

The Russell County Commission
Meeting Minutes
October 11th, 2017
9:30 A.M. EST

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

The invocation was given by Jean Keel, pastor of the Veteran's Outreach.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Corbett.

Public Comments:

Director of Safe Kids Columbus, Pamela Fair spoke about the organization which monitors accidents involving children. Most kids' injuries are from car crashes because parents are not using car seats appropriately or not at all. Law requires all children are to be appropriately restrained until 8 years of age. There are a lot injuries from falls from bikes, skates and scooters, where children's are not wearing helmets or proper safety equipment. The purpose of her organization is to help families who are unable to afford car seats and other safety equipment for their kids obtain the proper equipment and a course its install and proper use. Mrs. Fair requested funding so they can extend their services to Russell County resident, who need their service and qualify.

Stephen Robinson, President of the Phenix City/ Russell County of the NAACP, who announced a forum to be held October 16th at 6:00 p.m. at the Central Activity Center for Candidates running for the District 2 Council Seat. The election for this seat will be held November 14th.

Chair Martin welcomed elected officials, department heads and guest. She also thanked the Citizen of East Alabama and East Alabama Cable for their coverage of the Commission Meeting.

The Assistant Administrator called the Commission roll for attendance. Members present were: Chair Peggy Martin, Vice Chair Larry Screws, Commissioners Gentry Lee, Carl Currington, Ronnie Reed, Cattie Epps, and Chance Corbett. Also present were the County Attorney Kenneth Funderburk and Assistant Administrator Vicki Perry, who kept the minutes.

A quorum was established.

Due to Monday's Holiday the work session cancelled. The agenda items were deleted and an agenda approval is required. All Administrator items were deleted due to her absence. Also Meeting Minutes were tabled.

Commissioner Corbett requested taking the District 6 Planning Commission Appointment off until the next meeting and asked if Commissioner Epps would agree to take the Contract for Mik Cole off the agenda. There are some questions about the contract he would like to ask the Administrator. Commissioner Epps agreed to table.

EMA Director Bob Franklin requested to add the Safe Rooms approval.

Chief Alexander took off the Hurtsboro Deputy Contract.

Assistant Administrator Perry read the remaining agenda items.

Attorney Funderburk took the Attorney General Opinion and added Executive Session for Economic and a Personnel matter.

Assistant Administrator Perry re-read the agenda. Commissioner Lee motioned to approve the agenda with the changes. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. The vote was unanimous.

A proclamation for Domestic Violence Awareness Month was presented to Janie Potts. Commissioner Lee motioned to approve and was seconded by Commissioner Reed. The vote was unanimous.

Commissioner Currington requested for the County Engineer Shawn Blakeney discuss the procedure for work orders, which are as follows:

- Call the Office Monday thru Friday, leave your name, phone number and the work you are requesting to be done
- Use the Engineering e-mail address RCHD.US
- Russell County Highway Department Facebook page

Mr. Blakeney stated that some work orders may only take a few minutes to do and others can take up to 2 weeks for completion. Last year alone there were 13,052 work orders called in. There are only thirty-five employees in Engineering to take care of the work orders, which averages about 7 work orders a day.

Commissioner Reed discussed the importance of the Coroner's role in the county. He explained, if the Sheriff should become sick unable to run his office the Coroner would be the one to take over office, not the Chief Deputy.

Commissioner Reed feels the Coroner should have a full-time employee in his office and stated he has enough money in his budget for a Chief Deputy.

Chair Martin let Commissioner Reed know that this item was under discussion items, which means a vote, could not be taken at today's meeting. Commissioner Reed wanted to continue the discussion.

Commissioner Lee stated the Coroners' Budget was just discussed at the budget meeting a week ago and a full-time Deputy Coroner was not addressed.

Commissioner Reed stated, the Coroner requested that he bring it up now. If the Coroner should have to go out of town, he does not have anyone to take over in his absence. He has two part-time deputies and a part-time administrative assistant but said he would eliminate those, if he had a full-time Deputy.

Commissioner Corbett said he understood the Coroner to say he would not do that.

Commissioner Reed said the two part-time Deputies do not receive salaries, but since this is not listed as a business item, he will place it on the next meeting agenda under business. The Coroner has enough money in his budget to hire a full-time Deputy.

Chair Martin asked Coroner Sumbry, if he was willing to give up his two part-time deputies for one full-time deputy.

Coroner Sumbry stated, in the proposed 2017-2018 budget, this position was included. He wanted the County to be covered the way it has been covered with the part-time deputies with the exception of adding a full-time employee.

Commissioner Reed acknowledged; Coroner Sumbry had this in his budget and was only requesting approval to hire full-time employee, there is not a budget amendment.

Commissioner Lee did not understand, because the law only allows 2 deputies.

Coroner Sumbry stated: One law "bill 575" says there can be three, one chief and two deputies. He also informed the Commission he has had the same conversation years ago, as far as the Coroner's position being part-time or full-time.

Commissioner Reed asked if this item could be moved to business so it could be taken care of it today.

Chair Martin did not allow this since the agenda had already been approved.

More discussion took place until Commissioner Corbett stated that he would like for the County Attorney to review this, instead of the Commission blindly acting on something that is illegal or could cause the Commission trouble. He asked the Attorney to research this and bring back an opinion to the Commission whether or not the Coroner's job is full-time, can the Commission add a full-time deputy and how many deputies the Coroner can have.

Attorney Funderburk agreed to look into this matter. It doesn't matter if it is full-time or part-time. He was not sure that was a distinguishing factor, since the Commission controls the budget and positions.

Commissioner Reed acknowledged the Coroner has everything in his budget. All the Commission has to do is vote for it. There would not be any money added to his budget.

Commissioner Lee informed Commissioner Reed more than money is involved, a law that governs the Coroner's office. That is the question.

Commissioner Reed stated two (2) legislations existed, but entitles the Coroner to have a Deputy Coroner.

Commissioner Epps requested to table this item and bring it back to the next meeting. This will give opportunity to review the law, instead of continuing the discussion, which is going nowhere.

Coroner Sumbry asked if the Commission has the right as far as doing anything by resolution as it relates by law to his office.

Commissioner Corbett acknowledged that is what the Commission wants to know. Before, they take action; he wants to know from the Attorney if they have the ability to do that.

Attorney Funderburk announced the Coroner is an employee of the State, not an employee of the County Commission. The issue being discussed is being called full-time to get benefits from the County. The Coroner is not a county employee.

Commissioner Lee replied, the latest law passed only allows the County Commission to address the authority to set the Coroner's salary, nothing else. The Commission cannot say you are full-time or part-time according to the law. We can set the Coroner's salary by resolution.

Commissioner Corbett recalled the law sets the Coroner's salary at \$15,000 and two (2) deputy salaries at \$3,000 and that was all. That is why he wants to know more; before any action is taken by the Commission that they are not allowed to take.

Attorney Funderburk agreed to check the law, but could say that the Coroner is a State employee. This person is not an employee of the county; they would work for the Coroner.

Commissioner Epps did read a portion of the law which stated that the Coroner could appoint three part-time coroners to be designated as a Chief Deputy and two (2) Deputies to assist the Coroner. The Chief should receive a monthly expense of up to \$800 to set by the Coroner, payable out of the Russell County expense account. The two (2) Deputy Assistance Coroners should receive a monthly expense allowance up to \$500 to be set by the Coroner, payable out of the Russell County Coroner's expense account. She read Section 5 which stated, all laws or parts of laws, which shall conflict with this act are repealed. The date of this law is 2001.

Commissioner Lee stated; if you go by that law, then the salary is set for \$800 for a Deputy and \$500 for the Assistant Deputy per month. This is an old law; there is a newer one. This should be researched more before a decision was made.

This law set a salary of only \$800 for a Chief Deputy. I do not think this was what the Coroner is requesting.

Coroner Sumbry also wanted to know if his position as Coroner was considered a Department Head or Elected Official.

Commissioner Lee acknowledged that he is an Elected Official who ran for this office. Department heads are hired and fired by the Commission. The Coroner is elected by the people.

Commissioner Reed requested that the Courthouse parking lot be repaired and resurfaced. County Engineer acknowledged they have estimated the cost of the parking lot repair. There is an issue with water which will have to be corrected.

Commissioner Corbett stated Safe Kids Director Pam Fair has already spoken to the Commission about her request for funding, so her program could be expanded to Russell County residents. He motioned to approve her request of \$750 for the program. Seconded by Commissioner Currington. The vote was unanimous.

Chair Martin stated the security and the safety of employees and citizens should be taken more seriously. She feels the back entrance of the Courthouse is cause for concern due to its quick access to the back stair well, Probate Office and Veteran's Offices. Chair Martin believes it should be locked used only by employees who work inside this building. She asked Chief Alexander to discuss this with the Sheriff and come back to the Commission with recommendations.

Commissioner Epps motioned to appoint Carla Thomas to fill her board appointment on the Wiregrass R C & D. Seconded by Commissioner Corbett. The vote was unanimous.

Commissioner Corbett discussed a restroom project being constructed at the Crawford Park. Due to the amount of construction, Auditors require a construction contract. Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve the contract. Seconded by Commissioner Lee. The vote was unanimous.

EMA Director, Bob Franklin, gave an update on the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. Since the last Commission Meeting documentation had been received by his office for the Fort Mitchel and Seale Community Shelters and for individual shelters.

Individual shelters are funded by citizens who applied, being reimbursed for 75% of the cost by the State. The State will send the reimbursed amounts to the County to be distributed to those individuals. Receiving reimbursements could take up to 90 days.

The Community Shelters are 75 % federally reimbursed; the County will provide 25% which will in-kind. Mr. Franklin requested approval for the Chair Martin sign the documentation for the individual and community shelters. Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Epps. The vote was unanimous.

Mr. Franklin also presented the State Local Disaster Assistance Agreement, which is application for reimbursements for Hurricane Erma clean-up. This will pay up to 75% of the cost from the Federal Government and 12 ½% from the State for overtime and equipment. Commission Epps motioned to approve and was seconded by Commissioner Corbett. The vote was unanimous.

Mr. Franklin reminded the Commission of the Homeland Security Grant award for installation of security cameras in the Courthouse. The first bid was rejected due to the high amount. A rebid was held for fewer cameras with a higher resolution and newer technology. The bid opening was held Friday, October 6th. Part of the bid requirement was for the companies to submit their State business license. The low bidder did not include a copy of his business license, but the company did have an expired license as did all of the companies who submitted had expired licenses. All business license expired as of September 30th.

Mr. Franklin requested that the Commission accept the low bidder "Elevated Security" with the condition that he renews his business license before moving forward with the project.

Commissioner Lee asked if the bid amount submitted is within the grant amount.

Mr. Franklin acknowledged this is well below the grant amount and as specialization to the bid was the ability to add additional cameras to bring the amount up to \$18,000 grant award.

Commissioner Lee informed citizens that all business licenses expire September 30th, but the whole month of October is the grace period in which to purchase the license.

Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve the low bid as recommended by Mr. Franklin. Seconded by Commissioner Currington. The vote was unanimous.

County Attorney Funderburk recommended moving into executive session to discuss his agenda item. Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve the executive session. Seconded by Commissioner Currington. The vote was unanimous.

Announcements were made before convening to executive session.

The Commission returned to the Commission Chamber. Chair Martin requested a motion to reconvene the meeting. Commissioner Lee motioned to reconvene and was seconded by Commissioner Reed. The vote was unanimous.

Attorney Funderburk recommended approving expenditures up to \$115,000 for industrial / economic development project in the Ladonia Community and to let it be known the County is interested in making sure we have development in that area. The Water Authority will oversee the project. Commissioner Lee motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Currington. The vote was unanimous.

Vice Chair Screw motioned to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned.