

Russell County Commission  
 Russell County Commission Chambers  
 Meeting Minutes February 10, 2021  
 9:30 A.M. EST

The Russell County Commission was called to order by Chairman Corbett.

The invocation was given by Reverend Brady Baird of Seale United Methodist Church.

Commissioner Reed provided the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Ms. Cassandra Smith about County Road 14 in Hurtsboro Alabama request to get road paved to keep from water standing in ditches on Mayflower Drive. Commissioner Screws stated that he has had the superintendent look at the road several times because they have received several calls on it. It is his understanding that it is a private road. Commission Screws stated that the road leading into it, Mayflower Drive, we do service. Ms. Smith then stated she is talking about Mayflower Drive. Commissioner Screws stated Mayflower Drive was not reported to him so he will send someone to look at Mayflower Drive. Shawn Blakeney, the County Engineer, stated he now has the information, and he will have someone to go out and look at it.

Mr. Leroy Davis gave a friendly reminder about the meeting next Thursday at 11:00 am EST with Mr. Boswell from Montgomery and Mr. Ronnie Davis, Executive of Wiregrass and he sits on State Executive Committee for Bike Trails, will be able to help locate extra grant money. Chairman Corbett verified the date is Thursday, February 18, 2021 for the meeting.

Chairman Corbett thanked media partners Cable TV East Alabama, TV Beam and Citizen of East Alabama for broadcasting this meeting. He also mentioned the meetings are on Facebook Live for the people at home to see the Commission meetings and see the business in the county government. Chairman Corbett welcomed elected officials, department heads, and citizens including guests.

Chairman Corbett stated the agenda had been approved at the work session.

Assistant County Administrator Tina Thomas called roll of the Commission. Members present were Chairman Chance Corbett; Vice Chairman Gentry Lee; Commissioner Ronnie Reed; Commissioner Rod Costello; Commissioner Scott Chambers; Commissioner Larry Screws; and Commissioner Cattie Epps. Also, present was the Interim County Attorney Hope Hicks and Assistant County Administrator Tina Thomas, who kept minutes.

A quorum was established by Assistant County Administrator Tina Thomas.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Chairman Corbett presented to approve the January 27, 2021 Commission meeting minutes. Motion to approve by Commissioner Costello. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. The Commission approved the minutes unanimously.

**PROCLAMATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS:**

Chairman Corbett presented 2 resolutions to be signed by the Commission to be adopted both for the MPO Resurfacing Project for County Road 24 (Lato Road) from CR-137 and the second one is the Tarver Road section CR-24 between CR-39 and Lato Road. Motion to approve the 2 resolutions by Commissioner Screws. Seconded by Commissioner Epps. The Commission unanimously approved the resolutions for the 2 MPO Resurfacing Projects.

Chairman Corbett presented Bob Franklin, EMA Director, for updates on COVID-19 Vaccination Program in Russell County. Mr. Franklin gave the 14-day numbers from the last commission meeting. We were at 542 over a 14-day period and the trend was staying steadily high. Currently, as of yesterday, we are at 249 so we dropped 293 cases over a 14-day period, which we are going in the right direction. We still have a long way to go and we want to still ask people to wear their mask, social distance, and wash their hands. We are heading the right direction in positive cases and hopefully the high trend was because of the holidays and we are moving on from that. We currently have vaccinations available at the Russell County Health Department, Jack Hughston Memorial Hospital, Regional Rehab Hospital, Jackson Point of Light Family Medicine, and the Preferred Medical Group in Fort Mitchell. These are all by appointment only and the appointments are based on the availability of the vaccine at those locations. Mr. Franklin stated that the State has worked out an agreement with Walmart and he is waiting for the confirmation with-in the next day or two that our Walmart here will be one of them. Also, there are some other places to come online soon but currently the biggest holdup is even though we have added more places to get a vaccine, the number of vaccines we receive in the county has not really changed but it will change some with Walmart, since Walmart will be a direct Federal vaccination, and they will get their vaccinations straight from the Federal Government, so it will not come out of the Alabama allocation and that will help us increase the number of people we can vaccinate. Mr. Franklin stated that the current level that the state health has set for who is eligible for the vaccine is anyone who is 65 and over. Also, frontline critical workers listed as: first responders, corrections officers, food and agriculture workers, Postal Service workers, manufacturing workers, grocery store workers, public transit workers, people that work in the education staff (teachers, support staff, community college and higher education), childcare workers, and Judiciary. That is the current list of people in the State of Alabama and that is a little over 1 million people. We are not getting that many vaccines a week so it will take time to get through this group. Hopefully, the Johnson and Johnson vaccine will be approved soon, and when it does, it will increase the number of doses. Good thing about the Johnson and Johnson vaccine is that it is a single dose vaccine where the Moderna and Pfizer vaccine take 2 doses to get you where you need to be. In the county, the number of new vaccinations will be down some because we have the first round of people that received their first round of vaccine and are now to receive their second round. They are having to go back through the process, but there is enough increase so we are vaccinating new people as well, and there will not be as many in the next couple of weeks so then we will get back to doing many more. We have worked with one doctor's office that has worked with both school systems to work them in separately, and to get the education systems running smooth, and to get the kids back into a normal school year before this is over.

Commissioner Screws stated that he was trying to contact Warren Wix about getting the vaccine in Hurtsboro for the elderly people and has tried to contact him several times and he has not called him back. Mr. Franklin said he does not know Mr. Wix but he is working with the Public Health Department and since we have the community development block grant now for Russell County for \$500,000, part of that the community that is working on how to spend that money is willing to purchase a trailer in and Hurtsboro and Pittsview for people in those remote locations that cannot make it into Phenix City or do not come in often. It will take a couple of weeks to get it done, but they are working on something to vaccinate those people too. Mr. Screws stated that Hurtsboro has a clinic that is big enough to handle the vaccinations and Ms. Baker, who is over the clinic, says she is willing to do it but they only have two people so they will need to have someone to administer the vaccinations. Mr. Franklin said he probably can get volunteers to help, and will work on it, and asked if they have a freezer with storage capacity down at the clinic. Mr. Screws did not know but he said it seems we could purchase a refrigerator and there is only 700 to 800 people down in their area and he will talk to Mr. Franklin more after the meeting. No further discussion.

#### **COMMISSIONERS DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

Chairman Corbett presented information about the Sanitation Board Meeting Report. One of the several good reports was from the County Engineer, which is the Interim Director of Sanitation, gave a report of purchasing some equipment and trying to get it on a rotation basis to keep good, quality equipment so we are not constantly having to pay heavy maintenance

costs on. The Sanitation Board also voted unanimously to maintain the County Engineer to be their Interim Sanitation Director during this time with the projects coming up. Mr. Blakeney had also reported that prior to today's commission meeting, an air tank exploded at the Sanitation shop this morning. It caused damage to the building, but no one was injured. Mr. Blakeney talked more about the damage and has pictures. Mr. Blakeney stated that they have contacted the insurance company and have a claim in to have it repaired within the next 24 to 48 hours.

### **BUSINESS ITEMS:**

Chairman Corbett presented Bob Franklin, EMA Director, with information about the standby generator for the Russell County Health Department. Mr. Franklin stated that with the \$500,000 community government block grant money received, they appointed a committee to include Mr. Franklin, the Chairman, and the Sheriff along with the City has some personnel included. The committee came to a unanimous decision on how to spend the money, to include adding a standby generator for the Health Department for reliable cold storage for the vaccines. He also verified that a permanent generator would be covered while a temporary one would not be. Mr. Franklin asked the Commission to allow them to bid out a standby generator, and if something changes, he will update the Commission. He would like to open the bids for Thursday, February 25, 2021 in the Commission Chambers at 3:00 pm. Chairman Corbett discussed that the Commission has the bid specs in their packets and entertained the motion to approve to send out the bids. Commissioner Costello moved and Commissioner Epps seconded. Commissioner Lee asked if the generator was one for the entire building, to carry the ac too, and would they need one that large? Mr. Franklin agreed that it would, and it would need a 125 kW and they have had a survey done on it. Commissioner Lee mentioned that if one to run lights, computers, and refrigeration equipment would not take near that much. Mr. Franklin said they might have to rewire the building for that. Chairman Corbett stated a big issue that came up if they were trying to pull off a clinic in the middle of the summer, without the HVAC, it would be a problem. Commissioner Lee agreed. The Commission approved unanimously for the bidding for a standby generator for the Russell County Health Department.

Chairman Corbett presented Bob Franklin, the EMA Director, with his information about the 30-degree freezer and the Ultra-low freezer. Mr. Franklin asked to have both of the freezers on the same bid. He stated that the 30-degree freezer is for the Moderna vaccine and maybe we can squeeze in and use the same bid price for the Hurtsboro clinic. Mr. Franklin does want to bid both of the freezers (30-degree freezer and Ultra-low freezer) because they do not have the freezer capacity in Russell County to store either the Moderna and Pfizer vaccine. The Pfizer requires an ultra-low freezer, and both of the freezers are relatively expensive and together they will exceed the bid law and so he would like to bid them out with the same opening date of the generator Thursday, February 25, 2021 at 3:00 pm and then he will present the findings to the Commission at the next Commission meeting afterward. Chairman Corbett asked if there is a motion to send the bids. Commissioner Costello motioned it with amendment to add the Hurtsboro refrigerator to the bid. Mr. Franklin requested not to do it since it has to be approved through the committee and has to be unanimous, but he does not see an issue with it and once they bid it, he does not see a problem in purchasing it for Hurtsboro with the same bid. Commissioner Costello motioned to approve it, without the recommendation, to send bids. Seconded by Commissioner Chambers. Chairman Corbet added that if one is purchased for Hurtsboro that Mr. Franklin needs to look at the requirements needed before the purchase. The Commission approved unanimously the bidding for both a 30-degree freezer and the Ultra-low freezer.

Chairman Corbett presented Bob Franklin, the EMA Director, Homeland Security Grant Reimbursement to Fort Mitchell Volunteer Fire Department. Mr. Franklin stated that the Russell County Firefighters Association, in an effort to improve the communications for volunteer fire departments in the county, elected to apply for a Homeland Security Grant and run it through the Fort Mitchell Volunteer Fire Department to install a 150 ft self-supporting tower at their Station 3 on Knuckles Road near Blackbottom Road. The tower has been installed and paid for. The grant and all the paperwork, there are copies of the cancelled checks and invoices in your packets, have been sent to State Homeland Security

and we have received the funding back, and so at this time, Mr. Franklin is requesting the Commission reimburse the Fort Mitchell Volunteer Fire Department \$49,950.

Chairman Corbett confirmed that we do have the money. Motion to approve by Commissioner Epps. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. The Commission approved unanimously the Homeland Security Grant Reimbursement to Fort Mitchell Volunteer Fire Department.

Chairman Corbett presented to appoint Paulette Colbert as the Interim County Administrator until a permanent Administrator is named and voted on by the Commission.

Commissioner Lee motioned for approval. Commissioner Reed seconded the approval.

Commissioner Screws asked how long will this be? Chairman Corbett stated that no movement on how long and asked to amend the motion and include the 10% incentive on being the interim. Commissioner Lee stated he will include it on the motion until the vacancy is filled or until Ms. Colbert wants to retire. Commissioner Reed stated that since Ms. Colbert does not want a car and she will only get mileage, we need to give her a little more money, right? Chairman Corbett said we can bring it up later but at this point we need to get her in the position and approve this motion. If we have a different motion, we can bring that forward. The motion was approved by unanimous vote by the Commission.

Commissioner Lee stated that as long as you have the option to take either the county vehicle or paid mileage, he does not see need to increase in salary. Chairman Corbett said it was a good point and it should be covered in our personnel policies.

Chairman Corbett presented courthouse access procedures. He put this on the because when we swapped to a modified procedure for the courthouse opening when we went to the window in the 2020 year due to Covid. Some groups and department heads met and discussed this. Chairman Corbett said he attended a couple of the meetings and never knew what the rules were, and a couple of rules came up. One rule was about kids being in the courthouse and we have squashed those rules now. He would like to ask that the Commission allow the Chair, whoever that is, to be able to, while working with the department heads, make decisions for the status of the courthouse due to Covid (short of closing it -that is not in this motion). It is to change the rules on letting people in due to Covid and know we will strive to get a policy or procedure on that, that we can bring to the Commission. Chairman Corbett would like to entertain the motion to do that. Commissioner Costello made the motion and seconded by Commissioner Reed and it passed unanimously. Commissioner Lee asked if a Commissioner sees something they want to address, they will then call the Chair because the Chair will listen to the Commissioner's suggestions? Chairman Corbett agreed and mentioned that one of the biggest issues is that we have 2 official meetings a month, and obviously work sessions, and we have things that need to change on the fly. We do not do that, but we have done that in some cases but did not know if we had the rules to back what we were doing and now we do because we have meetings with the department heads when we have those issues and talk about it with the occupants, the EMA Director, the Sheriff, and all of the occupants and the other department heads in this building. We talk it through, and it is a consensus when the decision is made, but at some point, we need to be able to make it and not be able to call a special Commission meeting to do it. Commissioner Lee agreed and stated that if department heads see something please call the Chair. He discussed about the line of people wrapped outside waiting in line the other Monday and he wished someone inside would have called to let them know so they could modify that with the cold and rainy weather, but they were just following the rules. Chairman Corbett mentioned that Ms. Hope Hicks sent documentation from another county with a similar issue and he will look those over and hopefully bring something back to the Commission that we can have in our hand.

Biggest thing is that the Commissioners need to know what the rules are so we can share them when people ask, so the communication piece is something we are striving for.

Commissioner Lee said that hopefully this will not be much longer, maybe by the end of the summer we can open-up completely. He said we may always wear masks forever, like they do in Japan, but at least he hopes we can open-up. Commissioner Screws asked that they will be informed to what changes? Chairman Corbett agreed and wanted to verify his email address and he stated that the other Commissioners can tell he tries to communicate as much as he can with what is going on because he says it is important to know what is going on.

Chairman Corbett presented the Human Resources reporting structure. He stated that it has come to his attention, and has been talked about over the years, it is important that the Coordinator of Human Resources report directly to County Commission and not another department head, whether it be the Administrator or any other department head. It is important because the Administrator and any other position falls under Personnel Policy and must report their time and other things to the Human Resources person.

Commissioner Lee motioned. Commissioner Chambers seconded. Commissioner Lee verified that this is mainly to keep up with leave time and sick leave to make sure it is accurate.

Commissioner Epps stated that when they first set up the Human Resources Department, she thought the Human Resources person was to report to the Commission.

May not have been said in those words but she was under the impression that would happen so if that was not part of the minutes, she wants to make sure they are not doing double work. Commissioner Lee stated that in the past they could not find in the minutes of setting up a Human Resources Department, it was just a person. Chairman Corbett said it is a very important position and whether it was done in the past, it is clear now and he thinks moving forward we will know where that position reports to. Commissioner Lee also stated that this person will have the authority to write certain policies as far as how he or she receives information from department heads, and so forth, about leave time, vacation time, and all that stuff. If this person does not have a way to receive the information, then they still will not know what it is. Chairman Corbett then stated that obviously we cannot conflict with our Personnel Policy but obviously communicating with the department heads and others is going to be a key to the job. He is not proposing to change the job, he just proposes to change the reporting structure. Commissioner Lee agreed. The Commission unanimously approved the policy.

Chairman Corbett presented the County Personnel Policy revision and Commissioner Screws was pretty involved with the revision. Chairman Corbett requested that the Commission allow the Chair to reconvene that committee of department heads and Commissioner Screws obviously needs to be involved since he was involved with it before so we can get a new revision to the table for hopeful approval. We are well beyond where we need to be before from a 94 - 96 Personnel Policy and we need to get moving on that quickly. Commissioner Screws stated that policy they worked on was complete and that our past attorney there was a problem with it so when Commissioner Screws went to the meeting, the only thing he wanted to change was that the Personnel Board could not bring a lawyer to the hearing. There was nothing else wrong with the policy. Chairman Corbett then stated that the good thing is that the current state we are in with Ms. Hope Hicks is that is what she does for a living so she will be able to look at the revisions we have in place. He said since that was several years ago so there is a good chance there are things in there that will have to bring up to date now or change with current policies and current standards so when it is time to bring it back forward, he is willing as a Chair, to get it moving again and get it back before this Commission body for approval and obviously we can lean on our attorney for guidance. Commissioner Screws stated to send her a copy of the policy to let her read it and whatever changes she has we would make those changes. He stated the policy was done and Ms. Corbett can attest to it. He said we covered present and future things that came up, so again there was nothing wrong with the policy. The only thing the attorney wanted was that the Personnel Review Board could not bring a lawyer. Chairman Corbett then stated the only copy he saw, as a Commissioner, had a different county's name throughout it where it was copied and pasted and he does not have a problem with that, why reinvent the wheel, but all he is asking for is to bring the department heads back together first and get things going. He has no problem with the attorney seeing that copy of it, and maybe it has changed since then, but the one that was presented to him had a different county throughout the document and a university throughout it. He just wants to get it up to speed. Commissioner Screws stated that if we get them back together, it would be more feasible for her to make recommendations, so when we come back together, we will know what they are working on. Chairman Corbett agreed. Commissioner Lee then stated as long as Ms. Hicks is serving as our attorney and that is her expertise, he does not have a problem with her going over it but the main thing is that you have to be careful to protect the county because there are so many state laws to protect County Commissioners you can override them if you put the wrong policy in there. Chairman Corbett entertained the motion to pull back together the committee to work on the new personnel policy and will include sending the current draft to the attorney, Hope Hicks, and ask her to work on it and

report back to the Commission. Commissioner Lee motioned. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. Commissioner Reed then discussed of a couple of employee's files that are missing in the Personnel Office and he feels like we need some type of policy against that. With personnel files, they can get a copy but not take the whole file because that is exactly what we have going on now. Chairman Corbett stated that we can work with Mr. Herring in HR and get something in place for that to make sure we are being smart with that paperwork. The Commission unanimously approved the policy.

#### **COUNTY ENGINEER:**

Chairman Corbett presented County Engineer Shawn Blakeney with a budget transfer. Mr. Blakeney requested a budget transfer for the Sanitation Department and decrease line item 561, Construction Equipment by \$55,000 and increase line item 234, our Equipment Repairs and Maintenance by \$55,000. As he stated Monday night, this is due to a lot of the equipment and trucks getting older and having to do a lot more servicing on them. This will not increase the budget he is just moving money from one line item to another. Motion to approve by Commissioner Epps. Seconded by Commissioner Costello. Commissioner Lee discussed that budgeting is a guessing game and it is mighty early to start moving this kind of money, wanted to make this note for the record. Mr. Blakeney agreed, and stated this is for several major repairs they have had to include their Mac truck transfer station that was about a \$14,000 repair, and he has had 2 or 3 \$7,000 repairs for transmissions and things like that, unexpected. Commissioner Lee stated that we have not spend a lot on equipment for Sanitation and it will catch up with us one of these days. Chairman Corbett stated that he hopes with the plan Shawn has going forward, if we can get this done, once we get our audit reports in, we will be able to move forward on that. He said the Sanitation Board was very excited about it on Thursday.

#### **ADMINISTRATOR:**

Assistant County Administrator Tina Thomas said no there are no items to discuss and Interim County Administrator Paulette Colbert had none to discuss either.

#### **ATTORNEY:**

Interim County Attorney Hope Hicks requested to go into an Executive Session and made an oral declaration that the items to be discussed would be matters regarding pending litigation and controversies not yet being litigated, but in the likely be litigated or imminent likely to be litigated, if the Commission pursues the proposed course of action, I would make a declaration that this is an exception other than open meetings, laws, and misappropriations. Chairman Corbett stated that we just heard the request by the County Attorney to go into Executive Session due to pending litigation and will likely reconvene after the Executive Session and either take action or adjourn from that point so we will adjourn back from the table. Motioned by Commissioner Lee and seconded by Commissioner Reed to go into Executive Session. The Commission unanimously approved the Executive Session.

#### **COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION:**

Commissioner Epps stated that she has a recommendation for a young man that finished Central High School and has gone pro. He has also earned the 2021 Superbowl for this year and she thinks we should recognize him through a Proclamation through the County Commission, and she said she will have information for the next meeting to vote on.

The Commission adjourned for Executive Session.

The Commission reconvened from the Executive Session.

Chairman Corbett stated that he was told by County Engineer Shawn Blakeney they did not vote for the Sanitation Budget transfer earlier. We had a motion seconded buy did not vote

after the discussion. Assistant County Administrator Tina Thomas called the vote and it was unanimously approved by the Commission for the Sanitation Budge transfer.

Interim County Attorney Hope Hicks stated that she recommends to the Commission that there is a dispute between the Commission and LeAnn Horne regarding the employment contract that was between the Commission and Ms. Horne. In an effort to resolve this dispute and have Ms. Horne release any and all claims she has or may have regarding her employment. She recommended the Commission approved the settlement agreement with Ms. Horne up to \$150,000 and authorize the Chairman to sign the settlement agreement within the next 5 days. Commissioner Costello questioned is it with both parties in the next 5 days? Ms. Hicks agreed. Commissioner Costello motioned and seconded by Commissioner Screws. In discussion, Commissioner Lee wanted to make it real clear because he was not sure that Ms. Hicks microphone picked up on the tape that this is a recommendation from the County Attorney, is that correct? Ms. Hicks agreed, and Chairman Corbett agreed. Assistant County Administrator Tina Thomas called the vote, and unanimously approved and passed by the Commission.

Bob Franklin, the EMA Director, stated that he learned during the break that both Walmarts in Phenix City will be administering the vaccine and you do have to go online at Walmart.com to make appointments online. Commissioner Epps asked if they have the vaccine in? Mr. Franklin said that the State said none of them will have it until Friday and they are not accepting applications so he does not know if they will start accepting them when they have the vaccine in to allow it to go through or not. He says people should be checking that site regularly.

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Lee. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. The Commission meeting was adjourned.

Adjournment.

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
County Administrator

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chair