

**Russell County Commission
Meeting Minutes May 22, 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 Alice Hubbard with True Believers Ministry.

Commissioner Costello led the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Mr. LC Harris came to speak about the property abatement clean-up on Old Highway 431 which will be covered in today's meeting under the Business Items area.

Ms. Anita Johnson and Ms. Rosie Gary came to invite everyone to the upcoming Juneteenth celebration in Crawford.

Chairman Costello thanked Keith with Russell County IT Department for Facebook Live, The Citizen of East Alabama for covering the meetings. He welcomed our elected officials, department heads, other media, and guests.

County Administrator Chandra Wright called roll of the Commission. Members present were Commissioner Scott Chambers, Commissioner Chance Corbett, Commissioner Larry Screws, Commissioner Cattie Epps, Commissioner Ronnie Reed, and Chairman Rod Costello. Commissioner Gentry Lee 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 20th.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chair Costello requested approval of the minutes from the Commission meeting on May 8, 2024. Commissioner Corbett moved to approve the minutes as presented; seconded by Commissioner Epps. 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:

Chairman Costello recognized Enforcement Bill Friend who presented an abatement at Uchee Hill Highway. After discussion and since the property owner's family was at the meeting wanting to clean the property, Commissioner Corbett requested Mr. Friend talk with ADEM and extend this request. Commissioner Corbett moved to postpone the abatement; seconded by Commissioner Chambers. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Chairman Costello recognized EMA Director David Martin who presented a budget transfer request. He requested to decrease Line Item 541 (Equipment and Furnishing) by \$1,000 and increase Line Item 242 (Natural Gas/Water) for the expenditures of the new public safety building. Commissioner Corbett moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Chambers. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Chairman Costello recognized Maintenance Director Leon Watson who presented a bid request for painting four of the buildings at the Ft. Mitchell historical site. If approved, they will run ads in the Phenix Citizen from 5/30/2024 to 6/13/2024 (for three consecutive weeks), have a pre-bid meeting on 6/10/2024 with all bids being accepted until 10:00 am ET on 6/21/2024, and bids will be opened at 10:30 am here in the Commission Chambers on 6/21/2024. Commissioner Corbett moved to approve the request as presented by the Maintenance Director; seconded by Commissioner Chambers. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Chairman Costello recognized Commissioner Epps with a project money donation request. She requested to donate \$2,000 to the Russell County Middle School to help a Washington trip. Commissioner Epps moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Screws. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Chairman Costello recognized Commissioner Screws with a project money donation request. He requested to donate \$1,000 to the Russell County Middle School. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Corbett. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Chairman Costello presented a project money donation request for himself to the Young Leaders of East Alabama through the Foundation of the Chamber in the amount of \$1,500. Chairman Costello moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Epps. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried. Commissioner Corbett also requested to donate \$500 to the Young Leaders of East Alabama through the Foundation of the Chamber. Commissioner Corbett moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

COUNTY ENGINEER:

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney requested to solicit their annual bids. He will advertise them on May 24th, May 31st, June 7th, June 14th, open bids in the Chamber on June 20th, and then bring them back to be awarded at the Commission meeting on June 26th. Bids are as follows:

- 001-23 TRAFFIC STRIPING BID
- 002-23 LIQUID ASPHALT BID
- 004-23 BITUMINOUS PAVING (PUBLIC WORKS BID)
- 005-23 GRASSING BID
- 006-23 METAL PIPE AND HDPE PIPE BID
- 007-23 AGGREGATE BID
- 008-24 CONCRETE PIPE BID
- 010-23 MOTORGRADER BLADES BID
- 014-23 FENCING BID

Commissioner Epps moved to accept the request; seconded by Commissioner Corbett. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney presented Owens Road (between McClendon Road to Patterson Road) speed limit sign request. He stated that it is not currently posted with a speed limit sign and the increased speeds after we repaved it. He said it is currently 45 miles per hour and he recommends approval for a speed limit sign for 35 miles per hour through this short section of road. Commissioner Epps moved to approve the request; seconded by Commission Corbett. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney presented the request to bid and advertise Brown Road (section 2), their next CRAF project. This is the second section of Brown Road where they ended the pavement from Robin Lane to Padgett's Road. Mr. Blakeney said that they will advertise it through the ACCA website on May 29th, June 5th, and June 12th, then open bids on June 20th here in the Commission Chambers, and award bids at the next Commission meeting on June 26th. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the request; seconded

by Commissioner Corbett. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

SANITATION:

Sanitation Director Ward Dudley presented the award bid for repairing their garbage truck for Bill & Sons Body Shop in Tuskegee for the amount of \$51,484.32. He recommended we award the bid to them to let the repairs begin. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the recommendation; seconded by Commissioner Corbett. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

There was nothing presented in this area.

ADMINISTRATOR:

County Administrator Chandra Wright updated the Commission of the two additional state holidays approved by Governor Ivey to include Juneteenth on July 19th, along with the day after Thanksgiving, on November 29th.

CORONAVIRUS RESCUE ACT FUND:

Chairman Costello recognized Maintenance Director Leon Watson who presented the quote for the Pittsview Park bathrooms and pavilions. He stated the cost of one bathroom and pavilion is \$106,477.99, and if Commissioner Screws requests two pavilions and two bathrooms, the cost will be \$212,955.98. After further discussion, Attorney Hick stated from an ARPA standpoint when looking at projects to see if they qualify for ARPA use, she can justify one bathroom and pavilion because of access to wi-fi internet, but she would want to make sure if the second bathroom and pavilion qualifies for ARPA guidelines. She would like to see which guideline this would fit under. Attorney Hicks suggested to motion to approve two bathrooms and pavilions, and it be subject to legal review as to the two being appropriate under ARPA funds. If two are not, then it would be one pavilion and one bathroom approved. She can have a response back to the Commission by tomorrow. Commissioner Screws moved to approve Attorney Hicks recommendation; seconded by Commissioner Epps. County Administrator Chandra Wright took a roll call vote of the Commission as follows: District 2: Commissioner Chambers, no; 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 referring to the work session Monday where Commissioner Corbett asked her to look at ARPA funds being allocated or obligated and what that entailed as far as your time frame. She looked at it yesterday and did some research, she stated that simply voting to allocate or the technical term is obligate these funds is not enough. You are going to have to be engaged in whether it is a contract or purchase order or an agreement with the vendor who's doing the process, but it has to be more than your vote, and to keep this into consideration when looking at these projects. So, with the Ladonia sewer project, it cannot just be that you voted, but you actually have to have engaged in and started the process beyond just your vote. She said it does not have to be "shovel in the ground" but it has to be that you've signed a contract or that purchase orders or bids have been submitted or requested, and that the process is moving, not just a vote of the Commission. Commissioner Chambers asked about money already being paid towards the Ladonia sewer project, but Attorney Hicks stated that you've paid for the study and haven't actually paid out anything for the project (she doesn't believe). She added that if the city approves it, we'd want to enter into a written agreement with the city, and we'd want to go ahead and enter into a written agreement with the builder who is going to build it. She stated that you'd want to have a little bit more done.

Attorney Hicks discussed the policies and procedures handbook. The Commissioners were given a list of employees who have been employed since April 19th, 2000, and the list included the job positions and the hours they had. Based on that, there are some that have less than 360 hours. So, she reworked the once section of annual leave about that to state: *"Pay Upon Separation: Upon voluntary separation from County service, an individual hired on or after April 19, 2000, will be paid for unused annual leave up to a maximum of 160 hours (which is our current policy as well). For employees hired before April 19, 2000, upon voluntary separation from County service, these individuals will be paid for unused annual leave up to the amount of*

annual leave time that was accrued as of today, May 22, 2024, with a maximum payout of 360 hours.”

Attorney Hicks added that the one other change was where she was asked about advances. She said that the initial draft said there was no advances of annual leave, but this draft says: *“up to two days of annual leave may be advanced to an employee who has been employed for at least one year for extenuating circumstances at the discretion of their department head.”* Commissioner Corbett verified the date of April 19th of 2000, and she stated that is currently the date that separates 360 and 160 hours, so the date was not changed. Chairman Costello verified that they have 18 months to use up some of their vacation, so they don't lose any of those hours. She agreed. She said that employees may roll over annually what was granted in 2024 until December 31, 2025. She said that we're not ending it this year, we're giving it a whole other year, so essentially 18 months at this point. As of January 1, 2026, any annual leave over the employee's annual allotment will be forfeited. They are not going to lose anything right now, but we are easing into where you can only roll over what you earn in a year. So, if you've been here for 24 years and you earn 160, you can roll over 160. If you've been here for 25 years or more and you earn 184, you can roll 184, and so it's staggered based on how long you've been here and how much you earn, but not anymore than 360 (that's the most you can have). Ms. Hicks recommended that if the Commission adopts this policy, that they approve as of January 1, 2025, a one-time (just a one-time), 20 hours of leave to each employee that is employed as of that date. Ms. Hicks stated that we are increasing annual leave for most categories, along with adding categories. See the following new leave and all the categories:

- 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 years or more they'll earn 184 hours earned leave per year

After further discussion, Commissioner Corbett stated that the additional 20 hours that the Commission is approving for the employees (for one-time on January 1, 2025), they are giving employees an additional 20 hours. After further discussion, Ms. Hicks stated that if the handbook is approved, she has spoken to Ms. Wright and Mr. Herring because would like schedule and train the department heads, including elected officials, as well as the employees on this since they haven't had a new handbook in over 30 years, with all the new rules and regulations. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the handbook delivered to them by Attorney Hicks; seconded by Commissioner Corbett. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Attorney Hicks requested to go into executive session and stated that there will not need to be a vote in the executive session, so the Commission could recess this meeting, go into Executive Session and adjourn from there. Commissioner Corbett moved to approve the request by the attorney; seconded by Commissioner Reed. Ms. Hicks made her declaration by saying she is an attorney licensed to practice law in the State of Alabama. She would represent that the matter discussed in Executive Session is appropriate for Executive Session as they are to discuss controversies not yet being litigated. but imminently likely to be litigated, or imminently likely to be litigated if the governmental body pursues a proposed course of action. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried to go into Executive Session and adjourn from there after discussion and announcements.

COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION:

Commissioner Epps spoke about the Ft. Mitchell Senior Center concerns with the furniture that belongs to the center that has put on the back porch area, along with other storage area concerns.

Commissioner Reed spoke about his concerns with the building department.

Commissioner Corbett announced information about the Boston butt fund raiser event for the Russell County Sheriff's office K-9 Unit, and the upcoming Crawford Community Center Legacy's senior center breakfast, along with events honoring our veterans for upcoming Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

Commissioner Corbett recognized Chief Appraiser Heath Crowe who spoke about the property tax cap legislation and what was recently passed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Announcements were made.

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