

Russell County Commission  
Russell County Commission Chambers  
Meeting Minutes April 28, 2021  
9:30 A.M. EST

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

The invocation was given by Paster Donald W. Abrams II.

Commissioner Reed led the Pledge of Allegiance.

No public comments were made.

Chairman Corbett thanked the Cable TV of East Alabama BEAM, and the Citizen of East Alabama for covering the meetings and for Facebook Live for those residents that are not able to be here. He welcomed our elected officials, department heads, visitors, and guests. He thanked everyone for coming out to see our local government in action.

Chairman Corbett stated this is a light agenda because they did not have a work session Monday night, due to it being a holiday.

Interim County Administrator Paulette Colbert called roll of the Commission. Member's present were Commissioner Rod Costello, Commissioner Cattie Epps, Commissioner Scott Chambers, Commissioner Larry Screws, Commissioner Ronnie Reed, Commissioner Gentry Lee, and Chairman Chance Corbett. Also, present was the Interim County Attorney Hope Hicks and Interim County Administrator Paulette Colbert, who kept minutes.

A quorum was established by Interim County Administrator Paulette Colbert.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Chairman Corbett presented to approve the April 24, 2021 Commission meeting minutes. Motion to approve by Commissioner Costello. Seconded by Commissioner Epps. All Commissioners were in favor by saying aye. None opposed. The Commission passed the motion to approve the minutes unanimously.

**PROCLAMATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS:**

Chairman Corbett presented a proclamation for Alex Burgess by Commissioner Epps. She asked for Alex Burgess to come to the front to present him the below proclamation on behalf of the Russell County Commission:

**Alexander "Alex" Burgess**

**Eagle Scout**

**WHEREAS**, the Russell County Commission along with his family, friends and community, wish to recognize Alex Burgess for his achievement of Eagle Scout with Boy Scouts of America Troop 27, Ft. Benning, Georgia, and

**WHEREAS**, Alex Burgess is the son of Jonathan and Brooke Burgess and has lived in Russell County, Alabama for the past seven years, moving here for his dad's final orders from the United States Marine Corps, and

**WHEREAS**, Alex attended St. Luke for middle school and will graduate from St. Anne Pacelli Catholic High School in May with a grade point average of 4.1, and has accepted admission to Auburn University in the fall of 2021 to study biology and astronomy/aerospace engineering, and would like to practice horticulture with NASA or SpaceX on the space station or other outposts, and

**WHEREAS**, Alex has excelled in many other areas including National Honor Society, National Society of High School Scholars, National French Honor Society, Cross Country Team, Viking of the Month and Hugh O'Brien Youth Foundation Ambassador,

**THEREFORE**, The Russell County Commission recognizes and honors Alexander "Alex" Burgess for the high achievement of Eagle Scout status on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2021.

#### **DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

Chairman Corbett presented EMA Director Bob Franklin with the FEMA Funeral Assistance Information. Mr. Franklin spoke about assisting families that had family members that passed away from Covid. They are now eligible to receive funeral expenses through FEMA and further eligible expenses which include transportation to identify the body, transfer of remains, burial plot, markers and head stones and anything having to do with the funeral. If they have an insurance policy or you received assistance from somewhere else, they will adjust the amount they will do up to that. They can go to [FEMA.gov/funeral-assistance/faq](https://www.fema.gov/funeral-assistance/faq) for information, and we will also have this posted on our Facebook page. Commissioner Lee asked Mr. Franklin if it seems that the supply of the vaccine has caught up with the demand in Russell County? Mr. Franklin agreed and said it has slowed down now. He stated that they did the 2<sup>nd</sup> dose clinic last Friday, but no one really showed up. They were expecting people to come in and get a first dose, but we didn't have that happen again. Commissioner Lee thinks the reason why is because many of the drug stores have it, so they can get it there. Mr. Franklin said that there is a lot more availability out there and a lot of people probably go over to Columbus or other places. He said that our percentages are still look lower at about 19% but he thinks we are much higher than that. Mr. Franklin stated that if anyone is having difficulty finding a vaccine, they can contact his office and they will get them in touch.

#### **BUSINESS ITEMS:**

Chairman Corbett presented Maintenance Director Leon Watson for the bid award for the Courthouse Window Project. Mr. Watson stated that the Commission open bids on 4/22 in the Commission Conference Room for the first phase one Window Repair that they received only one bid from a local glass company that has done work for us in the past and provides excellent service to the county. Maintenance work request awards the bid in the amount of \$30,866 to LTR Glass Company in Columbus Georgia and move forward with the first phase of the courthouse window repairs. Maintenance also request approval from the Commission to negotiate the bid being that we only received one bid for this project. Commissioner Lee moved the motion. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. Discussion included Commissioner Costello asking if this was a budgeted item. Mr. Watson agreed. Interim County Administrator Paulette Colbert called roll of the Commission. The Commission passed the motion unanimously.

#### **COUNTY ENGINEER:**

Chairman Corbett presented the County Engineer Shawn Blakeney to award the Bituminous Paving Bid. Mr. Blakeney stated that they opened the bids last Thursday here at the Commission Chamber and after receiving the bid, they had two bidders: Wayne Gentry Builders and East Alabama Paving turned in bids and he recommends that they split the bid between the two for the lowest bid prices. Chairman Corbett asked the Interim Attorney Hope Hicks if we are clear with splitting the bid. Interim Attorney Hope Hicks agreed. Commissioner Lee moved the motion. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. Interim County Administrator Paulette Colbert called roll of the Commission. The Commission passed the motion unanimously.

#### **ADMINISTRATOR:**

Chairman Corbett presented Interim County Administrator Paulette Colbert with the update on employee's taking home county vehicles. Ms. Colbert stated that she included both the county's take home vehicles and the policy concerning the take home vehicles and they are included in their folder packets for review. Chairman Corbett asked that the Commissioners look at the information so that they may be ready to discuss it at the next work session since they didn't have a work session here (due to holiday). Also, he said if they have any questions or feel if there is anything in it by error, they can reach out to Ms. Colbert.

#### **COUNTY ATTORNEY:**

Interim Attorney Hope Hicks wanted to let them know that she is working with the County Engineer to try to help with the sanitation solid waste collection. Chairman Corbett stated that he was called about a possible bill in the Legislature so she might want to look at that as well since it is dealing with sanitation, but he is not sure what it was about, but he thinks the ACCA might have been asking for positive support on it.

#### **COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION:**

Commissioner Epps stated that she wishes the Commissioners would get frames for when they do proclamation and resolutions and that we will have the sizes in stock and on hand so when it comes to presenting them, we will have a frame to put them in and they will not have to worry about it. Chairman Corbett said that he liked the idea, and he thinks they had the conversation on it after have the one on Sheriff Boswell's Proclamation. He would like to see us to standardize our proclamations with the seal and far as framing goes, that can get expensive when they give out a lot of proclamations. He said that they can talk about it at a later work session. He considered that the Commissioner that brings to proclamation forward would supply the frame for the proclamation since the framing can get expensive, so they will need to consider how they are going to pay for them. They will need to budget some money if we pay it as a Commission. Commissioner Epps stated that she thought about paying for it herself and also said that if we standard the size of proclamation, we can get standard size frames and we can have them on hand so if each Commissioner would donate x amount of dollars from their appropriation, then we would not have to have a budget for that. It is her suggestion because yesterday she drove around to find the right size, then called the office and to get the size, but when she came in this morning it was a different size. Chairman Corbett said he had the same issue and had to order some from Amazon since they don't have the 8 ½ x 14 in stores (he has a couple of extra ones).

Chairman Corbett mentioned that when we were closed Monday for the holiday, he had a meeting with a reporter up here to do a story on our gas tax money and the projects we were doing. He said the flow of cars in and out of this courthouse was amazing to the people getting out of their car walking up to the front door reading the little sign on the door saying that we were closed for a holiday. This being such an unknown holiday, or flew under the radar for the state of Alabama, people did not get the message so he would like for us to consider ways that we can get that message out better for future holidays and maybe even putting a larger sign at the door or that is very visible from the parking lot because there were some older folks and taking 2 minutes to get to the door just to see that the courthouse was actually closed. He said you can imagine some of the comments I got on it (they were not all pleasant). He would like to see if we can put our brains together, put out heads together and Ms. Colbert, in the office, and let's see if we can make that easier. Maybe it's how we advertise it, maybe how we get it in the paper, maybe take out an ad, or what we can do to get that message out a little bit better. He said that it is something that has happened forever, but he just happened to be right in the middle of it this time and actually saw it so he appreciates any thoughts that can be put into it would be great. He noted that this also happens when we take the Mardi Gras holiday, whenever we take that odd day off and people are coming up here trying to pay their taxes or whatever it is so we need to do whatever we can do to our due diligence in getting the word out to the people. He could see how frustrated people were and some people probably drove from Hurtsboro or other places in the county to get here, so if we could get the word to them better, it would be great.

Chairman Corbett talked that dealing with the IT issues we had this morning, and he can put it on a future agenda, he would like the county to consider 2 projects that we really need to think about. He knows Commissioner Lee is not always on board with that piece of that but as far as

the Commission goes, but the first one is our conference room upstairs, we need to get a little more IT capability so we can have web meetings, Zoom, or Teams meetings because that is the world we are in today. We need to be able to go into a space and the only space he knows of now is Emergency Management that we can go in and do something like that. We have the ability to do it with very little money and he has spoken to Paulette about it. He thinks it's a step we need to be making. The other one is, if we don't officially do it during our meetings, he thinks we at least need to do it during the work sessions and to have the capability to Zoom, or join as Commissioners, into a Teams meeting. He said that Commissioner Lee proved it could happen the other day when he was watching the Commission meeting on Facebook when he was out. Chairman Corbett said he would like to at least hear what is going on in the meeting and join in, if possible, if he is away on business, on vacation, or if he chooses to go into it. So many counties around this state and around this country have already done this and he would like for us to not be caught at the next pandemic, or the next issue where we can't come and meet and not be able to have meetings. He says it is something to consider and he will do a little research on his own end and bring it before the Commission in a future meeting. He just wanted to get everyone's thoughts and minds moving in that direction. Commissioner Lee stated his concern with the Zoom part of the meeting, he knows everyone is doing it and he hopes no problem happens 10 or 15 years from now and if somebody challenges something that was done in Zoom because the Constitution of Alabama says we meet in person and vote in person, not by electronic or anything. That has been his concern. He said if they want to amend the Constitution then that would be great. Chairman Corbett said that he thinks that would be something they'd need to talk about but he's sure there has been discussions on it already and there has been some rulings to allow us to do it, but as Commissioner Lee said, rulings don't always hold up and rulings can be changed as well.

Chairman Corbett stated that the Economic Development Advisory group that they have put together will be meeting for the first time this week and they have moved on it by telling them they were appointed by sending out letters, and they will be meeting the first time to start talking projects in the county.

Chairman Corbett asked the Commission to keep on their radar about the Federal Relief money that was pushed down and the numbers that were received, or say we will receive, we are still waiting on guidance from the Treasury on it. Our attorney, Hope Hicks, has been on the forefront of it, as well as the State, that can give us good guidance on it as we move forward. He said that we are getting calls from the ACCA about joining their group and conversations from other groups that can help us with guidance in making sure we are following our rules. He wants to make sure it is on their radar, and hoping they are keeping up with it because it is going to be something that we really could use for some of the projects that are they have been talking about these past 6 months, they are projects that they will be able to actually realize it with this money that may be or will be coming in.

Chairman Corbett mentioned that Commissioner Lee brought up about changing the times of the meetings. Chairman Corbett wants to make sure they have a good discussion about it so he thinks maybe we need to put on the work session next and talk about it because he has had a couple of people mention it with their opinions since the last meeting.

Chairman Corbett followed up about the microphones and they were working on Facebook because he received a couple of messages saying that they were working, and he will make sure he will follow up to make sure they are fixed here in the chambers.

Commissioner Epps brought up about changing the Commission meeting times and she asked Interim Attorney Hope Hicks if it has to be done at the time they are sworn in. Ms. Hicks did not know the answer and has never been asked that question, but she can get the information for the next work session to know if it's possible to do or not. Chairman Corbett thinks that as long as we advertise the change and advertise the meetings, that we could change the time. Ms. Hicks believes the same but will verify it. Commissioner Lee said that he knows when it was changed from 10 to 9:30 it was not at a swearing in time. It was like a year or 6 months after they were elected, and they had 5 new Commissioners elected at one time. Chairman Corbett said he remember when they had the work sessions Monday night and the Commission meeting Tuesday morning, but because they wanted more time to help the staff get information together, they changed it from Tuesday to Wednesday back in the early 2000's, when he started as EMA. They will check on it more.

Commissioner Costello brought up what was mentioned earlier about the monies that are supposed to be coming for the counties and asked if there is any criteria out yet so they can start looking at. Ms. Hicks said she has bits and pieces on it, and she will look more into it and have some information put together on it.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

- Crawford Walking Trail Yard Sale Saturday, May 1st from 8 am to 3 pm
- Crawford Market Days start back on May 15<sup>th</sup> & will be the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday monthly till November
- Tax Sale starts 10 am on May 4, 2021 outside the right side of the Courthouse

Motion moved to adjourn by Commissioner Lee. Seconded by Commissioner Reed.

The Commission meeting was adjourned.