

The Russell County Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
December 14, 2016  
9:30 A.M. EST

An adjourned meeting of the Russell County Commission was called to order, by Chair Peggy Martin.

The invocation was given by Brady Baird of the Summerville United Methodist Church.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Lee.

Public Comments were made by:

Representative Chris Blackshear discussed the Fort Mitchell Historic Park and its importance to the community. He presented the Historic Commission a check in the amount of \$20,000 for the use of the Historic Park.

Planning Commission Chair David Ellis announced he talked with Bill Friend who had planned to retire from the Planning Commission Board. Mr. Friend has agreed to continue to serve the board and ask the Commission to reconsider accepting his resignation.

Chair Martin thanked the Cable T.V. of East Alabama and the Citizen of East Alabama for their coverage of the Commission meeting. She also welcomed elected officials, department heads, media and guests.

The Commission role was called. Members present were: Gentry Lee, Carl Currington, Peggy Martin, Ronnie Reed, Cattie Epps, Chance Corbett and Larry Screws. Also present was the County Attorney Kenneth Funderburk and County Administrator LeAnn Horne, who kept the minutes.

Chair Martin requested a motion to approve the November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016 meeting minutes. Commissioner Screws motioned to approve the minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. Six Commissioners voted to approve the minutes. Commissioner Corbett abstained because he thought there was confusion over one of the votes. Six (6) votes yes and one (1) abstention, the meeting minutes were approved.

Commissioner Corbett motioned to add to the agenda to give the Chair the authority to appoint 3 commissioners to meet with Representative Blackshear concerning future legislation. Seconded by Commissioner Screws. The vote was unanimous.

Chair Martin asked if the Commission wished to take care of this item now. It was agreed to do so. Commissioner Corbett motioned to allow the Chair to appoint 3 Commissioners to meet with Representative Blackshear. He would like to direct those appointments to be Commissioner Lee due to his experience on the Commission and

previous experience with the Legislation and actions in this County over the years, Commissioner Carl Currington due to Ladonia being his district and where the majority of the issues rose in the past with the City have come from, such as revenue sharing and police jurisdiction, etc. He also wanted to include himself because he is on the ACCA Legislative Committee. Seconded by Commissioner Lee. District 1, Lee voted; yes, District 2, Currington voted; yes, District 3, Martin voted; yes, District 4, Reed, voted; no, District 5, Epps voted; yes, District 6, Corbett voted; yes, District 7 voted; yes. Six (6) yes votes and one (1) no vote, the motion was approved.

Chair Martin moved to the next item: the Department of Human Resources Board Appointment. She stated that she learned that Jack Sanders, whose appointment is coming to term, would like to remain on the Board. Commissioner Corbett motioned to reappoint Mr. Sanders. Seconded by Commissioner Lee. The vote was unanimous.

Probate Judge Alford Harden Jr. presented the \$5.00 Recording Fee Resolution. This fee helps with the upgrade of computers in the Probate and has benefited several things for the County outside of his office. This is not an additional fee, but as written must be renewed every 2 years. He would also like the Commission consider legislation that would change the renewal of this fee to be every 5 years instead of every 2 years. Commissioner Epps motioned to accept Judge Harden's recommendation. Seconded by Commissioner Reed.

Judge Harden requested the Commission to quickly request the legislation so it would be at this year's Legislative session. Commissioner Lee asked to remember his suggestion of making the fee permanent instead of every 5 years; also with a super majority of the Commission to have it removed.

Sheriff Heath Taylor gave the results of the Sheriff Department's Vehicle Bid for two (2) 2010 Crown Victorias. Only one bid was received from Brannen Motor Company for \$18,000 each. Sheriff Taylor requested that the Commission grant him the ability to accept the bid and allow him to negotiate the price with Brannen Motor. Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve Sheriff Taylor's recommendation. Seconded by Commissioner Lee. The vote was unanimous.

Lee/Russell Council of Governments requested a \$4,500 increase in the approved appropriation given at the 2016/2017 budget meetings. Commissioner Lee motioned to approve the increase for food cost and was seconded by Commissioner Screws. The vote was unanimous.

District 7's Personnel Review Board Appointment is to expire this month. Commissioner Screws spoke to the current appointment of Jerome Battle who stated he would like to continue serving. Therefore, Commissioner Screws reappointed Mr. Battle for an additional 3 years.

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney discussed being approached by ADEM concerning a scrape tire dump located on Uchee Hill Highway, between Wild Oak and Lato Road. An

estimate of the cost of removal of the tires was submitted and approved by ADEM. They have approved to pay up to \$15,304 for removal of the tires. Mr. Blakeney requested approval from the Commission to clean the site. Commissioner Screws motioned to approve; seconded by Commissioner Epps. The vote was unanimous.

Mr. Blakeney also requested approval for the Annual Materials Bid to be held January 12<sup>th</sup> at 2:30 p.m. and to bring the results back at the following Commission Meeting January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Commissioner Screws motioned to approve the bid. Seconded by Commissioner Epps. The vote was unanimous.

Commissioner Corbett submitted a letter of agreement to ALDOT, stating the Russell County Commission agrees to pay the electric bill for the new lighting that will be installed by Alabama Department of Transportation at the intersections of 431 South and Highway 169 South as well as 431 South and County Road 26. He motioned to have the Chair to sign the letter to send to ALDOT. Seconded by Commissioner Screws. The vote was unanimous.

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney requested to close Firetower Road from Old Seale Highway to County Road 18 up to Howard Road to Firetower Road back to Hwy 165 closing the route to truck traffic. Signs will be posted to give the public several weeks' notice before closing the road. He will also contact Mead and place an advertisement in the paper concerning the road closure. This is a dangerous road for speeding trucks and was not designed for truck traffic. The alternative route is County Road 4 which is not far out of the way. Commissioner Screws motioned to approve the road closure. Seconded by Commissioner Lee. The vote was unanimous. Commissioner Corbett asked Mr. Blakeney to make sure that the Sheriff and other law enforcement know about the closing.

County Administrator LeAnn Horne presented a resolution approving the County's participation in 2017 Severe Weather Preparedness Tax Holiday begins Friday, February 24, at 12:01 a.m. and ends Sunday, February 26th, 2017 at midnight. Commissioner Screws motioned to approve and was seconded by Commissioner Epps. The vote was unanimous.

Administrator Horne requested approval of the 2017 County Holiday Schedule as presented at Monday night's work session. The schedule reflects the State's approved holiday schedule with the exception of Mardi Gras, which the Commission usually approves as a floating holiday to be used during the year at their discretion. Commissioner Screws motioned to approve the 2017 Holiday Schedule. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. The vote was unanimous.

Administrator Horne presented the 31 county bank depositories that by law the Commission must review and approve yearly. Commissioner Screws motioned to approve and was seconded by Commissioner Reed, The vote was unanimous.

The Sanitation Director position was discussed by Administrator Horne. This position became open due to the November election of Carl Currington, former director, to the Commission's District 2 position. Several options were presented at Monday night's work session for consideration on moving forward with this position. Commissioner Screws made a motion to hire within the Sanitation Department for this position. Seconded by Commissioner Reed.

Commissioner Corbett: Can you amend your motion to say who would replace Mr. Currington?

Commissioner Screws: I think it needs to be stated whether we are going to hire within or outside first. Then proceed.

Commissioner Corbett: As it was said at Monday night's work session I'm not sure that is how it should be done. I have been on this Commission 4 years and each time it is done differently. We owe it to ourselves, to the public and employees of this county to do it the same way and to do it the right way. Each time an open position is brought to the Commission it is discussed this is the way it was done in the past or we don't do it this way or we should give our employees first shot or we should go within. There has to be some policies and procedures that are followed. How do we expect our county employees to abide by our policies and procedure manual when the Commission changes every time the county has a position available? It seems that if some of the Commission doesn't like the qualified employee who is already doing the job, then lets hire from outside. We have to give our employees the incentive to move up. If our position as a Commission is going to be anytime we have an open position we do an internal search first and then if it's not successful then we do an external. Or, we automatically do an external or we promote within.

The Commission has to stick to some rules. I've been here 4 years and this has come up several times and each time we get to the table it's different. We sat here Monday night and discussed if we had an employee in a department that was qualified, then they should get the job. The last position filled; we had an employee who was qualified and he didn't get the job. How do we do that? I want to be fair. I think in this situation we have a very qualified and very good employee who can take the reins of this department and run it and that will be my vote. I will vote for this position today, but I do think it is my duty as an elected official to tell you here if we don't have rules how do we expect our employees to have rules. The Commission has to put something in place. I think that has to be an initiative in 2017 that we sit down and write this up and approve it and stick to it.

Commissioner Lee: My problem here is not the motion, it's but part of the motion. I think the policy is within the county, but this is limited to within the department. Therefore, we are cutting out any other department employees that may be as or more qualified. I don't have anyone in mind. So, I don't know how to vote on this today.

Commissioner Screws: First you have to establish if you are going to have a search or a policy you are going to hire within or hire within a specific department and that is all that I'm doing. You can vote up or down either way. If you go along with my motion you will hire within the sanitation department.

Attorney Funderburk: You have a legal problem there.

Commissioner Lee: That is what I think, also. I think it should be county and not department.

Commissioner Screws: If we have a legal problem then I change my motion to hire with in the county.

Commissioner Lee: I can do that.

Administrator Horne polled the Commission. The vote was unanimous.

Commissioner Lee: Now, what we should do is open it up, send a notice to all county departments that this position is available and turn your application into the Administrator.

Commissioner Screws: I motion to hire Wanda Hardie for the position.

Commissioner Reed: I second.

Commissioner Corbett: I stated a few minutes ago, I do support this person, I think she has been very responsive and very responsible since she has been in the interim role. I do agree with Commissioner Lee that for the sake of our other employees except if we do it internal we just took a motion and a vote that we are going to hire from within the county and then the next motion is we go right to a person. Then why didn't we go straight to the person. Why are we confusing the matter? If I were sitting in the audience why did we do the last thing that we did? It makes no sense. I want to vote for Wanda, because I think she is the right person for the job. But, again I call this Commission to action and lets get this right. Let's stop doing this. It's not fair to our employees to work as hard as they can and be completely bypassed. This time you are taking applications, this time you are not taking applications, this time you are appointing them from the floor.

Commissioner Reed: Call for the vote. There is too much discussion.

Commissioner Lee: Discussion is needed. It is not going to affect the vote. I wish Commissioner Screws had just made the motion to hire Wanda. I know 4 votes can do anything.

Commissioner Corbett: I would like to ask the Attorney if we are doing this properly.

Attorney Funderburk: Yes. The Commission does not have an established routine. It's when you try to limit it too much. This way it's open and you know who you want to hire. There is no law against hiring them, unless you change the rules as a matter of policy.

The Administrator polled the Commission. The vote was unanimous.

Commissioner Screws motioned that the Administrator and Mrs. Hardie work out a pay schedule and bring it back to the Commission for review. Seconded by Commissioner Epps. The vote was unanimous.

Attorney Funderburk recommended going into executive session to discuss 4 matters. He thought the Commission may need to reconvene to take action concerning on one of the items discussed during the executive session.

Commissioner Corbett motioned to move into executive session. Seconded by Commissioner Currington. The vote was unanimous.

Announcements were made.

There was no action taken after the executive session. Chair Martin adjourned the meeting.