

The Russell County Commission
Russell County Commission Chambers
Meeting Minutes October 14, 2020
9:30 A.M. EDT

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

Chairman Lee welcomed everyone for their attendance.

The invocation was given by Commissioner Martin.

Commissioner Chance Corbett led the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Mr. Henry C. McGruder, Jr., licensed car dealer in Russell County with a wholesale rebuilders permit stated: During a time of pandemic and so many uncertainties the State decided they are no longer going to give wholesale license or rebuilders license. Everything has to be retail. We have submitted all of our paperwork, insurance, and bond just like we have in the past as any other retail dealer. My home is behind the Drop Zone in Ft. Mitchell and not classified as retail or commercial. We are asking for your help. We received a letter to provide documentation from your local zoning official. Chairman Lee stated: There is no zoning in Russell County that the Commission is over. Enforcement Officer Bill Friend stated: I will take care of it.

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. Also, present was the County Attorney Kenneth Funderburk. Commissioner Carl Currington was absent. A quorum was established.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Commissioner Corbett stated: I would like to make a motion to approve the Agenda and I would also like to add something under Discussion. The title would be BLOOM and Rachella Smith will be here to speak.

County Administrator LeAnn Horne stated: I would like to add under Discussion Section Employee Sick Bank. Currently at the Engineering Department an Engineering employee is having a critical family health issue. Commissioner Martin seconded. County Administrator Horne polled the Commission. The vote was unanimous.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chairman Lee stated: We have 3 different sets of minutes to approve. What is the pleasure of the Commissioners? Commissioner Corbett stated: At this time because the budget is included 23rd minutes. I make a motion we table August 26th and September 23rd minutes. Chairman Lee stated: The motion is to approve the September 9th, 2020 minutes which are mainly the Budget Review minutes. Commissioner Martin seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Chairman Lee stated: Commissioner Corbett suggested to table August 26th and September 23rd minutes. Commissioner Corbett motioned to table. Seconded by Commissioner Epps. County Administrator Horne polled the Commission. District 1 Lee, yes; District 3 Martin, no; District 4 Reed, no; District 5 Epps, yes; District 6 Corbett, yes; District 7, Screws, yes. There were 4 yes votes and 2 no votes. The motion carries to table the August 26th and September 23rd meeting minutes.

PROCLAMATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS:

Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve a Posthumous Proclamation in honor of Mr. Roy Greene. I am asking the Sheriff and the County Administrator to help get the Proclamation drafted. I would like to motion the Proclamation for Mr. Greene be presented at a later date. Commissioner Martin seconded. The vote was unanimous.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Commissioner Corbett stated: I was approached by a citizen Ms. Rachella Smith about a program that she is leading that gives and takes care of people that are in need. She mentioned she wanted to do a fundraiser in the Courthouse parking lot. Ms. Smith stated: I am the leader of a ministry called BLOOM. We are a group of women who goes from community to community empowering other women spiritually, mentally, and physically. It is important because there is so much suicide, depression, and addiction. Our project is to collect new hats, scarfs, gloves, and personal necessities and basic essentials to keep people warm. This will take place December 5, 2020 at 10:00 a.m. in the parking lot of the Russell County Courthouse. Chairman Lee stated: This is under discussion, but I would like a motion to authorize BLOOM to use the Courthouse parking lot. Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Martin. There were no objections. Therefore, motion carried to allow BLOOM to use the parking area for that day.

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney stated: For years if we had employees out of sick leave, new employees or current employees that have been sick a lot other employees want to donate sick time we were allowed to do per Department Head. We have had some issues in the last couple of years and the County Administrator said that it has been stopped. We have a current employee that works in the Sanitation Department that is a single father with a child that is in the hospital in Birmingham. He has been out of work for two weeks. I have had numerous employees ask me if they could donate some of their sick time? We currently do not have an official policy for sick leave bank. Can we get some guidance in these situations; or do we tell employees they cannot

donate sick time? This individual employee was with the County for several years. He left and came back, and he is still inside his six-month probation due to his return. He is an outstanding employee.

Chairman Lee stated: In 1994, I thought we put a policy in the manual for sick leave bank. County Administrator stated: Prior to today, it was left up to the respective Department Head. If the Department Head agrees the employee agrees, we required them sign an agreement or memo of understanding. A challenge was raised. There wasn't an official policy. I would like to put together a committee with several Department Heads to review several benefits and bring back a proposal.

Chairman Lee stated: Right now, we need to deal with this particular situation.

Commissioner Screws stated: When I was in the School District, it was up to seven days an employee could donate. The understanding was you have to pay that employee back. There was a board that would determine if an employee could receive sick days from the bank.

Commissioner Corbett stated: We do have to have some things in place. There has to be some criteria for the employee sick bank. There would need a board for the sick leave bank. It requires a lot of work and a lot of work quickly. I would be willing, if it were legal, for us to help this employee today until we get to the basis. County Engineer Shawn Blakeney stated: In the past we have had individuals donate some sick leave to another employee without having a sick leave bank. Chairman Lee stated: I think that is something we can do today.

County Administrator Horne stated: What appears to have passed the examiners in the past, is with the employees signing an authorization along with the Department Heads permission.

Chairman Lee stated: Why did we stop doing that. County Administrator Horne stated: There was an employee who raised a concern and went to Commissioner. I received word there was not a policy and I had no authority. The Department Heads before handled it within their Respective Department.

Chairman Lee stated: If that was working why can't we do that now. County Administrator Horne stated: At this point, it has been at the Department Head or Elected Officials discretion. It has to be an emergency and both employees have to agree.

Commissioner Corbett stated: Is it legal for me to make a motion for the Department Heads to determine that? County Attorney Funderburk stated: Yes. Commissioner Corbett made a motion that we allow the Department Heads on an interim basis, until we have a formal policy passed, that the Department Heads create an internal sick leave bank to donate sick leave to another employee and it has to be an emergency or serious illness. Commissioner Martin seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Sheriff Heath Taylor stated: As you are aware, we asked for the bid for the Ambulance to get out. The Committee has received those bids. There were only two bids submitted to the County. One was by Haynes Ambulance out of Montgomery. One was EMS Care Ambulance. Haynes did not ask for any subsidy from the County other than the two stations we provide. EMS Care asked for reimbursement of payroll cost to their employees. Even though they did not provide the exact payroll cost the Committee did their best to look at what that would potentially be from research that would be in excess of \$300,000 expense to the County. The Committee requested the County Commission to approve and accept the bid from Haynes Ambulance to provide the ambulance service for Russell County for the next bid period, which is twenty-four months and two, one-year extensions. Commissioner Corbett made a motion the ambulance bid be awarded to Haynes Ambulance per the Sheriffs recommendation. Seconded by Commissioner Martin. Sheriff Taylor stated: Haynes Ambulance bought CARE Ambulance that was handling the current contract. They told us they are leaving every person who wants to stay on with them employed. According to the new owner, we will not miss anything from the services we have been given. They will continue to have CARE Ambulance on the ambulances for at least a year according to them. They are going to leave it exactly like it is. County Administrator Horne polled the Commission. The vote was unanimous.

Sheriff Heath Taylor stated: I am assuming the Chairman and County Administrator Horne will sign the contract once the contract is brought back to make sure everything is correct. Commissioner Corbett stated: Are we approving the contract or just awarding the bid? County Administrator Horne stated: I think we should bring it back to the next meeting. Sheriff Taylor stated: I would suggest we bring back the signed contract for approval of the Commission but you are awarding the bid and giving the Chairman and the Administrator the ability to negotiate anything in the contract. Chairman Lee stated: I will not sign anything until the Commission approves it.

County Administrator Leann Horne stated: As you brought up at the last meeting the discussion appointing an Assistant County Administrator. At this time, I recommend to the Commission you move forward with that idea. I think appointing our bookkeeper Tina Thomas. We have talked at length.

She comes with 30 years' experience, education in the accounting field and an impressive resume and credentials. She is a quick learner and a quick study. With that being said, with the appointment, she would have the statutory authority to handle the financial matters for the Commission; talk with banks on County finances and help with budget matters. I think you need that backup under the law as it is today.

Commissioner Lee stated: This person will have the responsibility of the Administrator except hiring and firing employees. In that case the Commission would have to grant that authority.

Commissioner Corbett made a motion to appoint Tina Thomas as the Assistant County Administrator. Commissioner Martin seconded and stated I have a question for the Administrator.

What about the compensation? I have not discussed that with her. Chairman Lee stated: That can be determined at a later time.

Commissioner Epps stated: I have a concern about this. My concern is an appointment. If the County says they are going to hire them they do not appoint them. I did ask that question at the last meeting and you stated we do not have to advertise for the job. I checked that out. All jobs when your hiring someone it is proper to put the job out for someone else to apply for it. Chairman Lee stated: We are not hiring anyone this is assigning duties to a current employee.

Commissioner Epps stated: How did the person we are talking about get the position.

Chairman Lee stated: The same way the others got it. Commissioner Epps stated: It went through the Commission. Paulette was offered the position and did not want it and Vicky sent in a resume for the position. Commissioner Lee stated: Vicky was already hired as a bookkeeper and after several months the Commission made the decision to appoint her to Assistant Administrator. County Administrator Horne polled the Commission. District 1 Lee, yes; District 3 Martin, yes; District 4 Reed, no; District 5 Epps, no; District 6 Corbett, yes; District 7 Screws, no. Chairman Lee stated: The motion did not pass due to a tie vote.

County Administrator Leann Horne stated: As you know we are facing a lot of changing time and challenging times with benefits. Both in benefits whether it is health insurance and retirement. I would appreciate if the Commission would consider appointing a temporary committee to work together to review our health insurance options, sick bank included and possibly looking outside the local government for family insurance. That has always been an issue. The Commission does not set the premium rates. I would suggest the top 5 largest departments. I think we need to have representatives from the departments that work with or knowledgeable about the benefits.

Chairman Lee stated: This committee needs to have a Commissioner on it and since Commissioner Screws is in charge with dealing with the personnel policy, I suggest that he be a member of the committee. I would suggest no more than 4 others and probably Department Heads. County Administrator Horne stated: I suggest the 4 largest departments. Chairman Lee stated: I suggest the Administrator come back with recommendations at the next meeting.

County Administrator stated: For the record, we have not had a meeting to approve the minutes. I feel we are finally legal. We have a consultant formatting them for our accounting program software. Normal accounting should begin next week.

Commissioner Lee stated: The law states if the budget is not approved you go by last year's budget, so we are still the guidelines.

County Attorney Funderburk stated: I have provided a copy of an amended contract for Pine Hollow for another ten years if that is what the Commission decides. The new extension starts in February and it goes for ten years like the one that is in place now. That will be February 2031. The contract is the same as the County is under now. County Administrator stated: I have not experienced any problems with the previous contract. Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. The vote was unanimous.

Chairman Lee stated: We need a motion to allow the Chair to sign the contract. Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. The vote was unanimous.

Announcements were made.

Commissioner Martin motioned to adjourn.

The meeting was adjourned.