

**Russell County Commission  
Meeting Minutes May 8, 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 Keenan West with the 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist Church.

Commissioner Reed led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Ms. Lillie Evans with Home Health Providers and their service in the surrounding counties as Medicaid waver providers and solicited for donations to help in any way.

County Administrator Chandra Wright called roll of the Commission. Members present were Commissioner Gentry Lee, Commissioner Chance Corbett, Commissioner Larry Screws, Commissioner Cattie Epps, Commissioner Ronnie Reed, and Chairman Rod Costello. Commissioner Scott Chambers was not present. Also, present were County Attorney Hope Hicks, and County Administrator Chandra Wright, who kept the minutes.

A quorum was established by the County Administrator Chandra Wright.

Chair Costello stated that the agenda was approved at the work session on Monday night, May 6<sup>th</sup>.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Chair Costello requested approval of the minutes from the Commission meeting on April 24, 2024. Commissioner Lee moved to approve the minutes as presented; seconded by Commissioner Corbett. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried to approve the minutes.

**PROCLAMATIONS, RESOLUTIONS AND PRESENTATIONS:**

There was nothing presented in this area.

**DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

There were no discussion items presented.

**BUSINESS ITEMS:**

There were no business items presented.

**COUNTY ENGINEER:**

The County Engineer had nothing to present in this area.

**SANITATION:**

The Sanitation Director had nothing to present in this area.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:**

There was nothing presented in this area.

**ADMINISTRATOR:**

County Administrator Chandra Wright introduced herself to the Commission.

### **CORONAVIRUS RESCUE ACT FUND:**

Commissioner Costello stated that the Bathrooms at Pittsview Park did not need to be on the current agenda and was taken off at the work session.

Commissioner Costello recognized Maintenance Office Manager Sheri Massey, who stood in for Maintenance Director Leon Watson, who requested the approval to accept bids for the second phase of lights at the Ladonia Walking Trail. The ad would run May 16<sup>th</sup>, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, and May 30<sup>th</sup>. The pre-bid meeting would be on May 21<sup>st</sup>, while bids due on June 4<sup>th</sup>, and bids will be opened on June 4<sup>th</sup> at 10:30 am, and announce the winning bid at the Commission meeting on June 12<sup>th</sup>. Commissioner Corbett moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Reed. County Administrator Chandra Wright took a roll call vote of the Commission as follows: 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.

### **ATTORNEY:**

Attorney Hicks spoke about the employee handbook and the changes she made after their Monday evening work session. She presented the following handbook changes. With the temporary assignments policy, she changed it to make it temporary-interim so if we have a position that could be an interim, it would be taken care of. She stated that a temporary-interim would be for 6-months or less, unless extended by no more than six additional months by the department head or the Commission. Upon completion of the assignment, the employee's pay will revert back to their regular pay and their performance review cycle will continue as it normally was. The annual leave was changed by the accrual, where the annual leave will begin January 2024, and end on December 31, 2024. Beginning on January 1, 2025, the annual leave year will begin on the anniversary of each employee's hire date. Modification was made to the leave, as was discussed Monday night, so the employees who have been zero to four years would earn 80 hours per year, which is 3.334 hours per 24 pay periods. She stated that they earn sick leave based on 24 pay periods, so the annual leave will be earned just as the sick leave. She shared the following earned leave:

- For 5-9 years = 100 hours per year earned leave
- For 10-14 years = 120 hours per year earned leave
- For 15-19 years = 140 hours per year earned leave
- For 20-24 years = 160 hours per year earned leave
- For 25 hours or more they'll earn 184 hours earned leave per year

Ms. Hicks stated that the annual leave fully credited to the employees during the second pay period in January 2024. Employees hired between that pay period and May 22, 2024 will have their leave fully credited to them upon completion of their probationary period. For any employee hired after May 22<sup>nd</sup> and for all employees beginning January 2025, annual leave will be credited at the end of the first two pay periods of each month (since they have already received their leave this year, we don't want to take it back). So, beginning January 1, 2025, it will change. The pay upon separation through the end of this year will remain 320 hours and effective January 1, 2025, it will drop down to 240 hours is the most they can get paid out. Ms. Hicks also stated that she changed the word "hotel" to "lodging" throughout the Travel Policy. She stated that this would be the first reading, so this would be appropriate for you to consider a motion and a vote at the next Commission meeting for approval. Commissioner Lee stated for the record, that he is not in favor of using annual leave or sick leave in less than four-hour increments. Commissioner Corbett stated that he felt department heads could manage it. Attorney Hicks stated that it is one-hour increments to use annual leave along with sick leave. Attorney Hicks stated that no action needs to be taken today, at this first reading.

Attorney Hope Hicks spoke about the Ladonia Sewer Project and requested to send a letter to Phenix City about the ability to tie in with it since it can move forward if they will allow the lines and customers to tie into their service. She presented and read aloud the below drafted letter that she requested the Commission to approve:



*The Russell County Commission*

1000 Broad Street • P.O. Box 969  
Phenix City, Alabama 36868-0969

**Chandra Wright**  
**County Administrator**

COMMISSIONERS: May 8, 2024

**Gentry Lee** Mr. Wallace Hunter  
**District 1** City of Phenix City  
601 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
**Scott Chambers** Phenix City, Alabama 36867  
**District 2**

**Rod Costello** Dear Wallace:  
**District 3**

**Ronnie Reed** As you are aware, the Russell County Commission would like to use ARPA funds  
**District 4** to have a sewer line installed along Highway 80 West from the City of Phenix City's  
sewer connection on Whiterock Road to Ladonia Square. In previous communications  
about this line the City expressed an interest in this project along with a possible sewer  
line in the Fort Mitchell area. As I am sure you are aware, the Commission did not  
receive the 2023 grant for the Fort Mitchell sewer project. The Commission has hired  
**Cattie J. Epps** Ardurra Services to assist in applying for the grant again this year.  
**District 5**

**Chance Corbett** In the meantime, the Commission would like to proceed with the Ladonia project.  
**District 6** The Commission hired Tim Simpson with Barrett Simpson who completed a study and  
prepared a cost estimate for this project conforming with all Phenix City codes for adding  
sewer lines. Once constructed and tied into the City's sewer lines, the line would be  
given to Phenix City and all of the customers on the line would need to be serviced by the  
City.  
**Larry Screws**  
**District 7**

Before beginning this project the Commission would need the City to agree to  
accept the line and customers. Without the City's agreement, the project cannot move  
forward and the Commission will need to explore other projects using our remaining  
ARPA funds.

We would ask that you, Mayor Lowe, and the Council consider this request and  
respond to this request by Friday, June 7, 2024.

Sincerely,

Copies to: Mayor Eddie Lowe  
Councilman Steve Bailey  
Councilwoman Vickey Carter  
Councilman Arthur Day, Jr.  
Councilman Dr. R. Griff Gordy  
Rod Costello  
Russell County Commission Chairman

Phone: 334-298-6426 • Fax: 334-298-0844  
www.rcala.com

Attorney Hicks stated that she requested response by June 7<sup>th</sup> to give the City two meetings for them to have time to consider it, and gives the Commission enough time, if they don't want to do this, to have other projects to consider using those funds that you've allocated. She stated that the letter is copied to Mayor Lowe and all of the council members. Commissioner Corbett moved to allow the chair to sign the letter and have it sent. Seconded by Commissioner Lee. After further discussion, Commissioner Corbett stated that the Commission would have to make a decision soon or risk losing the ARPA funds that they have if they don't make this decision in a timely manner. After further discussion, the vote was made. County Administrator Chandra Wright took a roll call vote of the Commission as follows: 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.

Attorney Hicks requested an executive session and stated that this is an issue to discuss the topic that is appropriate for executive session, as it would be to discuss with your attorney the legal ramification for, and legal options for pending litigation controversies is not yet being litigated, but is likely to be litigated, or imminently likely to be litigated if the governmental body pursues a proposed course of action. She stated

that there will not need to be any action taken by the Commission from this Executive Session, so the Commission could finish this meeting, adjourn into the Executive Session, and adjourn the meeting from there. Commissioner Corbett moved to approve the request to go into Executive Session after the Commissioner's Discussion and Announcement and adjourn from the Executive Session ; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

**COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION:**

Commissioner Corbett shared the reason Commissioner Chambers not attending was due to him attending a school award ceremony for both his kids.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Announcements were made.

There being no further business, the Commission went into Executive Session, and the meeting was adjourned in the Executive Session.