

**Russell County Commission
Meeting Minutes August 28, 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 Mr. David Ellis.

Commissioner Chambers led the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Ms. Gwen Jones spoke about road water problems with the city on Hwy 80 in Phenix City.

Ms. Carmen Evans spoke about the Tri-City Prayer walk and asked permission to share a parking lot area for their walk on Saturday, October 19th, at 9:00 am.

Ms. Rosanne Perry from Hurtsboro, Alabama spoke about her concerns about their library. She was for the budget meeting to follow afterwards.

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

County Administrator Chandra Wright 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 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, August 26th.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chair Costello requested approval of the minutes from the Commission meeting on August 14, 2024. Commissioner Epps moved to approve the minutes; seconded by Commissioner Chambers. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried to approve the minutes.

PROCLAMATIONS, RESOLUTIONS AND PRESENTATIONS:

There were no proclamations, resolutions, or presentations presented.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

There was no discussion items presented.

BUSINESS ITEMS:

Chairman Costello recognized EMA Director David Martin with a budget transfer request. Mr. Martin requested to decrease Line Item #304 (contract services) by \$2,000, and to increase Line Item #265 (registration & training) by the same. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Corbett. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Chairman Costello presented a project money request for Wreaths Across America. Mr. Costello requested to donate \$1,000 to help with the national cemetery. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Corbett. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.


Commissioner Costello then requested to donate \$1,000 of his project money to CAC, the Russell County Child Advocacy Center. Commissioner Corbett moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Lee. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Chairman Costello presented a Lee-Russell Council of Government transit letter request to be signed by the chair to be sent back to ADECA. Commissioner Lee moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Corbett. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Chairman Costello recognized Commissioner Epps with a project money donation to the Ft. Mitchell Volunteer Fire Department. Commissioner Epps requested to give \$250 to the Ft. Mitchell Fire Department. Commissioner Epps moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Screws. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

COUNTY ENGINEER:

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney presented a request of the approval of the 2025 Transportation Plan. Mr. Blakeney stated that a part of the new gas tax law, the next transportation plan needs to be approved. See below plan presented:




FY 2025 County Transportation Plan

Russell County

Date Approved by the Russell County Commission: **August 28, 2024**

Date Amended by the Russell County Commission



Map Index	Project No.	Road Name/Number	Begin		End		Project Details				Total Project Estimated Cost	Estimated Amount Planned To Be Utilized Under Competitive Bid	Estimated Amount Planned To Be Utilized Under Public Works	County Rebuild Alabama Funds or Federal Aid Exchange Funds (List fund type separately for projects involving both CRAF's and FAE's)	CRAF Amount	FAEF Amount
			Lat	Long	Lat	Long	Road Improvement Project	Bridge Improvement Project	Project Length (miles)	Description of Work						
Estimated Beginning Balance															\$236,269.00	\$618,000.00
Estimated Annual Revenue															\$1,140,000.00	\$490,000.00
1	RA-RCP-17-001-25	Waker Road	32.2789	-85.3387	32.3487	-85.3470	X		0.06	Resurface and Traffic Stripe Waker Road from Shady Grove Road to North Creek Road	\$854,835.00			CRAF	\$804,835.00	
2	RA-RCP-17-002-25	Alabama Avenue	32.4667	-85.0879	32.4651	-85.0873	X		0.32	Resurface and Traffic Stripe Alabama Avenue from US HWY 80 to End	\$35,618.00			CRAF	\$35,618.00	
3	RA-RCP-17-003-25	Tennessee Avenue	32.4698	-85.0950	32.4676	-85.0899	X		0.15	Resurface and Traffic Stripe Tennessee Avenue from US HWY 80 to Mississippi Drive	\$16,725.00			CRAF	\$16,725.00	
4	RA-RCP-17-002-25	Florida Drive	32.4586	-85.0891	32.4676	-85.0622	X		0.34	Resurface and Traffic Stripe Florida Drive from Tennessee Avenue to Mississippi Drive	\$37,962.00			CRAF	\$37,962.00	
5	RA-RCP-17-002-25	Mississippi Drive	32.4579	-85.0933	32.4677	-85.0808	X		0.32	Resurface and Traffic Stripe Mississippi Drive from Andrew Road to Alabama Avenue	\$35,618.00			CRAF	\$35,618.00	
6	RA-RCP-17-002-25	Georgia Avenue	32.4674	-85.0907	32.4646	-85.0906	X		0.17	Resurface and Traffic Stripe Georgia Avenue from Mississippi Drive to End	\$19,675.00			CRAF	\$19,675.00	
7	RA-RCP-17-002-25	Virginia Street	32.4653	-85.0905	32.4654	-85.0874	X		0.18	Resurface and Traffic Stripe Virginia Street from Georgia Avenue to Alabama Avenue	\$19,901.00			CRAF	\$19,901.00	
8	RA-RCP-17-002-25	Carolina Street	32.4664	-85.0906	32.4665	-85.0876	X		0.17	Resurface and Traffic Stripe Carolina Street from Georgia Avenue to Alabama Avenue	\$19,109.00			CRAF	\$19,109.00	
9	RA-RCP-17-003-25	Island Creek Road	32.4206	-85.1906	32.4062	-85.1914	X		0.52	Resurface and Traffic Stripe Island Creek Road from Pughetts Road to End	\$52,612.00			CRAF	\$52,612.00	
10	RA-RCP-17-004-25	Antioch Road	32.1922	-85.2590	32.2062	-85.2588	X		1.00	Resurface and Traffic Stripe Antioch Road from Providence Road to 1.00 Mile	\$101,765.00			CRAF	\$101,765.00	
11	RA-RCP-17-005-25	St. Luke Road	32.2944	-85.3161	32.3157	-85.3406	X		2.07	Resurface and Traffic Stripe St. Luke Road from New Placement to Old Road	\$232,141.00			CRAF	\$232,141.00	
12	RA-RCP-17-006-25	Woodland Drive	32.4239	-85.0891	32.4695	-85.0847	X		3.43	Resurface and Traffic Stripe Woodland Drive from Sandfort Road to US HWY 80	\$816,158.00			FAEF	\$816,158.00	
13	RA-RCP-17-007-25	Fourney Road	32.4505	-85.2206	32.4701	-85.2348	X		1.81	Resurface and Traffic Stripe Fourney Road from US HWY 80 to County Line	\$201,842.00			FAEF	\$201,842.00	
Totals/Page Totals			Total Miles Addressed by CTP (Total Mileage Does Not Include Bridge Projects)				19.37	Total CTP Estimated Costs		\$2,394,001.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	Total CRAF/FAEF Remaining Estimated	\$268.00	\$0.00	

Note: Any amendments to the CTP shall follow the same guidelines and procedures as the original approval process.

Remarks: _____

CTP Plan #06/0119

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

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney presented the request to award the bid for Battle Road and Saint Luke Road to East Alabama Paving in the amount of \$722,326.25, and to allow the chair to sign the contract. Site one will be Battle Road and site two will be Saint Luke Road. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Epps. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney presented the ADEM Stormwater grant application. Mr. Blakeney stated that they were awarded a \$250,000 stormwater grant several months back, and he requested that the chair sign the application and all documentation so they can start receiving reimbursement for this grant. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Chambers. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

SANITATION:

Sanitation Director Ward Dudley presented a budget transfer request in the amount of \$5,233.85 from Line Item #214 (minor equipment) and move to Line Item #234 (vehicle repair). Commissioner Lee moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Epps. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

ADMINISTRATOR:

The County Administrator had nothing to present in this area.

CORONAVIRUS RESCUE ACT FUND:

There was nothing presented in this area.

ATTORNEY:

Attorney Hope Hicks spoke of an email she received yesterday from the Office of Prosecution Services, which is the office that manages DAs around the state, and there was legislation this year that gave the Russell County District Attorney's office \$200,000 for juvenile detention beds. She stated that the way legislations was written instead of paying it to Russell County Commission, it was paid to the district attorneys. So, the state comptroller sent the money to the Office of Prosecution Services (which is the district attorney's association). That is money that will need to come to the Russell County Commission, but they have sent a proposed memorandum of understanding, and they have asked for the chair to sign it. Ms. Hicks said that she is working with them because she wants to clean up a bit of language before she prepares it and have the chairman to sign. She asked if the Commission would approve for the chair to sign the memorandum of understanding with Office of Prosecution Services so that we can get that \$200,000. Commissioner Lee moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Corbett. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried. After further discussion, Ms. Hicks stated that the memorandum is asking that we be able to itemize how the money is spent. For example, how many beds, how many nights, how many kids? This is the one thing that has to be worked out to make sure we can get that information to be able to provide it as requested.

COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION:

Commissioner Corbett shared information on the upcoming Labor Day event at the Old Seale Courthouse.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Announcements were made.

RUSSELL COUNTY COMMISSION FY 2024/2025 BUDGET MEETING:

County Administrator Chandra Wright presented a proposed balanced budget for fiscal year 2024/2025 with the General Fund amount of \$20,741,379. She stated that there was an increase in revenue, and we brought in more revenue than was budgeted for, so the county is in a strong financial position. The health insurance premiums are increasing by 4.75% and included in this budget, along with a 3% across the board cost of living increase included in the proposed balanced budget. There are some additional salary adjustments that will be

requested by department heads and elected officials when they present their budgets to you individually. She stated that the appropriations are listed on the first tab of your budget books. There is a column which shows the entities' requested amounts and the funding recommendations for the nonprofits are at the Commissioner's discretion. There are two new nonprofit requests, funding for these two requests is not included in the balance budget. It was her recommendation in FY 2025/2026 that the nonprofit appropriations are decreased, and the entire nonprofit appropriations process is re-evaluated and updated.

After representatives from appropriation organizations spoke, the appropriations were not approved and will be voted on in the next Commission meeting on September 11, 2024.

County Administrator Chandra Wright presented the Commission office's budget proposal with the following requests:

- Line Item # 113 (other salaries): this shows additional salary increases for the Commission staff above the cost of living, due to restructuring of roles and responsibilities, and to actually bring them up comparable to other employees with the same titles around the county government.
- Line Item #233 (office equipment, repairs and maintenance): this is adding a budget for the IT Dept. since he does not have a budget (*it was previously put into maintenance*). She stated that this will be maintained at the Commission office for IT Support and needs across all departments.
- Line Item #265 (registration and training): this increase is based on classes that Ms. Wright will have to take as a new administrator, as well as conferences for both Max Herring and Tina Thomas.
- Line Item #550 (motor vehicles): this is to replace the minivan with two Ford Explorers through the Enterprise leasing program.

Probate Judge Harden presented the Probate Office's budget proposal with the following requests:

- Line Item # 499 (other): increased to \$15,000 since the Probate Judge Association is proposing a bill in January to be able to pay the special probate judge when they serve in the absence of the Probate Judge. Judge Harden wants to put the money in incase it passes in January.
- Line Item #113 (other salaries & wages): he proposed a 3% increase for his employees along with increasing one employee's salary by \$2,000 since she has moved up to his Assistant Administrator and it will reflect other counties.

Revenue Commissioner Natalie Kirkland presented the Revenue office's level funded budget.

In the absence of Chief Appraiser Heath Crowe, County Administrator Chandra Wright presented the Mapping and Appraisal level funded balanced budget. She had previously met with Mr. Crowe and went over his balanced budget, as well as receiving a letter from the Department of Revenue approving it.

MV License Commissioner Carrie Bowman presented the Tag Office's level funded budget.

Registrar Brindlea Griffin presented the Board of Registrar's budget proposal with the following request:

- Line Item # 499 (other): for \$1,700 because they were gifted for GIS mapping system by the State of Alabama Secretary of State's office for 23, 24, and part of 25. So, the last two months of the 2025 year, they have to pick up the maintenance cost which is \$850 for two months is \$1,700 total.

She also mentioned that she moved things to cover some additional mileage, training cost and postage cost.

Maintenance Director Leon Watson presented the Maintenance Department's budget proposal with the following requests:

- Request for adding two additional employees, a full-time carpenter and also a full-time electrician (that will come from a part-time electrician position).
- Mr. Watson also stated that his balanced budget includes additional equipment in the amount of \$110,986 coming out of his budget in Line Item #541. Mr. Watson stated this is included in this budget, but it will be alleviated from his budget if this is taken out of another fund.

Sheriff Taylor presented the Sheriff Department, Jail, and Animal Control budget proposal with the following requests:

- \$200,000 for vehicles was added, intending to receive 12 to 15 vehicles (outfitted with all the equipment) for that price. He stated that historically he has budgeted for \$160,000 to \$200,000 and they received no more than 4 vehicles being outfitted. He is hoping that this program they are entering into is going to be

a really good program for the money and that they would spend in a couple of three years, have a new fleet which we all know reduces maintenance costs and repairs. He stated that they currently have a lot of vehicles with age on them.

- \$30,000 was added to replace deputy laptops
- \$25,000 was added to cover flock system cameras around the county (9-11 cameras right now)
- 10% increase to Public Safety scale for all jail and deputies (to come up closer to city pays)
- \$52,000 to \$56,000 for housing inmates for Autauga County reimbursements will continue for another 3-4 months along with the city reimbursement totals about \$300,000 average total reimbursement to help offset this budget.

EMA Director David Martin presented the EMA/Homeland Security office's budget proposal with the following requests:

- Moved money from Line Item #219 and #214 to Line Item #541 for EOC equipment.
- Included a 5% merit raise for the deputy director.

Coroner Arthur Sumbry presented the Coroner's office level funded balanced budget.

Juvenile Court and Drug Court budget proposal was presented earlier in the appropriations.

Chief Building Official Bubba Roberts presented the Building Inspections budget proposal with the following request:

- Salary increase for the Senior Inspector/Assistant for when Mr. Roberts is not in the office, along with him receiving certifications in building, commercial and residential, and working on his electrical.

Special Enforcement Officer Bill Friend presented the License/Nuisance office's level funded balanced budget.

Sanitation Director Ward Dudley presented the Sanitation Department's budget proposal with the following requests:

- Added additional salary and wages for employee holiday working double pay throughout the year.
- He noted the new exempt wages line item added for overtime.
- He stated that the purchase cost for the extra cans is included but not the additional revenue.

Parks & Rec. Director Shawn Blakeney presented the Parks & Recreation department's budget proposal with the following requests:

- He stated that the overall 2024/2025 budget is requested with a 37% increase, a \$20,950 increase from the prior year 2023/2024, budget because of 3 additional positions created in this budget that increases an additional \$168,400 for these positions. He said that these positions are due to the increase in work and responsibilities added to their department over the past few years. The positions are Parks and Rec. Technician 2, 2 positions at \$17/hour, and a Parks & Rec. Technician 2 position at \$19.50/hour.
- He requested a 16% increase for the Assistant Parks & Rec. Director (on top of the 3%). From his salary of \$43,056 and proposing a salary for him to be \$49,920 since he will take on double responsibility and double personnel over the last 2-3 years.

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney presented the Highway Department budget proposal with the following requests:

- With an overall budget increase of \$58,450 from last year, which is included in the \$123,600 increase in salaries he added an additional \$115,000 for Phenix City hold money inside.
- He requested two additional salaries above the 3% merit increase as follows:
 - For the Assistant County Engineer, he requested a 10% increase that will bring him from \$96,600 to \$100,880 and that is due to him passing the PE Tag Test and 50% of that will be reimbursed by the state.
 - For the Maintenance Superintendent, he requested a salary increase of 13%, which will be from \$69,264 to \$75,920, because they did a salary study with the County Association, and this puts him in line with what a county of our size Maintenance Superintendent makes.
- Line Item #304 (contract services): the additional amount is to contract service out 3 rounds of grass mowing for about a \$111,000 increase in this line item.

Commissioner Corbett moved to approve the appropriations as listed, to include an additional \$14,600 for mental health and pull out the Russell County/Phenix City Animal Shelter until the next budget when they have more information. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. County Administrator Chandra Wright took a roll call vote of the Commission as follows: District 2: Commissioner Chambers, no; District 1: Commissioner Lee, no; District 6: Commissioner Corbett, yes; District 7: Commissioner Screws, no; District 5: Commissioner Epps, abstained; District 4: Commissioner Reed, yes; and District 3: Chairman Costello, yes. Motion failed.

After further discussion, Commissioner Screws moved to approve the general budget, take out the juvenile bed space and all appropriations at this time. Seconded by Commissioner Chambers. County Administrator Chandra Wright 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 passed.

Commissioner Screws moved to accept the salary schedule coming from the administrator; seconded by Commissioner Epps. No changes were made. County Administrator Chandra Wright 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 passed to approve the salary schedule.

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