

The Russell County Commission
Meeting Minutes
September 23, 2015
9:30 A.M. EST.

An adjourned meeting of the Russell County Commission was called to order. Commissioners present were: Chair Peggy Martin, Vice Chair Cattie Epps, Gentry Lee, Tillman Pugh, Ronnie Reed, Chance Corbett and Larry Screws. Also present was the County Attorney Kenneth Funderburk and County Administrator LeAnn Horne, who kept the minutes.

A quorum was established.

The invocation was given by Father Tom Weise, Retired Pastor of St. Patrick and Mother Mary Church.

The Pledge of Allegiances was led by Commissioner Screws.

Public Comments:

Barry Alexander, President of the Russell County Youth Football League, discussed a feeder program created 4 years ago for youths 12 years and over. There are over 200 youths signed up for this program. Mr. Alexander requested assistance in funding equipment for the children, and use of the Seale Sports Complex including use of the lights for practices. Commissioner Lee referred his to Park and Recreation Director Bill Taylor for use of the Seale Complex and funding should be summited at next year's budget.

American Legion Post # 135 Commander, Leroy Davis announced November 13th the Veteran's Banquet will be held at the Columbus Trade Center. This is sponsored by The Chattahoochee Veteran's Association. Tickets are \$40.00 each the cost of a table is \$300. The Veteran's Day Parade will be held November 14th.

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

Chair Martin requested a motion to approve the September 9th Commission Meeting and Proposed 2015-2016 Budget Meeting minutes. Commissioner Pugh motioned to approve the minutes and was seconded by Commissioner Screws. The vote was unanimous.

Coroner Sumbry requested approval of payment for the Court ordered cremation of Lyanna Leftwich to Taylor Funeral Home not to exceed \$400.00. Commissioner Screws motioned to approve. Seconded by Commissioner Epps. The vote was unanimous.

Administrator Horne presented the Salary Schedule for the fiscal year 2015-2016. The proposed schedule includes a 2% maintenance adjustment for general government employees and a one-time salary adjustment for a few employees. The Sheriff presented during the September 9th proposed budget meeting a salary study that included a new pay chart for law enforcement employees both in the Sheriff's Office and the Jail. The salary schedule for those employees included varying salary adjustments based on the law enforcement pay study and Sheriff's approval for those salary changes, which was approved at that meeting. Administrator Horne recommended approval for the salary schedule she has presented today for all other employees. She stated that she wished that the county could afford a larger increase for employees; however, current revenues would not afford one. Russell County does not have the tax base and the revenue of Lee County or Phenix City. As stated during the September 9th, budget meeting, she plans to contract with an consultant to conduct a salary study on all general government employees. The purpose is to look into and research where Russell County is positioned as far as general employees' salaries within this region; just as the Sheriff has done for his law enforcement personnel this year. She hopes that this study finds that Russell County is in position and is not below the market value. If there are any adjustments, those will be addressed at the next budget time next year. However, Administrator Horne recommended the salary schedule presented to the Commission today be approved.

Chair Martin requested Administrator Horne to explain where the County's revenue is generated.

Administrator Horne detailed that funding is received through 3 to 4 major funds:

- Ad valorem Taxes, there was a very slight increase (2%) in the projected revenue for next year.
- Sales Taxes, which are meeting budgeted revenue, but there is no additional sales tax, to date. Sales taxes come from outside the city limits of municipalities in the county alone from businesses that are located in the county. The County does receive 1 ½ percent in the police jurisdiction.
- Business Licenses help sustain the county budget. Those revenues are flat compared to last year.

The county is working off the same amount of revenues that we had a year ago. As presented during the budget meeting, the county's forecast is questionable being that there is sequestration and reduction of the military. It is unsure how that will affect ad valorem since that is paid in arrears. The State also just passed its General Fund Budget, and the county is still receiving their fallout from the cuts that the State of Alabama has presented. One of those cuts is EMA and different other funds that may be affected and also with annexation within the municipalities, which affect the county's sales tax revenues. She anticipates those being flat and did not project any increase in those sales tax revenues at this time. There are also some intergovernmental transfers and different other State funding, but the three named are the major funds for the County's general funds for operating all county departments.

Commissioner Screws motioned to approve the salary schedule. Seconded by Commissioner Reed.

Commissioner Corbett discussed the Sheriff's salary study that was approved and his concern for employees in the Sheriff's department that will receive a less than 2% salary increase, which the rest of the employees will receive. Commissioner Corbett stated that he spent time figuring the amount of money it would take to bring those employees up to the 2% increase, which is less than \$10,000. He noted a letter was received from an agency that is returning appropriation money of \$10,000 back to the Commission and requested taking the returned \$10,000 and adjusting the Sheriff's salary budget to bring those who will receive less than 2% raise up to the recommended 2% salary increase of the other employees.

Much discussion took place concerning Commissioner Corbett's recommendation, but the consensus was to follow the Sheriff's salary schedule as it had been presented and approved. Chair Martin instructed Administrator Horne to poll the Commission. District 1(Lee) voted, yes; District 2 (Pugh) voted, yes; District 3 (Martin) voted, yes; District 4 (Reed) voted, yes; District 5 (Epps) voted, yes; District 6(Corbett) voted, no; District 7(Screws) voted, yes. Six (6) votes, yes and one (1) no vote; the motion to approve the salary schedule presented passed.

County Attorney Kenneth Funderburk discussed a letter received from Attorney James Graham in regards to a proposed Real Estate Lease between Russell County and Phenix City Museum, Inc. The City has requested a deed for the Coulter Building, which they say will allow the Museum Board to use City appropriated funds to improve the existing county building. Mr. Funderburk stated he thought the City is incorrect in their proposal. A standard provision that will be included in the lease, which will require the City to get the Commission's permission to, which the Commission would not unreasonably withhold, to borrow money. Then, the Commission would subordinate the lease to the mortgage company, which is lending the money. With that clause in the lease there is no impediment to the City for borrowing money.

The reason the City wants a deed is so they can include the value of the property on their financial statement and the County would have to take it off their financial statement. It would be in the County's best legal interest to leave it as a lease.

When conditions are placed in a deed, reversion clauses, it is easy to have a reversion if property is not being used as a museum it reverts back to the county. Trying to prevent the City from selling the property, things of that nature would be inconsistent with what you would grant if you gave them a deed. Conditions the Commission want to have on this conveyance is, the plaque and for them not to be able to borrow money unless they have the Commission's permission is easier to handle as a lease instead of a deed.

Commissioner Pugh motioned to take no action at this time. He would like for the Administrator to contact the County's Bond Company to see what affect it would have if the County took this property off our bond portfolio and give it to someone. He also mentioned that Administrator Horne was able to obtain the property value as it shows on the tax records which list at approximately \$290,000 which is usually 15% below market retail. The County's insurance carrier has it covered at \$850,000. He thought it would behoove the Commission to wait until the next meeting to see what the Bond Company says the effects will be; then the Commission could make a decision about the best way to handle the property. Seconded by Commissioner Screws. The vote was unanimous.

Chair Martin announced the Courthouse will be closed October 12th for Columbus Day and American Indian Heritage Day.

Commissioner Lee motioned to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned.