

**Russell County Commission
Meeting Minutes April 10, 2024
Russell County Commission Chambers
9:30 A.M. EST**

An adjourned meeting of the Russell County Commission was called to order by Chair Rod Costello.

The invocation was given by Pastor Jeremy Johnson with Golden Acres Baptist Church.

Commissioner Chambers led the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Pastor Don Abrams with Trinity United Methodist Church spoke about their upcoming free night of worship event that includes multiple churches in the local area.

Ms. Caroleene Dobson, a Republican Candidate for Alabama's Second Congressional District, introduced herself to the Commission and spoke about her upcoming running for congress campaign.

Chair Costello thanked the County Commission's IT department for broadcasting the meeting on Facebook live for the public and The Citizen of East Alabama for covering the meeting. He welcomed the citizens, elected officials, department heads, media, and guests.

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

A quorum was established by the Interim County Administrator Tina Thomas.

Chair Costello stated that the agenda was approved at the work session Monday evening, April 8, 2024.

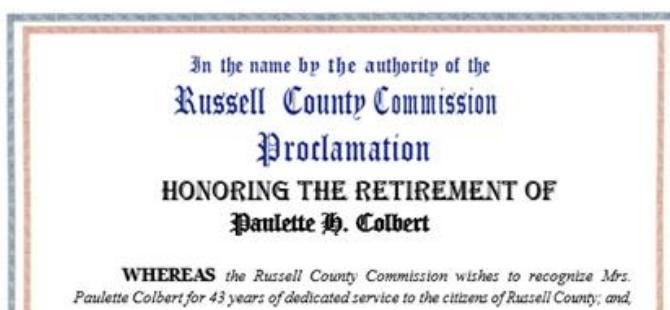
Commissioner Costello requested, in a form of a motion, to add to today's agenda a proclamation for the Month of the Military Child. Seconded by Commissioner Corbett. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried to add the proclamation to the agenda.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chair Costello requested approval of the minutes from the Commission meeting on March 27, 2024. Commissioner Epps moved to approve the minutes as presented; seconded by Commissioner Screws. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried to approve the minutes.

PROCLAMATIONS, RESOLUTIONS AND PRESENTATIONS:

Chair Costello recognized Commissioner Corbett who presented a proclamation for Ms. Paulette Colbert's retirement. Commissioner Corbett read the following aloud:



WHEREAS, in September 1980, Paulette Colbert began her career with Russell County as a clerk for the Russell County Mapping/Appraisal office before transferring to the Russell County Commission office as a payroll clerk. Mrs. Colbert was then promoted to Assistant County Administrator/Bookkeeper before being appointed by the county commission to serve as the Motor Vehicle License Commissioner for twenty years. In 2021, Paulette was unanimously appointed as the county administrator for Russell County where she served until her retirement; and,

WHEREAS Mrs. Colbert's integrity and expertise earned her the trust, respect, and admiration of all of her co-workers as well as the citizens of Russell County; and,

WHEREAS, Mrs. Colbert has been actively involved in the community and, along with her husband Keith, raised three wonderful children who have grown up to realize successful and rewarding careers; and,

THEREFORE, we, the elected members of the Russell County Commission, hereby proclaim that it is our privilege and honor to approve this Proclamation to recognize the retirement of Mrs. Paulette Colbert, who has served the citizens of Russell County with distinction and honor throughout her 43-year career.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hand this 10th day of April in the year of our Lord two thousand & twenty-four.

Commissioner Screws moved to approve the proclamation; seconded by Commissioner Epps. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried to approve the proclamation.

Chairman Costello presented the proclamation for the Month of the Military Child which was accepted by Ms. Jasponica Florence and Ms. Lakisha Logan from the Military Child Coalition. Chairman Costello read the following proclamation aloud:

**In the name by the authority of the
Russell County Commission
Proclamation**

Month of the Military Child

WHEREAS, the Russell County Commission recognizes the selfless acts of service performed by its brave members of the military and their devoted families; and

WHEREAS, military families continue to face the unique burden of deployments, often causing uncertainty and constant upending of their daily lives and routines; and

WHEREAS, military families know of the sacrifices borne by military children, but their important contributions can often go unnoticed by the general public; and

WHEREAS, Alabama is home to more than 30,000 military children; and

WHEREAS, these children are a source of pride and honor to us all, and it is fitting that we take time to recognize their contributions, celebrate their spirit and let our men and women in uniform know that while they are taking care of us, we are taking care of their children; and

WHEREAS, the recognition of April as the Month of the Military Child provides an opportunity to pay tribute to military children for their commitment, their sacrifice and their unconditional support of our service members, because when parents serve in the military, their kids serve too; and

THEREFORE, we, the members of the Russell County Commission, do hereby proclaim April 2024, as Month of the Military Child in Russell County, Alabama.

PASSED, ADOPTED, AND APPROVED, this 10th day of April, 2024.

Commissioner Screws moved to approve the proclamation; seconded by Commissioner Corbett. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried to approve the proclamation.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Chairman Costello recognized EMA Director David Martin who spoke about the Alabama Power Foundation Grant for the purchase of NOAH weather radios for all of the county buildings, along with county and city schools, and for those who are impoverished or underprivileged and have no other way to receive weather warnings. He thanked and shared appreciation to their staff that made it possible.

BUSINESS ITEMS:

Chairman Costello recognized Commissioner Lee with the following project money donations: \$2,500 to Friends of the Library, \$2,500 to the Art Council of Phenix City, and \$1,000 to the Cancer Relay for Life. Commissioner Corbett added to give \$500 for the Relay for Life from his project money. Commissioner Costello added to give \$500 for the Relay for Life and \$500 to the Art County of Phenix City from his project money. Commissioner Lee moved to approve the requests; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Chairman Costello requested to donate \$750 to the Leadership of East Alabama from his project money. Commissioner Corbett added to donate \$1,000 from his project money. Commissioner Lee added to donate \$500 from his project money. Commissioner Costello moved to approve the requests; seconded by Commissioner Screws. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Chairman Costello recognized Commissioner Corbett who presented additional Opioid Settlement lawsuit documents and requested for the chair to sign the documentation. Attorney Hicks stated that she has reviewed the documents and stated it is appropriate for the chairman to sign them at this time. Commissioner Corbett moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Chairman Costello recognized Maintenance Director Leon Watson with a request for approval for site renovations at the Ft. Mitchell Historic site and a request for funds for the renovations for the Visitor Center, Trading Post, Carriage House, along with adding restrooms and power for the fort. Commissioner Corbett stated that he has spoken to the auditors to verify that this funding could come out of the Tourism funds. Commissioner Corbett moved to approve the request of \$235,000 from the Tourism funds for renovations, repairs, and upgrades to the facilities known as Fort Mitchell Visitor Center, Tavern, Carriage House, Trading Post Fort, and the grounds located at 561 Highway 165 in Russell County. Commissioner Epps seconded the motion. Commissioner Lee restated that this would come from the Tourism funds. Interim County Administrator Tina Thomas took a roll call vote of the Commission as follows: District 2: Commissioner Chambers, yes; District 1: Commissioner Lee, yes; District 6: Commissioner Corbett, yes; District 7: Commissioner Screws, yes; District 5: Commissioner Epps, yes; District 4: Commissioner Reed, yes; and District 3: Chairman Costello, yes. Motion carried. Commissioner Epps spoke about wanting to advertise more for this site and the purpose for it being there, along with putting more emphasis on that it can be used by the county & public.

COUNTY ENGINEER:

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney discussed a portion of Lee Road 130 in Russell County. He stated that after further research and speaking to the Assistant Engineer from Lee County, Russell County actually acquired the right-of-way back in May 2008 for Lee County to pave this portion of the road. Mr. Blakeney recommended and presented the request for Commission's approval to take over the 430 ft. section of Lee Road 130, rename it, so the Russell County Highway Department can take over the maintenance of the road. Commissioner Corbett moved to adopt the portion of the established road, formally known as Lee Road 130 located in Russell County, and to direct the engineer to contact the 911 director to secure a name for the same. Commissioner Reed seconded the motion. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

SANITATION:

There was nothing presented in the Sanitation area.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Mr. Ward Dudley presented the DCIP Grant request for the Economic Development Tourism Director Victor Cross, since he was out of town. Mr. Dudley asked permission for the Chair to sign an agreement with the engineering firm for the sewage system, and to continue the contract for a cost of \$17,000. Commissioner Corbett asked Attorney Hicks if this would be appropriate use of the ARPA funds. Attorney Hicks stated that this would be an appropriate use of the American Rescue Plan funds. Commissioner Corbett moved to approve utilizing the America Rescue Plan funds for this study and pay for the work. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. Attorney Hicks stated that she fully reviewed the contract and that she has several emails with the engineering firm to clarify some terms of it, and that it is a flat \$17,000 rate contract with no additional fees unless approved by the Commission. Commissioner Corbett moved his motion to reflect the \$17,000. Chairman Costello restated that Commissioner Corbett moved to approve \$17,000 as a continuation, or update, of the engineering study for the DCIP Grant. Interim County Administrator Tina Thomas took a roll call vote of the Commission as follows: District 2: Commissioner Chambers, yes; District 1: Commissioner Lee, yes; District 6: Commissioner Corbett, yes; District 7: Commissioner Screws, yes; District 5: Commissioner Epps, yes; District 4: Commissioner Reed, yes; and District 3: Chairman Costello, yes. Motion carried.

ADMINISTRATOR:

There was nothing presented in this area by the administrator.

CORONAVIRUS RESCUE ACT FUND:

Commissioner Corbett recognized Commissioner Screws with the request to approve two pavilions and two bathrooms for Pittsview from the Coronavirus Rescue Act Fund. Attorney Hicks stated that Wi-Fi access would allow this to be covered under ARPA, and without Wi-Fi access, she's not certain the pavilions or bathrooms would meet the requirements, where the park would be covered. After further discussion about Wi-Fi, sewer, and power, Commissioner Corbett moved to postpone and bring it back with all the cost estimates. Seconded by Commissioner Lee. Interim County Administrator Tina Thomas took a roll call vote of the Commission as follows: District 2: Commissioner Chambers, yes; District 1: Commissioner Lee, yes; District 6: Commissioner Corbett, yes; District 7: Commissioner Screws, abstained; District 5: Commissioner Epps, yes; District 4: Commissioner Reed, yes; and District 3: Chairman Costello, yes. Motion carried to postpone this request.

ATTORNEY:

Attorney Hope Hicks presented the new county administrator contract, that the Commission has already reviewed and seen, so she recommended and requested the Chairman and Ms. Wright to sign. Commissioner Corbett moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Screws. Interim County Administrator Tina Thomas took a roll call vote of the Commission as follows: District 2: Commissioner Chambers, no; District 1: Commissioner Lee, yes; District 6: Commissioner Corbett, yes; District 7: Commissioner Screws, yes; District 5: Commissioner Epps, yes; District 4: Commissioner Reed, yes; and District 3: Chairman Costello, yes. Motion carried.

COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION:

Commissioner Screws spoke about getting new chairs for the Commissioner's chambers stage area.

Commissioner Corbett shared an upcoming Ft. Moore Best Ranger Competition at the Columbus Civic Center area. Commissioner Costello spoke about the Ft. Moore entrance being closed.

Commissioner Reed spoke about an event at the Mariott this evening, where Mr. Figures is running for congress.

Commissioner Reed spoke about voting in the upcoming election on April 16th. Judge Harden added additional information about the election.

Commissioner Epps spoke about looking for Ft. Mitchell Market Days and will share any information when she gets it.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Announcements were made.

There being no further business, Commissioner Lee moved to adjourn; seconded by Commissioner Screws. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. The meeting was adjourned.