if the pandemic impacts Russell County. This plan is subject to change, as needed, when conditions change and as events unfold.**

**B. KEY BUSINESS FUNCTIONS**

- *If a government shutdown becomes necessary, essential employees are defined as those who will be required to work from home or in their offices/vehicles so that critical government services can still be provided. Non-essential departments relating to this pandemic emergency and its employees are defined as non-critical during this pandemic. Those departments will be notified by EMA if their category changes due to the changes and impact of the pandemic.*
- **The chart below shows the County’s essential departments and employee count should an outbreak occurs in our jurisdiction.**
  - Essential Front Line**
    - **Emergency Management - 3**
    - **Sanitation – 48**
  - Essential – Possible alternate Schedule**
    - **Commission Office – 5**
      - **Finance / Accts Payable – 2**
      - **Human Resources – 1**
      - **Payroll – 1**

- **Tag Office – 9**
- **Facilities Maintenance – 5**
- **Building Inspections – 3**

□ **Non-Essential for Pandemic but subject to recall**

- **Parks and Rec. – 4**
- **Engineering – 48**
- **Special Enforcement – 2**
- **Mapping and Appraisal – 10**
- **Economic Development - 1**

- Inventory equipment that remote workers will be utilizing.
- Essential employees who will be working remotely should prepare by developing a “ready bag” that they take home with them at the end of each day.
- All employees are subject to be called back to work during a government shutdown, depending on the need and circumstances.
- A payroll code will be established, if necessary, in addition to the current classifications for payroll purposes to track all hours worked due to the pandemic. Additionally, track any expenses associated with purchasing items relating to the pandemic. The Administrator will determine the accounting procedure that will best meet the standards of accounting and for all departments. Options may be reimbursement to your departmental budget monthly; or, create a special line item to post expenses as they occur. However, these shall be expenses related to the pandemic only.
- Impact on County services.
  - ✓ Department heads should be prepared to backfill positions if employees are absent.
  - ✓ Communicate and practice various scenarios with staff to ensure understanding.
  - ✓ Ensure lines of communication are available for all critical staff and departments.

**C. WORKPLACE EXPOSURE**

- Staff with increased risk include older employees, those with existing serious health conditions and those involved in waste management and public safety, such as Fire and Police. Public Safety employees should immediately consider changing clothing at the end of each shift (before going home) to minimize risk of exposure to family members.
  - ✓ No handshaking.
  - ✓ Minimize face-to-face contact.
  - ✓ Minimize meetings with large numbers of people.
  - ✓ Use email, phones and teleconferencing/webinars during a pandemic, rather than face-to-face contact.
  - ✓ Effectively handle materials and customers/patients that could be contaminated.
  - ✓ Wash hands often and practice other sanitary means to prevent spread of germs.

- ✓ If an employee is diagnosed/confirmed positive with the virus, the workplace should be shut down and disinfected before allowing other employees to return.

#### D. WORKPLACE POLICIES

- County Administrator will coordinate cases/events with Commissioners and staff.
  - ✓ **Presumed or Confirmed Cases** of corona virus in an employee or immediate family member.  
The following policy will apply: If a medical official determines that an employee is presumed or confirmed to have the virus, then the County will pay the employee for a minimum of two weeks, not to exceed three weeks, based on medical professional directives and doctors report / excuse.
  - ✓ **Exposure Event** – Quarantine of employee by medical staff – County will pay employee a minimum of 2 weeks at their current hourly rate.
  - ✓ **Government Shut-down** – County will pay employees their current hourly rate as associated with other County Commission approved closures.
  - ✓ **On the job Exposure** – County will cover the percentage of normal pay worker's comp doesn't cover, for two weeks, as determined on a (case-by-case basis) based on workers compensation or a medical doctors prognosis and recommendations with regards to their respective quarantine time and medical condition.
  - ✓ If an employee chooses to personally travel to a high-risk country and is quarantined upon return to the US, the County will not pay the employee during this timeframe.
  - ✓ The employee would have the ability to utilize earned leave (sick, vacation, etc.) they have accrued while quarantined. (See Russell County Personnel Policies and Procedures / Compensated Leave or Leave without Pay options.
  - ✓ The County reserves the right to place the employee in voluntary quarantine under these conditions and cannot return to work either until a medical doctor has confirmed employee is negative of the COVID-19 virus or employee does not develop symptoms.
  - ✓ The Commission Chair or in his/her absence the Vice Chair or in his/her absence the Senior Commissioner, will have the ability to make emergency decisions on the status of a department, county facility or service during a pandemic.

#### E. INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES – Immediate Implementation

- ✓ Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette, and hand hygiene at the entrance to your workplace and in high visibility locations.
  - Provide soap, water, and alcohol-based hand rubs in multiple locations and routinely refill.

- ✓ Employees should clean hands often by washing for at least 20 seconds using soap and water; or, using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water is not available.
- ✓ Supply tissues and no-touch waste bins in county departments and to employees.
- ✓ Ask employees to stay home when sick period.
- ✓ Employees should routinely clean commonly touched surfaces and sanitize all areas of their workspace multiple times a day. High traffic areas a minimum of every two to three hours. This is every employee's responsibility to maintain a safe and clean work area / space.

#### **F. ENCOURAGE SOCIAL DISTANCING – Immediate implementation**

- Social distancing is an intervention to increase the physical distance between people and reduce the spread of disease.
  - ✓ Implement policies and procedures for critical employees to work remotely.
  - ✓ The County Administrator can allow telecommuting, if necessary, upon written request from the department head.
  - ✓ The County Administrator can permit flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts), if possible.
  - ✓ Ensure that we have the technology and infrastructure needed to support multiple employees working from home.
  - ✓ Establish one entrance system for the County Courthouse and Judicial Center. All other buildings that experiences high citizenry traffic should minimize access points to respective building; or direct the public to drop boxes or drive-thru where appropriate to minimize risk of exposure to staff and contamination of areas.
  - ✓ Place appropriate signage at all entrances and an information monitor at the designated entrance for customers, visitors, etc.
  - ✓ Place a locked drop-box at the designated entrance to the building, where documents and payments can be submitted safely, without the need to interact directly with staff.
  - ✓ Provide email and telephone number on all signage for assistance to customers utilizing the drop box or other methods of contacting your respective office.
  - ✓ County departments shall provide a (flyer) or brochure listing all social media addresses, office contact information, procedures for online payments and include a section for frequently asked questions to provide additional information.
  - ✓ Employee business travel and training shall be cancelled effective immediately to minimize risk. If there is a request for special consideration/exemption; contact the County Administrator for further instruction and approval.

## G. SEPARATE SICK EMPLOYEES - Immediate implementation

- ✓ Employees who report to work having a fever or flu-like symptoms upon arrival, or who become sick during the workday, should be separated from others and immediately sent home. Ensure that:
- ✓ All managers and employees are aware of County policies and the expectation that sick employees stay home.
- ✓ **Employees should utilize TELADOC™** Phone & Online Video Consultations Online or call their primary care provider, if they experience fever or flu-like symptoms immediately.
- ✓ Do **NOT** go directly to the hospital or urgent care **unless directed by TELADOC™** Phone & Online Video Consultations or their primary care provider.
- ✓ This will minimize the risk of exposure for all concerned parties.  
*If the employee has other health conditions or is otherwise considered high risk, that information must be disclosed immediately to TELADOC™ Phone & Online Video Consultations Online or their primary care provider during the call.*

## H. ANTICIPATE ABSENTEEISM

- Prepare for employee absences resulting from personal illness, caring for ill family members, and dismissal of early childhood programs and K-12 schools. Be ready to adapt your business practices to maintain critical operations.
  - ✓ Cross-train employees to carry out critical functions so the workplace can operate when essential staff are out.
  - ✓ Prepare to temporarily suspend non-essential operations, if necessary.
  - ✓ Be prepared to differentiate between critical and non-critical services if staff shortages occur due to illnesses or quarantines.
  - ✓ Utilize “what-if” scenarios with essential and non-essential staff to prepare.

## I. PERSONAL PREPAREDNESS - Immediate implementation

- Our government is only as healthy as our employees. Employees should immediately take standard steps to prepare for staying at home, if needed:
  - ✓ Store a two-week supply of water and food.
  - ✓ Make sure to have enough prescription drugs at home.
  - ✓ Keep non-prescription drugs and other health supplies on hand. This includes pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold aides, fluids with electrolytes, and vitamins.
  - ✓ Get copies of electronic health records from the doctor, hospital, or pharmacy.
  - ✓ Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would like to be

- cared for if they got sick, and what's needed to care for them at home.
- ✓ Try to minimize being in large groups, events and traveling by plane – any direct contact with others you can reasonably avoid will help.

J.

#### **COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL - Immediate implementation**

- ✓ Keep workforce informed about the outbreak.
- ✓ Provide positive, factual information which will help calm and encourage staff.
- ✓ Establish clear lines of communication between essential staff members and departments to ensure critical services can be provided.
- ✓ All communications regarding the pandemic shall be directed to the Emergency Management Director or in his/her absence the Deputy Director or other designee.

#### **K. PROCESS FOR ACTIVATING THE COUNTY'S PLAN - Immediate implementation**

- ✓ Employees must immediately notify, by phone or email only, their supervisor /employer if they have experienced an exposure or received a presumed or confirmed diagnosis of coronavirus. If an employee fails to report; the employee is in violation of the County's Personnel Policies and Procedures.
- ✓ Employees who have been medically diagnosed with the virus or who were quarantined must submit a physician's release to return to work. If you are instructed by a medical doctor to self-quarantine due to exposure, then the employee must be symptom free for fourteen days before returning to work.
- ✓ Follow the local health officials and centers for disease control recommendations as needed to manage the pandemic.

#### **L. WORKFORCE INVOLVEMENT - Immediate implementation**

- ✓ Ensure that every person and department deemed essential has reviewed the County's Planned Response plan and is ready to act immediately.
- ✓ Every department head or elected official must test the plan to help detect gaps or problems that need attention by utilizing "what if" scenarios prior to shut down or events.
- ✓ **Every** employee should be familiar with this plan and be prepared to act immediately if an employee illness or event occurs.
- ✓ **Every** employee should know and understand the role they will play if an event occurs.
- ✓ Employees who may be classified initially as non-essential for this emergency response could become essential in the event of major outbreaks and/or quarantine of essential employees. Be prepared!

**Elected Officials are encouraged to follow the County Commission's Emergency Pandemic Plan. However, if the elected official has developed their own pandemic plan; the County Commission requests that you provide a copy to the Administrator and Emergency Management Director immediately. It is our goal to provide a *unified front and work together* as a "team" for the safety of our employees and citizens**

Chairman Lee stated: The motion is for approving the Emergency Pandemic Plan that was set out by CDC and modified to fit Russell County. We are approving the notice to put at the parks and sports facilities that these places are not sanitized. That helps protect the County. If we have to have a total shut down; we are authorizing a meeting between the Sheriff, the Emergency Management and the Chairman to come up with that decision so we do not have to have another meeting to authorize it. Our Administrator will continue to assist with communicating to officials and media as usual.

Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve. Seconded by Chairman Lee.

County Administrator LeAnn Horne stated: To reiterate for the minutes. Included in the motion the Russell County Commission COVID-19 Pandemic Plan, the resolution regarding the facilities and the use of facilities, the CDC recommendations regarding groups and no gatherings. Also, the Resolution authorizing the Chairman under these emergency conditions, the authority to Act on behalf of the Commission. Also in consultation with the Sheriff and the Emergency Management Director, if in the event we should have to close County facilities; this would allow us to do so without calling a meeting of the commission. That is my understanding from your discussions.

County Administrator LeAnn Horne polled the Commission. The vote was unanimous.

Commissioner Corbett stated: The facilities we have in the County, the Seale Courthouse, the Senior Center and the Masonic Lodge. The reality is we have already booked rentals and one is a wedding. There are rentals at all three facilities. I think we need to have a conversation about how we proceed from here. We have looked at some of the Cities. The City of Phenix City has decided to proceed on with the ones they have already rented and let them have the event as of now.

Commissioner Lee stated: Let the renters make the decision whether to continue or not with their event.

Commissioner Corbett stated: I don't have a problem with that. Cleaning it in between is what concerns me. We do have a person that cleans in Crawford and one that cleans in Seale. I am not sure about the Senior Center. Is it our staff?

Commissioner Epps stated: Yes, it is both our staff and the person who rents the facility. The person that rents it must make sure it is clean before they leave or should.

Chairman Lee stated: I say put a date on it for the next six weeks, if the person who rents it wants to cancel on their own, we will refund their money. If someone has planned a wedding and spent \$8,000, we cannot give that money back. We do not have the funds.

Commissioner Corbett stated: I want to ask the attorney, what can we do to mitigate the County? Is that signage? We have them sign something or is it signage we put there the CDC recommends no more than 25 people gathering in one place. What can we do to mitigate the liability of the County? I am not asking to cancel them.

County Attorney Kenneth Funderburk stated: I think what you just covered is mostly everything known at this time. If the renter wants to take the responsibility. We will notify them and let them know we will refund their money and if they take on that responsibility that is really it for the Commission about as far as you can go.

Chairman Lee stated: We can post it, but posting is not much good, but it is there. We know who these people are, and we can get them to sign a waiver that they understand that this place may not be sanitized. We are going to clean it, but we are not guaranteeing it is. We are not liable for the people that they have there. Then, they would have to prove it was the facility that caused their infection.

County Attorney Kenneth Funderburk state: If you give them the CDC notice and they choose to go there; that is what you can do to inform them.

Commissioner Lee stated: Hopefully we can start a letter tomorrow stating if you want to cancel your event, we will refund your deposit.

Commissioner Corbett stated: The CDC warning states 25 people in a location. The notice should state we cannot guarantee that it will be sanitized to the point it needs to be. We encourage you to sanitize when you get there, sanitize when you leave. We can draft a letter for it. As long as the Commissioners in agreement we are not going to cancel these events we are going to let me proceed on.

Maintenance Director, Leon Watson stated: I was told by Mathew that the Senior Center closed as of today to the public.

Commissioner Epps stated: The Lee/Russell closed their activities at the Senior Center. The building itself can be used.

Commissioner Corbett stated: That is another issue. We must ask Carla and Administrator Horne, if we proceed with this this route what is going to happen if the Courthouse gets closed and people need to pick up keys.

Chairman Lee stated: In that case, if we have to close the Courthouse for anytime or more than 24 hours that closes every County facility.

Commissioner Corbett stated: But does it? Say if we close the Courthouse because the Judge has someone come into his office and we decide to close the Courthouse because of that. What does that have to do with the Engineering Department, Sanitation etc.

Commissioner Lee stated: If we close the Courthouse for say (4) weeks that closes everything except essential staff. That is not fair for these employees to go home and get paid and everybody else still has to wait.

Commissioner Corbett stated: Is garbage pickup essential.

Commissioner Lee stated: Essential "yes". Engineering is really non-essential unless there is a break in something. Parts of Engineering is essential but paving and scraping roads is not essential.

Sheriff Heath Taylor stated: I just left a meeting in Troy with the Colonel from VPS with 25 Sheriff's. They are going to try to be lenient with issuing tag violations being expired and driver's license being expired because State is about to shut down issuing license. That came from the ALEA Colonel. They are going to have a few places open but not all of them are going to be open. They are putting this out. There are rookie officers out there patrolling who may first not going to get the message about the tags and secondly their going to write these tickets no matter what we say. If we must shut tags down, driver's license I would hope everybody has common sense to give them a few weeks on that deal.

Commissioner Corbett stated: I know as a Commissioner we would waive fees for the tag office or whatever if we can I am sure.

County Administrator Horne stated: I want to report to the public and make everyone aware that Judge Bellamy, Circuit Court Judge issued an order that came from the Supreme Court. It indicates no in court proceedings until April 16. He also limited access to all Judicial Departments which is the District Criminal Dockets, Small Claims, Traffic Dockets, District Civil Dockets, Jury Trials Circuit Criminal Dockets, and Child Support Dockets. I talked to him today. He stated his court proceedings he plans to utilize Skype or Zoom something for teleconferencing. He is limiting any access with the public as far as his hearings. He is limiting of any type of interaction with the public as far as his hearings go. He is recommending everyone to try to use Skype or online

services. There are restricting access to any of the offices at the Judicial Center. I just wanted to make you aware of that.

Sherriff Heath Taylor stated: Where you told about the employees that have kids? We were told today that the State Superintendent is basically going to shut the schools down for the rest of the year. It is not official. It will throw a lot of parents in turmoil about what to do with their kids for the next three months and come to work. Did ya'll

cover that in this policy. The City School system and the County School system is talking about feeding kids at different locations.

County Attorney Kenneth Funderburk stated: Mr. Chairman, the Federal law may step in there on family leave, we need to monitor that.

Meeting was adjourned.

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
County Administrator Chair