

The Russell County Commission Meeting
Proposed Budget Meeting Minutes
September 12, 2018

Chair Martin moved that the Commission meeting be reconvened. Commissioner Reed Seconded. Administrator Horne polled the Commission. District 1(Lee) voted, yes; District 2 (Currington) voted, yes; District 3 (Martin) voted, yes; District 4 (Reed) voted, yes; District 5 (Epps) voted, yes; District 6 (Corbett) voted, yes; District 7 (Screws) voted, yes; The vote to reconvene was unanimously approved.

Chair Martin stated this portion will concern our budget for the upcoming year. We have some changes for the appropriations portion of the agenda is where we will begin.

County Administrator stated in the Commission packets is a copy of the changes that were discussed in Monday's budget meeting. However, a representative from the Crisis Center is present today and was not this past Monday. The representative is new and the Crisis Center also has a new location/address. We will check and make sure we have the new address updated in the Commission's system too.

Wendy Boyd stated she is the Interim Executive Director for the Crisis Center for Russell County. I became a part of the Crisis Center, as the Shelter Manager, on May 18, 2018, I was asked to step in as the Interim, Assistant Director. We are in process of an audit for the 2017 year. As soon as that is available, I will turn it in to the Commission. Commissioner Lee stated that someone had represented the Crisis Center on Monday but thank you for the letter today and explanation. The Russell County Crisis Center is on the list of appropriations he stated. We can move on since it is in the budget.

Commissioner Lee stated: Since we are on the appropriation's, we discussed about moving the Chamber dues into the Tourism funds. We have always paid the Chamber dues out of the appropriations line in the regular appropriations fund. I don't want to stretch the Tourism money out so thin that if something came up that we may not be able to do it. I am going to make a motion that we move the Chamber dues, which is \$5,000, back under appropriations and not under Tourism. The Chamber does a lot more than Tourism, supposedly. I wasn't too happy with the response that I got Monday from the Chamber Director. However, as a platinum member of the Chamber of Commerce, I expect them to represent us and promote us just like they would any other member at that level or better due to our long history funding the Tourism at the Chamber. Commissioner Corbett stated, we need to monitor it that's for sure. Commissioner Lee stated, he asked the Chamber Director when we develop the County's pamphlets and marketing materials, are you going to put them in the office of the Chamber and distribute them when visitors request information. He hesitated for a minute and had to think about it a minute. Then he finally answered: I guess we will, but it cost money to do that. The Commission question was to the Director, what does it

cost? He said it would cost additional personnel to put it at a table and pass them out upon request. Commissioner Lee stated, he hopes that it works out great with the Chamber of Commerce but "I didn't get a good feeling about it on Monday evening".

Commissioner Corbett said, to be fair I thought that is what he might have insinuated but when asked the personnel working with the Chamber would be the same personnel and the Director, they stated it was. Commissioner Corbett stated, he agreed he wasn't really happy that when he paused there a minute before he responded.

Commissioner Lee stated, my whole point in changing this back to the appropriation line is that I really don't want to deplete our Tourism money the first year we have it. I know we have committed to salaries for the department. We have committed some funding to historic places and salaries for personnel at Fort Mitchell. We have committed to the Archery Tournament and just that is going to draw the money down close to the bone. Hopefully, though some of these tournaments they are bringing into Phenix City will increase the lodging tax and we may get more than the \$140,000 to \$160,000 than we expect.

Commissioner Epps asked if Commissioner Lee was through. She stated, that she thinks everyone in here knows how she feels about the employees. I call the employees my **pet peeves** because the employees are the ones who really do the work for the County and put themselves in harm's way for this County and once a year we can't give them a 2 percent or 3 percent raise. I done some figuring on my own. I hope that it will at least give these employees at least a 2 percent or 3 percent increase in pay.

First, I looked at the Commissioner's budget request. The Commissioner's budget request for District 1, this Commissioner is asking for \$50,000 that is for the upgrade to the repairs of the restrooms at the Old Seale Courthouse. I began to ask myself, self if we are going to give the Commissioner \$50,000 who is going to do the project? It will be the county employees. So, we expect them to do this work. Commissioner Corbett asked could he stop Commissioner Epps right there, because that is not true. That money will be paid for a contractor in a bid process. Commissioner Lee stated, that over the years since he has been a Commissioner that may be the most money, he had asked for in all the years him being on the commission. The restrooms at the Old Seale Courthouse which is in the County in District 7. It is used just about every week. They need repairing badly and have been since the early 1970's since any work has been done on them. This is a onetime expenditure. Next year, it won't be spent again. In other words, it won't be added in the budget again. That's all you need to remember when you are talking about trying to pull money out of the for raises.

Commissioner Epps stated that she understood. She continued; District 2, asked for \$7,500 for one project, \$12,500 for another project, and \$10,000 for appropriation for the improvement of the equipment. I am not the smartest person in the world but when I added it all up it came to X amount of dollars. Who is going to do all of this? The

county employees. Commissioner Corbett stated you are just saying stuff that is just is not correct. The employees don't do a traffic studies on Highway 80 Commissioner Epps. I didn't say that but at Ladonia they are asking for \$12,500 for additional playground equipment it says. Commissioner Corbett stated, Commissioner Epps you asked for \$32,000 which is more. Commissioner Epps asked Commissioner Corbett to please not cut her off again. Commissioner Corbet stated, yes mam. I just like for you to state it right for the record. Commissioner Epps continued; District 3 didn't ask for anything just wanted to continue to do what is being done which is cleaning up her ditches. District 4, asked for appropriation of \$50,000. \$50,000, what are we going to do with it, purchase property, where is the property, in the City or in the County or what? District 5; I asked for \$10,000. That is all I ask for it is in the book. Commissioner Lee and Corbett stated; it says \$32,000 in my book total expenses.

Commissioner Epps stated it says \$32,000, but that does not come out that is not including donations, oh she just added that up in there. District 6; \$10,000 to install lights and electricity, there was \$25,000 matching fund that was raised by donations for construction of a large gazebo, \$25,000 not raised by the Crawford Park. But when I total it up, that is \$60,000 according to my math. District 7; asked for \$20,000 but in the bottom, there was some other stuff when I add it up it totals about \$63,000. It has been said, we as Commissioners have been elected to take care of the County as a whole. Out of whatever we ask for, whether it is playground equipment, whether it is a fence to go around or whatever, nine times out of ten who is going to do the work? It is the county employees. I would like to see the budget as level fund in order to at least try to give our employees an increase in pay. If each Commissioner could work themselves with \$10,000 for this year budget could Madam Administrator give us an estimate of how much we would be saving in Commissioner's Appropriations. If we, ourselves, could level fund our budget, then that would give the opportunity for the employees to get an increase in pay of 2 or 3 percent. If we could level fund the whole budget because I disagree with a lot of stuff that we are asking for this year. Other entities that comes in and ask for an appropriation we are helping them to run their organizations. Out of that believe it or not, their employees some of them are getting an increase in pay because of what we are giving them. I think we ought to look at this.

Commissioner Lee stated, some years back we talked about stop giving appropriations. I just feel there is a way we can work this out to give the employees an increase in pay. That is my feeling about the appropriations and I started with the Commissioners. Commissioner Lee stated, as was said Monday, it is not the problem of finding money for a raise for one year. The Sheriff can give up some of his budget, the Commissioners can give up some of their budget and so forth all the way down. But, do they realize they are going to have to give that up from now on, not just for that one year but for what comes up the next year, the next year and the next year. Once you put it in for salaries it is there forever and that increases benefits too. These projects you are talking about do a lot of good around the entire County. That is just a onetime expenditure for my request and it serves all citizens and tourist. Yes, we can cut them

out that's fine, but that money doesn't mean that it is available from then on for raises. The only thing you can base raises on is revenue increasing. You need a 5 percent increase in revenue to give a 2 percent raise and that is due to benefits. It doesn't sound right but is right because you have other expenses that you have no control over that increase every year with those salaries. Your supplies increase, your lights increase, your gas increases, your water increases. It takes a 5 percent projected revenue increase to give a 2 percent raise. What your talking about is not increasing revenue, you are talking about worthwhile projects that serve the entire community. Your analogy is not correct. Your speaking like if these projects are not done, then the County employees won't have any work to do. The County employees work for their salaries regardless of what it is they are required to do. You can't say the County employees are working on these projects, so therefore they need a raise for working on projects this year. Employees are also are going to be cutting grass, they are going to be paving roads, they are going to be arresting people. I agree they need a raise. But when you don't have the revenue, it's hard to give a raise. Administrator Horne and I have been talking about this for five years. This point is coming if we keep giving raises every year. It is going to get to the point we can't and it is going to be hard for our employees to accept it when we stop giving raises due to no new revenue. I wish we could give them a 10 percent raise because we have some of the best employees in the world. They work out in the hot, in the rain and in the cold. The facts are facts. When your revenue doesn't justify it, you just can't provide it. For one year we could go through the budget pull projects for the raises, but what would we do next year when the revenue isn't there again. That raise on top of that raise you get this year. You will need a 10% increase in revenue to overcome it. That's my spill. The Sheriff is the best politician in the County. I know he has been politician and working and he takes care of his employees and that is his job. But it is my job to protect and spend the money of the County wisely. They are two different jobs and they clash at times. There is nothing I can do about it. I wish we could raise revenue. We have tried for many years. I have been on this Commission for 24 years and we've tried to get a County-wide sales tax but the legislature would not pass it. We had it one-time and the government wouldn't sign it.

That is why I don't vote for anybody that has anything to do with Bob Riley to this day. The gross receipt taxes on the business licenses saved us until this point. It has saved our rear-ends that is how we have been able to give raises the last ten years. That has dried up now. We are still collecting it, but it is not growing. We have reached the plateau. The reason the people of Russell County elected us is to make tough, hard decision about matters such as this not a popularity contest. Our main function of County Commission is protecting the resources and the revenue of the County. That is all I have to say again.

Commissioner Corbett stated, I want to apologize to Ms. Epps for interrupting her but I want to follow-up on what she said because I thought I just saw some inaccuracies in her reporting. I don't want it to be portrayed that it is as she stated it was. When I am done, we can agree or disagree and that's fine. District 1; asked for \$50,000 for ADA upgrade requirements for the restrooms in Seale Courthouse. The Seale Courthouse is a County project, it's not just a District 1 project in fact it is not in District 1.

I appreciate Commissioner Lee asking for that and I think it's great that he did, but that is a County project that serves all the citizens. The fact is when we put the elevator in the Seale Courthouse it has increased the rentals and is rented just about every weekend now. We are still sending people to the bathrooms that are substandard. It is a total representation of this entire County, including this Commission, and all the residents too. It has gone way too long since any upgrades have been made. That is a need that should be done. I believe the cost of that will be way more than \$50,000 and that committee will have to match the remaining of that bid whatever that comes in at. I think that's a very worthwhile cause and again a onetime money. District 2; added up and it was only \$20,000. Of that, \$7,500 was a traffic study on Highway 80. This is not to done by our county employees. Engineering makes a contract with the State or professional engineering firm. The other \$12,500. This is additional playground equipment which I guess our employees might help for a day to install it but it's not like it's cost them a lot of extra work hours. District 3; did not ask for anything other than anything but continued work because your district is inside the City. District 4, Commissioner Reed can comment on that if he wants to. He was asking for a piece of property behind Coweta Apartments in Phenix City. That is an old playground and I have been on that property with the Sheriff, we had an issue down there a couple of times. I am not on the surface thinking it, but I am not going to argue with that one, that is his request. District 5, there was a \$10,000 printed but then there was writing on this where it is for a basketball court and playground and it totaled up to \$32,000 what we were presented. I don't know what was donated and what wasn't donated that is what was presented to us. Commissioner Corbett asked the Engineer Shaw Blakeney which is stated the donations was \$10,500. Commissioner Corbett repeated the appropriation is \$32,000 minus \$10,500. District 6, yes, I put in a request for \$10,000 to install lighting on the Walking Trail because I think it is a safety concern and it needs to be done. The great news is I have been told there is a grant that is going to be issued, I just have not got it in my hand and all we have to do is match that grant. So, it's going to be less that or it maybe even a third of that. I don't want to go into the budget here and not putting there to not get that safety project done and then find out half way through the year we can't get it done because we didn't budget it. I fully believe part of that money can come back. The other \$2500 was asking for a major project out there a really big community gazebo, but it was contingent upon that committee raising another \$2500 to match it. If they do not raise that money by June 1, 2019 that money goes away. No other projects on the table is actually saying they we will match what we are doing. Every project I do out there is doing that, trying to match it. Commissioner Screws he just put in what is going to be a nice walking trail down there. We can't just

let him put in a walking trail and not do anything around it. If you do vehicles are going to drive on it and do donuts on it. For what I can tell Mr. Screws made a pretty good request on that as well. I am really tore up the employees may not get a raise this year. I do know the revenue that the revenue has not increased it has actually decreased. I have conversations with Administrator Horne, I was bugging Administrator at 7:00 a.m. on the phone trying my best to find a way for these employees because I completely agree they need them. I don't think the Commission needs them, I think the employees need them. I think we need to get with our Legislators and change the law and we give across the board raises it does not affect the County Commissioners. I don't think it is fair, I think we are up here to do a job and we shouldn't be getting a raise every time we give them a raise. Commissioner Corbett also stated that Administrator Horne said the reality is, if we can find the money this year it would be great but if we can't find the money that the savings we will find by not funding it this year may enable us to give a larger raise next year. If we dropped every project, it will still will not fund a raise. Commissioner Lee made a motion that the budget be approved with the change in appropriation that has been presented from our Administrators Office. That motion means that we continue paying the insurance and there are no raises. Commissioner Lee withdrew his motion to approve the appropriations. Commissioner Epps stated that on the appropriations there was another agency that I know what they are doing is good for the County but every year when I went back and researched the appropriations, we were giving them an increase. About four years ago when I was going to the meetings they could not give their employees a raise. When they sent it over that is what they ask for. When we looked into that they change it. I fill like on appropriation Lee/Russell Council Government, I feel like we should level fund that. Commissioner Lee asked are you Commissioner Epps are you saying to cut their appropriation. Commissioner Epps stated no level fund it. Commissioner Lee stated we increased it. Commissioner Epps stated I don't think we should increase it. Commissioner Corbett stated that when Lee/Russell did their presentation, the increase was 3 percent for administration and the rest of it was to purchase the buses because the bus they transport the elderly in Hurtsboro. We could be impeding it. Commissioner Currington stated the seniors in the rural county will have no way to get to health care or anywhere. Commissioner Lee stated they will still provide the service it just wouldn't be as often. Commissioner Corbett stated it was in their letter that they have a small increase which is due to administrative which was not much, and the rest is because of buses. They have asked all the organizations to fund the same amount, so they can replace the bus. Commissioner Reed would like to continue the United Save Ourselves to give them \$10,000 this year and also \$10,000 to Teen University. Administrator Horne stated that United Save Ourselves appropriation is \$5,000. Commissioner Reed stated he would like to increase United Save Ourselves to &10,000. Chair Martin stated we are in a crunch now. Commissioner Lee stated the reason United Save Ourselves had \$10,000 because Commissioner Reed gave it to them. Commissioner Corbett stated he knows this is a worthwhile organization, but there are other organizations that are getting hundreds of dollars and we are going to double this one up that is a little tight.

Commissioner Reed stated he wanted to clear up something Commissioner Epps stated concerning the \$50,000 in his appropriation. He stated there is some property in his district that he would like to see a recreation build because there is too many kids in his district that doesn't have anywhere to play. I feel like if I can keep a kid doing something it will keep them out of trouble. Commissioner Lee made a motion that the 2018/2019 County Budget as presented from our County Administrators office with these changes to appropriations that the Historic Commission be placed under Tourism, Chamber of Commerce be placed back into the appropriations, the Steward House be added and the ones that did not show up be deleted, be deleted and my motion is to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Corbett. Commissioner Martin stated she was not at the meeting on Monday, September 10, 2018 but I do not see what you did about the request of the Housing Authority. Commissioner Lee stated that is a Federal Project and they did not fund it. Chair Martin stated it is a Federal, but it comes back to us, we are helping our citizens and yes they will pay sales tax if they aren't paying ad valorem. Commissioner Lee stated we do not have the funding, that is over \$100,000. Chair Martin proposed that we designate a pledge \$50,000 over a ten-year period so we are playing on the team with them. Commissioner Lee asked if she made that as a motion? Chair Martin made a motion to amend. Commissioner Reed totally agreed with Chair Martin. County Administrator LeAnn Horne wanted to remind the Commission that to date the major fund sources for the County General Fund has only generated \$174 in additional revenue. We are basically flat lined on budgeted revenue. We have only reached 95 percent of our budgeted revenue. What I am trying to tell you is reserves have been depleted in balancing the budget of Sanitation, Engineering and General Fund. I agree with all of you, all these civic organizations and community organizations provide a terrific service but we have to take care of our own first. Commissioner Martin stated again she wanted \$50,000 to be pledged over a ten-year period. Commissioner Lee asked was there a second on Commissioner Martin's amendment. Commissioner Screws stated "no". Commissioner Lee stated then it dies so let's go on and vote on the budget. Commissioner Corbett stated he really appreciated the Housing Authorities letter, but we asked them to stand in front of us and explain where the money would go. All the people who did that did a great job. We really don't know what they would do with the money because their letter is not that clear. The representative did not ask us for \$10,000 she ask for \$100,000. We do not have that. Commissioner Lee stated point of order we need to move this meeting along and without a second, we don't even need to discuss is. Commissioner Corbett stated if we do not get a better income level by next year we may have to cut out all appropriations. If we are getting where we can't save enough to give raises, we may have to start cutting. Chair Martin stated that if we are not giving our own an increase I don't agree Lee/Russell Council of Government that we should vote for their employees to get a raise.

Commissioner Lee made a motion for the third time, to approve the budget presented to us by the County Administrator's office they we have gone over detail by detail was changes only in the appropriations. We have a list of six that did not show up to ask for their appropriation. They have been deleted. We are moving one request to Tourism

and the Chamber will remain under appropriations, the Stewart House will be added for a \$1,000. Seconded by Commissioner Corbett. Administrator Horne polled the Commission. District 1 (Lee) voted yes, District 2 (Currington) voted yes; District 3 (Martin) voted yes; District 4 (Reed) voted yes; District 5 (Epps) voted yes; District 6 (Corbett) voted yes; District 7 (Screws) voted yes; The vote was unanimous the motion was approved.

Commissioner Lee thanked the Commission for the vote. It was not an easy process. Hopefully next year we will get a million dollars into the general fund and then this won't be so difficult.

Administrator Horne stated the salary schedule that has been presented to you does not include a salary increase. I did want to mention that we did do some figuring this morning based on the Sheriff's concern, which I fully understand, and other department heads. We did an example if we did do a 2 percent salary adjustment, say for an average \$30,000-year salary that would be a \$600 increase and pass along the insurance to the employee that would be a \$200 decrease based on the insurance they would have to through the year. All the county budget would be increased regarding the retirement and FICA which currently balanced after the cuts the county departments made, there again their retirement and FICA would increase. The IRS would eat up the other. If we all start now planning to somehow manage our expenses as frugal as we can going through the year that is what is most important and elected officials and employees start talking to your legislatures to resolve this multi tax system that is not working equable for municipalities or counties. We need to resolve that, so we can provide the services that we're constitutionally required to provide. We have done and stretched, like I said we are living of the year 2000 revenues. We have not had a revenue change or increase since 2000, other than the one Commissioner Lee referred to, which is the business license. Commissioner Lee stated to Administrator Horne we have passed your budget don't un sale it.

Commissioner Lee asked the question that Commissioner Screws previously asked about the code enforcement, what the increase is for there? Administrator Horne found the mistake yesterday they corrected it to \$25,000 to \$30,000.00. That is the maximum a part time person can make when you retired and come back to work for the County. It is \$40,000 for the Director and \$31,000 for the full time and one part time which is required by law. Commissioner Lee asked why is the part time \$31,000? Administrator Horne replied we changed it to meet the maximum. Commissioner Lee stated we do not have to pay the maximum. Commissioner Corbett stated there was no one hired yet. Commissioner Lee stated he would think that \$31,000 is to close to the full-time person. Commissioner Screws asked about the Sanitation Collection Officer. Administrator Horne replied Wanda Hardie the Sanitation Director made some promotions within their department. Wanda stated she took the Operations Manager position out because she needs to have a Solid Waste Officer. Wanda stated she actually decreased the Operations Manager.

Commissioner Screws asked what about one driver hauler? Wanda Hardie stated that is the same. Commissioner screws stated “no”, it went up. Wanda stated that under the Operations Manager a lot of the duties that fell up under the Operation Manager has been distributed amongst other people. There should still be the same amount of money in the budget, I just had to distribute some of the pay because her employees are doing the duties of the Operations Manager. All the changes that were made in her salaries were distributed from the Operations Manager pay. Her employees are taking more work on. Commissioner Screws stated it is easy for people to say they got a raise and people will not see it and not understand it.

Commissioner Screws motioned to accept the salary schedule. Seconded by Commissioner Epps. Commissioner Corbett stated he has a discussion. His only concern is that he hates approving something that I haven’t really got to dive into yet. He stated he is going to vote to do this. Administrator Horne polled the Commission. District 1(Lee) voted yes, District 2 (Currington) voted yes; District 3 (Martin) voted yes; District 4 (Reed) voted yes; District 5 (Epps) voted yes; District 6 (Corbett) voted yes; District 7 (Screws) voted yes; The vote was unanimous the motion was approved.

Commissioner Lee moved to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Currington.

Attest: _____

County Administrator

Signed: _____

Chair