

The Russell County Commission
Russell County Commission Chambers
Meeting Minutes June 22, 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 Larry Screws led the Pledge of Allegiance.

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:

Chairman Lee stated: Is there a motion to approve the Agenda? Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Martin. The vote passed with no opposition.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chairman Lee requested approval of the July 8, 2020 Commission Minutes. Commissioner Martin motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. The vote was unanimous.

PROCLAMATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS:

Chairman Lee stated: All Commissioners approved awarding a Posthumous proclamation in remembrance the late Sheriff Tommy Boswell. Commissioner Reed motioned to approve. The Proclamation will be presented at a later date. I would like to see the Proclamation before we present it. If it is alright with you, Commissioner Reed, we are going to vote to authorize the writing of the Proclamation and for it to be returned to the Commission by our next meeting to read and approve. The approved proclamation will be presented at a later date. Seconded by Commissioner Martin. The vote was unanimous.

BUSINESS ITEMS:

Assistant County Engineer Ray Martin stated: We have a bid from East Alabama Paving for the first round of the Rebuild Alabama. It is for the resurfacing of Brooks Road, Hill Street, Three Lakes and Hugley. We will be bidding more later on, but this was the first one. The bid came in at \$334,166. Commissioner Screws motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Epps. The bid was approved by unanimous vote of the Commissioners present.

Commissioner Corbett stated: We talked about the Mural at the last meeting and there were some comments about trying to include Ft. Benning. As you see, the attempt by this artist in this design was to bring that portion into the mural. We have a soldier parachuting and the Follow Me emblem. I would like to see what the Commissioners think about it. Commissioner Reed stated: Mr. Chair is there any way we can get our parks and recreation field in Seale on it. Chairman Lee stated: I think we can, we talked about that in our last meeting. This will not be the last one. If you put too much on it, it can become meaningless. Parks and recreation are so new I think this first one depicts the history of Russell County. We will probably do another one that would hope to have some of the changes we have done over the years. Commissioners Screws suggested moving the trees around or a different color. Chairman Lee stated: Once it is painted the colors will stand out more. Commissioner Martin motioned to approve. Commissioner Reed seconded. The mural was approved by unanimous vote of the Commissioners present.

Chairman Lee stated: We do not have to vote on the funding right now we have time. Commissioner Corbett stated: I would like to get the mural on the artist's calendar. The first time I talked with the artist he said this may be a \$21,000 to \$22,000. By the time he did the design he could do it for \$14,000. I would like the Administrator to insure with the auditors because the design piece was a professional service and we will stay within the bid process or the bid amount that we are legal. We talked in the last meeting there are several Commissioners that are willing to put some of their project money into this project. I think this would be great this would be a Commission project. I would like to hear from the Commissioner s how we share the amounts. Hopefully, you have got your amounts and you know what your amounts are. I am willing to put all of mine if I have to, but obviously all the Commissioners can help as much as they can in this project. Chairman Lee stated: I pledge all of mine less \$1,000. Commissioner Screws asked how much does he need to give? Chairman Lee stated: I don't remember exactly how much it is. Commissioners Screws stated: I would suggest we look at how much it is, and the end of the year is coming, and we can't roll it over. Commissioner Corbett stated: We know in the last meeting Commissioner Reed had already allocated all of his funds to another location. Any of the Commissioners at the table that are willing to support this project we just split it amongst these Commissioners and if one doesn't have enough, we will make it up in the other Commissioner's funds. I am fine with that. Commissioner Screws stated: In the last meeting it was four Commissioners. Commissioner Epps, are you going to put in? Commissioner Epps stated: I am finding out how much I have left in my fund. Commissioner Corbett made a motion that we approve this project as \$14,000 pending the assurance of the auditor's and that we split the cost as appropriate that is available with five Commissioners that

agreed to do the project. Chairman Lee stated: Commissioner Corbett made a motion to approve the design and the cost (\$14,000) will be split between the Commissioners that desire to share it and Commissioner Martin seconded it. The vote was approved unanimously of the Commissioners present.

County Administrator LeAnn Horne stated: We have been researching for the last couple of months a telephone system because we have been experiencing some problems. We have been researching and looking for some options initially at the Courthouse and secondary at the Judicial Center because they are about the same systems. The Courthouse telephone system is about 15 years old. It is outdated and they do not make parts for it anymore. Most systems are going to voice over internet type systems. We have obtained several estimates to replace the telephone system. What you have in your packet today is from BEAM. It is a proposal they have presented to us. We do have the funds budgeted. Today is just a report that we want to move forward in replacing the system because of the fact we struggled last time when we had a system failure to get a phone part. I certainly do not want a complete system failure where we don't have telephones at all. The new system will replace what is here. In this proposal you will see they offered to drop some new lines. They will not be attached to your computer as some of the options do. This will have its dedicated line. That is an enhancement for security reasons. We do not want someone to hack into our computer system and be able to download sensitive information. We were conscious of that during our discussions. There will be some changes in the infrastructure to make the system operate properly. We are already using BEAM's cable for the internet both at the Judicial and the Courthouse. Unless there are any objections, I would like to continue to work with them. It may not be this much. Chairman Lee asked what is the total amount? County Administrator Horne stated: It is right at \$10,000. This is just an estimate. Chairman Lee asked if we do this how will this affect our annual or monthly charges? County Administrator Horne stated: In the estimate it is less than \$300 difference than what we pay on a monthly basis. There is a one-time charge for infrastructure but will not continue monthly. We hope to reduce it because we have had employees leave or change and we may not need those telephones at those locations. The new telephones offer so many more features and capabilities. With the COVID-19 this system is really needed when people are working remotely from home. It offers a lot more accessibility for the employee and the employer as far as communications. I did want to mention with the new fiber and the drops they can start with the Courthouse first in the Commission Office then transition into the other offices. If we had a failure in our computer system, our telephones would not go down. Chairman Lee asked: Are you asking us to approve for you to continue or to approve this cost? County Administrator Horne stated: Unless you have an objection to replacing the system, I am trying to be proactive I don't want to be reactive in an emergency state trying to replace the telephone system in the Courthouse or the Judicial Building. I would like to move forward. I wanted you to be informed that we are working on this. It has been an issue and we are addressing it. If you think it requires an official approval at this point, we can. Chairman Lee addressed Probate Judge Harden and Tag Commissioner Paulette Colbert. They both agreed it is needed. Chairman Lee stated it is definitely needed so at this time I would like to entertain a

motion to proceed. Commissioner Reed motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Martin. The request was approved by unanimous vote of the Commissioners present.

County Administrator Horne stated: I am going to ask the Sheriff to let everybody know how we reached this point to bid out the ambulance contract.

Sheriff Heath Taylor stated: We have been fortunate to have CARE in our County for the last 10 or so years. We have done this contract at no cost to the County. They run inside of the City and make most their profits inside the City when they do transports. I have been told how this ambulance company makes money. For the most part they have taken a loss every year for the County side of it, not in the City. They have done that as a service because this is their home County and that's what they wanted to do to provide a service. We are at a point where they have approached the Committee and told us that is no longer going to be able to happen. Their home office is in Montgomery and their main office is outside the state somewhere up North. They are in the position where they are going to have to start charging for their service out in the County. We do provide things that are of financial value. Our ambulance buildings that we have bought. Our substations that we have built for them. They have absolutely acknowledged that and that will go a long way with whomever we contract with. We are going to go from not having to pay anything for an ambulance service to there is no telling how much, \$150,000 to potentially \$200,000 to have it. There is some concern there. I don't know if the County can afford that and we are going to have to bid it out and see what comes in and make some hard decisions. We have to have an ambulance service in the County we need one, our Citizens need one, but it is certainly fixing to become a problem. We are having issues right now. I do not know of any other companies in the County. They would have to come from outside or potentially Georgia to bid on it. We have put the bid together and we are wanting to send the bid out and get the bids in so we can see where we are with everything that is going on to include the space that we give them to see what that is going to come out to. Chairman Lee stated: You heard the request to have a motion to bid out the ambulance service. Commissioner Corbett motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Martin. The motion before us is to solicit bids for an ambulance service in the County. The request was approved by unanimous vote of the Commissioners present.

County Administrator stated: I have provided for you a financial report. I know you asked for quarterly; however, we have not completed the third quarter. At the time you asked it was in the middle of the quarter. What I have put together is the year-to-date figures as of June 30, 2020. There is a summary of the overall budget. I did a comparison for three years in June of each year. You can see 2018, 2019 and 2020. That shows you that we did have a surplus each year. The next one that I provided for you is an all funds report. That is every fund that every Commissioner oversees. It also is a three-year report showing what we have collected or received by June 30th every year. That was 2018, 2019 and 2020. As you can see in 2018 there was \$19,574,822.30. That is all funds. There was in an increase in the funds and revenue \$426,016.78 for 2018, 2019 is \$21,549,211.81. COVID-19 has affected some. The

next report is more of what you are probably looking for. I didn't get really direction of what you were looking for. What I did pull is our major revenue sources. This is your General Fund report as of June 30th, 2020. It shows the actual revenue we have collected which is \$13,282,011.56. In expenses we have expensed year to date as of June 30, 2020 is \$11,732,191.00. We are about \$1.5 under which is very good. We are in a good position with our expenses and I would like to thank the Department Heads for that. Chairman Lee asked on the revenue the three sources that you named they are basically showing under balance. County Administrator Horne stated: That is to be collected. I provided graphics for you to see the portion of revenue, your ad valorem taxes as well as your business licenses. The next report that you have is Gasoline Fund that also provides you a year to date revenue as of June 30, 2020. I do want to mention we do collect gas tax in arrears, so it has not posted yet. That does provide you with what he has collected in revenue which is \$1,090,553.42. His expenses are showing \$87,000.00 but the revenue for the month of June has not posted yet. His total budget was \$4,930,320.00. He is about halfway which he should be at this time of year. I also provided another snapshot of the revenue year to date not including the expenditures that he has. The next report is the Sanitation Fund. As you can see, they are averaging their surplus about \$200,000.00 a month. Currently they are on target with that. Their budget is \$2,778,764.00. Year-to-date they have collected \$2,195,041.00. Their expenses are \$1,979,606.00. They are under in their expenses as with all the other departments. They have \$764,000.00 to go to collect revenue. The interesting thing about that department its sole operational on what they collect. It is not taxes, it's not something we contribute or transfer funds to. It is totally run as an independent private business. The next report is your snapshot showing the revenue side currently what they have currently in their budget. All the departments in your budget book will show expenses versus budget. By then it will be July 31, 2020 what is remaining. At this point we have not exceeded our revenue projections. Chairman Lee stated: This is a good report and I think we need to have them three times a year. When we have it send it digitally to Bob Franklin to put it on the screen. Commissioner Screws asked how much does our raises cost us each year? County Administrator stated: That depends on the percentage but if you go 3 percent the average raise is about \$300,000.00. Commissioner Screws asked how much is reserve? County Administrator stated: About 11.5 or 11.6.

Commissioner Epps stated: I received this letter from Ms. Bailey who collects our taxes for Russell County. She did a comparison. Did all the Commissioners see this letter? Chairman Lee stated: I gave mine to the Commission Office. Commissioner Epps stated: She has sent a letter before about the contract not being signed and I think you said you were searching around to see if you could get a better place for collecting taxes. County Administrator Horne stated: It is just not price related. It is a matter of service. We didn't realize the loss in the jurisdiction we are experiencing until we had the court situation and we did research. We really need boots on the ground here to maintain and monitor the police jurisdiction because the changing on the annexations. That issue is for operations and to stabilize our budget that needs to be monitored appropriately. They can't offer that service. I am working with the State and another agency to do that to protect our revenue. Commissioner Lee stated: When we first

went with another company which this particular company has changed hands three or four times. They were very good at the beginning. I think we are missing a lot of revenue now. At the time, we were missing a lot of revenue dealing with the State but they had a big shake up in the State collection department. In fact, I got kind of ugly with some of the people over there about the service that we got from the State. We gave them specific examples of people they weren't collecting taxes from. County Administrator Horne stated: Since that time the State has reorganized. Chairman Lee stated: We do need to look at this at least every three or four years to make sure we are getting what we are supposed to be getting. We have the most complicated system in the State of Alabama probably in the world. If you go to Lowe's in Columbus and it is delivered and you live in Russell County and you have a Phenix City address or Opelika address, they are the ones who get credit for the sales tax, not Russell County. Someone has to really stay on top of it where these sales tax go. County Administrator Horne stated: It is not just the sales tax. It is the business license. I don't think they have ever collected late business license. Mr. Friend collects most of them.

County Administrator Horne stated: I did want to revisit the summary report. I wanted the Commission to realize, because I have heard a lot of things since 2018 we returned to the bottom line \$1.3 million, in 2019 we returned almost \$2 million. We are managing our funds very well. I want to give credit to the Department Heads because that is where it begins. Without them you would not see this return and that is so important.

County Administrator Horne stated: I did want to make a note that I will put on the next agenda, the Russell County Building access procedure. I would like for the Commissioners to review that draft. Please be familiar with it since there was a security threat recently. The Sheriff, myself and Mr. Franklin with Emergency Management and Homeland Security we have met, and this is a procedure we would like to put in writing and in place for Department Heads and Elected Officials. If you have any objections or changes you can talk to the Sheriff or I can pass those on. Chairman Lee stated: According to this draft, we do not need to take any action. The Sheriff is in charge. County Administrator Horne stated: I just wanted to make sure all the Department Heads had a copy. Commissioner Corbett asked who is going to take the comments the Sheriff or you. Not now, I was just writing mine down. County Administrator stated: me or the Sheriff. Commissioner Corbett stated: I will give them to the Sheriff.

Commissioner Corbett stated: The ACCA Watch Event, in lieu of the conference they have asked the Commissioners to get together in their Counties and participate in the opening session and the second session as well. This date is August 19, 2020. It starts at 10:45 a.m., CST. The good thing about it is our County Extension Agent, Jennifer Davidson has agreed, and they are doing this across the State, they are bringing in lunch for the Commissioners and the people that attend. As the ACCA put it, anybody that would attend the Annual Conference they would like to come, that includes the EMA Director, County Engineer, Sheriff, the 911 Director, County Administrator anybody that would go to the Conference. It is open to others as well. What we do need is a number for lunch. I talked to Jennifer yesterday, as long as she has the numbers, they will be absolutely thrilled to provide us lunch for that day. My suggestion

is to try to do it in the Commission Chambers. I think we have enough room and we will sit in the audience and project the meeting on the screen. Chairman Lee stated: I haven't seen anything changing. At one time they cancelled our Conference they were going to have an in-person meeting with one person from each County. Has that been cancelled? Commissioner Corbett stated: This is the replacement for that. They want to actually bring us together with social distancing and have it here. It is August 19, 2020, 11:45 E.T until 2:30 E.T. I just need to know who is going to be here so we can get the numbers.

Commissioner Corbett stated: I just want to give the Commission a heads up we have had some discussions in an e-mail but there is a proposal to put another statue up of Horace King, near the Dillingham Street bridge. He was a very iconic figure in our history, not only Phenix City and Russell County but also in the State Capital. I will definitely give updates.

Commissioner Martin stated: I want to thank County Administrator Horne for getting the financial report to us. We appreciate your work on this request.

Commissioner Reed motioned to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned.