

**Russell County Commission  
Meeting Minutes September 11, 2024  
Russell County Commission Chambers  
9:30 A.M. EST**

An adjourned meeting of the Russell County Commission was called to order by Vice-Chair Chance Corbett.

A moment of silence was given to commemorate the 9/11 disaster 23 years ago today.

The invocation was given by Pastor Don Abrams with Trinity UMC.

The Pledge of Allegiance was given by Sergeant First Class Hopkins and Deputy Davidson in representation of the numerous brave First Responders and our brave military that responded to what happened after 9/11.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

There were no public comments given.

Vice-Chair Corbett thanked our Keith Lee with the Russell County Commission IT Department for Facebook Live and 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 was virtually remoted in. 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.

Vice-Chair Corbett stated that the agenda was approved at the work session on Monday night, September 9<sup>th</sup> and requested an addition of a Proclamation for the 85<sup>th</sup> Tuskegee-Morehouse game in order for them to add it in their program book due to time constraints.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Vice-Chair Corbett requested approval of the minutes from the Commission meeting on August 28, 2024. Commissioner Chambers moved to approve the minutes; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried to approve the minutes. Commissioner Costello abstained.

**PROCLAMATIONS, RESOLUTIONS AND PRESENTATIONS:**

Vice-Chair Corbett presented a proclamation for the Russell County Schools' Attendance Awareness Month to Ms. Paula and Mr. Johnson. County Administrator Chandra Wright read the following aloud:



**Proclamation of September 2024 as  
Attendance Awareness Month**

**WHEREAS**, *the nation is experiencing a school absenteeism crisis, making good attendance more essential than ever to student well-being, achievement and graduation; and*

**WHEREAS**, *students and families are more likely to show up and engage when there are positive conditions for learning at school, including physical and emotional health and safety; a sense of belonging, connection and support; academic challenges and engagement; and adults and peers with social emotional competency; and*

**WHEREAS**, reducing chronic absence (missing 10% or more of school for any reason) requires a comprehensive trauma-informed approach that starts with prevention and early intervention, including developing routines and trusting relationships that create a sense of belonging rather than responding with punitive action, which research finds is not particularly effective; and

**WHEREAS**, improving attendance and engagement takes schools, families, elected leaders and other community partners working together to rebuild regular and trusting communications and to identify and address barriers to being in school; and

**WHEREAS**, taking attendance daily in a caring, consistent manner is essential to identifying when students begin to miss too much school, and for noticing - as soon as possible - when students are starting to miss too much school and engaging students and families with needed support and resources; and

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Russell County Commission stands with the nation in recognizing September as "Attendance Awareness Month." We hereby commit to focusing on reducing absenteeism and addressing the factors that cause students to miss school in order to ensure all children an equal opportunity to learn, grow and thrive academically, emotionally, and socially. We recognize that we must work together to build an engaging school environment that motivates attendance and sends the message that learning can and must continue.

Specifically, we will:

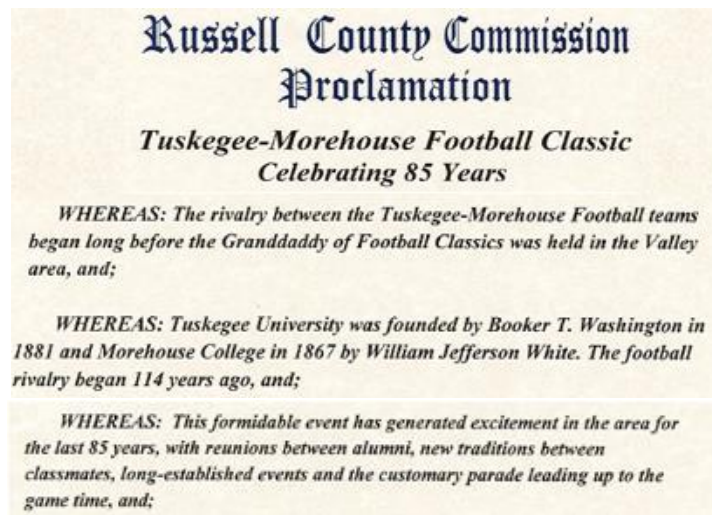
1. Engage students, families, educators and the broader community – including civic and elected leaders, local businesses, clergy members and nonprofit organizations – in working together to identify and remove barriers to getting to school in our community, and develop meaningful solutions that ensure all children and youth keep learning despite today’s many challenges.
2. Affirm the importance of showing up and engaging in school, and discuss with students and families what is needed to make showing up to school worthwhile.
3. Work with schools and districts and use an expanded set of data, (including analyzing attendance, digital access, availability of working contact information and relationships to school staff), which together paint a holistic picture of whether students are positioned to benefit from current learning opportunities, to monitor outcomes for different groups of students, raise public awareness, establish goals, allocate resources, track progress, and assure accountability for an equal opportunity to learn.

**THEREFORE**, we, the members of the Russell County Commission, do hereby proclaim **September 2024**, as **Attendance Awareness Month** in Russell County, Alabama.

**PASSED, ADOPTED, AND APPROVED**, this 11th day of September, 2024.

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

Vice-Chair Corbett presented a proclamation for the 85<sup>th</sup> Tuskegee-Morehouse game which was read by County Administrator Chandra Wright as follows:



*WHEREAS: The Tuskegee-Morehouse Game brings tremendous crowds to the Valley, stimulating the local economy as well as encouraging young men and women to obtain an education; not only with these prestigious institutions, but with other colleges and universities.*

*THEREFORE, LET IT BE KNOWN: The Russell County Commission would like to thank Tuskegee University and Morehouse College for sharing the last 85 years with the residents of Russell County, Alabama.*

*PASSED, ADOPTED, AND APPROVED, this 11th day of September, 2024.*

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.

#### **DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

There were no discussion items presented.

#### **BUSINESS ITEMS:**

Vice-Chair Corbett recognized Sheriff Taylor who presented an ABC license request for the Dix Store, which is a name change on a business license, as well as going from a beer and wine to a lounge liquor retail store on premise. Sheriff Taylor asked for the license approval by the Commission since they have done their due diligence and the investigation in the background of the name of the person asking for the license, as well as the community, so he recommended the license be approved. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Vice-Chair Corbett recognized Sheriff Taylor who presented the request to send out their annual Jail Food bids for the inmates and facility and asked the Commission office send out the food bids on September 12<sup>th</sup>, and have it returned on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September to be opened here in the chambers at 3 pm. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Vice-Chair Corbett recognized Tag Commissioner Carrie Bowman with the request for the vice-chair to sign their annual S&W vendor contract. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Chambers. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Vice-Chair Corbett recognized Maintenance Director Leon Watson who presented the request for the Vice-Chair to sign the awarded contract (that Ms. Hicks has drawn up) for Stamey Painting, out of Russell County, for the Ft. Mitchell Historical painting, which is a budgeted item. Commissioner Epps moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Screws. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Vice-Chair Corbett recognized Maintenance Director Leon Watson who presented the request to solicit bids for the on-site sewage disposal system at the Ft. Mitchell Trading Post (which is the Fort Mitchell Visitor Center). He will run the ad in the paper for three consecutive weeks starting on 9/20/24 through 10/4/24, have an on-site bid meeting on 9/30/24, end all bids at 10:00 am ET on 10/11/24 and open the bids in the Commission chambers at 10:30 am ET on 10/11/24. Then, tentatively awarding the successful bidder at the 10/23/24 Commission meeting. Commissioner Epps moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Chambers. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Vice-Chair Corbett presented the Juvenile Detention Center contract and recognized Mr. Moses for any questions. The contract is for \$140,056.55 for 4 beds: 2 beds that will be reimbursed from the city, two beds paid for by the county, and there will be an additional bed that is being paid for by the state directly to Lee County YDC (Youth Detention Center). Commissioner Screws moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion was approved and it was put in the budget.

Vice-Chair Corbett recognized County Administrator Chandra Wright who presented the FY 2024/2025 appropriations. She stated they were separated by community partner organizations, as well as non-profit

organizations. Her recommendations were in the green column on the presented sheet. She reminded the Commissioners that moving forward, the appropriations from non-profits will look differently with a complete overhaul of the application process will make them work more competitive, and also have it based on the availability of funds. So, just because they received funding this year from the Commissioners, does not guarantee that they would get funding moving forward. Commissioner Chambers moved to approve the recommendation; seconded by Commissioner Reed. Commissioner Screws mentioned sending letters today letting them know about the procedures for next year, and the cuts from this year. Ms. Wright agreed. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye, with Commissioner Lee opposing. Motion was approved.

#### **COUNTY ENGINEER:**

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney had nothing to present.

#### **SANITATION:**

Sanitation Director Ward Dudley presented a request to purchase 702 new garbage carts from Ingram Equipment in the amount of \$44,449.30, from the 2024/2025 budget and is a budgeted item. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Chambers. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Sanitation Director Ward Dudley presented the boom truck rate increase for their 16-yard boom truck, and it will cover any regulated waste that has to go to the landfill. He stated that any regulated waste that has to go to the landfill that they pick up with the boom truck will go from \$100 a load to \$225 per load. Commissioner Chambers moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

#### **ADMINISTRATOR:**

County Administrator Chandra Wright presented the Alabama State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program agreement and requested the vice-chair to sign the local constant agreement with the State of Alabama. Ms. Wright stated that Keith has already completed the first step, which is a survey, and this is the next step of the program. Commissioner Reed moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Epps. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

County Administrator Chandra Wright presented the Diversified Computer Services agreement and requested the vice-chair to sign the license software agreement in the amount of \$12,000 for the software that we use to file the ARPA reports with the Treasury Department. Commissioner Screws moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

County Administrator Chandra Wright presented the Long-Term Juvenile Detention Subsidy contract and requested the vice-chair to sign the contract that says that the Russell County Commission agrees that the Lee County Detention Center is the detention center of choice. Commissioner Chambers moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried. Vice-chair Corbett stated, for the minutes, that this is for the 4 beds, plus the state's bed.

County Administrator Chandra Wright presented the implementation of an Employee Appreciation Program. She stated that our Policy on Policies states that we have to have two readings of a new policy, so Ms. Wright read the first reading of the Employee Appreciation Program policy as follows:

### **Russell County Employee Recognition and Appreciation Program**

Pursuant to Amendment 909 of the Constitution of Alabama of 1901, the Russell County Commission ("RCC") does hereby establish the Russell County Employee Recognition and Appreciation Program ("ERAP") to express its appreciation to the dedicated employees of Russell County and to recognize those employees who have reached significant milestones in their years of service.

The scope of the ERAP is as follows:

1. An Employee Appreciation Day to be held once per year in the Spring/Summer.
2. The Appreciation Day will be held during the regular business hours of the RCC, at a premise or property owned or under the authority of the RCC.
3. An invitation to attend the Appreciation Day will be extended, via email and department heads, to all employees of the RCC.
4. The RCC Employee Appreciation Day will include a catered lunch, including a meal, beverages and dessert. The meal may be served either plated or buffet style.
5. Each quarter a department will nominate an employee to be recognized for following the safety policies established by the RCC or preventing an accident from happening on the RCC property.
6. Each department will nominate one employee to be recognized as Employee of the Month. That employee will be featured in the Citizen of East Alabama newspaper, given a certificate, attend a Commission meeting and receive an incentive approved by the Commissioners.
7. Employees of RCC who reach a five-year incremental employment anniversary after the preceding 12-month period will be given a service award, certificate and recognized at a Commission meeting.
8. Employees can also recognize each other for doing something "awesome". (Whether it be for another employee or for a customer.) The new slogan will be called "Bee Awesome". The employee being recognized will receive a small card that says, "Thank you for Bee-ing Awesome" and a "Bee" lapel pin to be worn.

The RCC shall cover all costs associated with the Employee Appreciation Day and all other recognition activities including meal catering or staff/elected official prepared, beverages, utensils, plaques, certificates, give-a-ways and other incidental costs. The County Administrator shall create a budget for the ERAP, and such budget must come before the RCC for approval prior to the expenditure of any funds related to the program. Further, the RCC shall maintain detailed records of all disbursements associated with the planning and execution of the ERAP, which will be subject to review by the Alabama Department of Examiners.

Ms. Wright stated that the Russell County Commission reserves the right to council or decrease the scope of the appreciation program as outlined above, however, the Russell County Commission shall not make any additions, or any way expand the appreciation program without following the notice procedures as outlined in Amendment 909 of the Constitution of Alabama of 1901 regarding the adoption of such programs and policies. Attorney Hicks stated that this is the first reading, and no voting is needed at this time. In discussion, Commissioner Screws asked if there was an outline of how the Employee of the Month would be selected. Ms. Wright agreed and stated that each department would be assigned a month of the year to recognize one of their employees, at the discretion of the Department Head.

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

There was nothing presented in this area.

#### **ATTORNEY:**

Attorney Hope Hicks presented a memorandum of understanding between the Office of Prosecution Services, the district attorney's office, and the Commission. She stated that the Commission voted at the last meeting that once she got the language squared away with, to have the chairman sign it. Ms. Hick requested, in the absence of the chairman that she asked them to vote to allow the vice-chair to sign the memorandum of understanding. Commissioner Lee moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Attorney Hope Hicks presented a petition to vacate a portion of the right-of-way by the Methodist Church of Pittsview and the Pitts Family Management, LLC, an area right in front of the Methodist Church in Commissioner Screws District 7. Ms. Hicks stated that if they are interested in moving forward with this, she asked Commissioner Screws make a motion to approve the petition of the Methodist Church of Pittsview and the Pitts Family Management, LLC, to vacate a portion of the right-of-way that abuts their property, then a public hearing would be scheduled before final action is taken, and a public notice for the public hearing of the proposal to vacate will need to be published for four weeks. A notice will need to be sent to all abutting and

affected landowners before the Commission can actually vote to approve it. Thus, the motion would be to just move forward with the process towards the vacation. Commissioner Lee verified with Ms. Hicks that the joining landowners will be notified and not have to read it in the paper. She agreed and stated that they will receive actual notices, there will also be a public notice in the newspaper and on the bulletin boards here, and then they'll receive letters notifying them. After further discussion, Commissioner Screws moved to approve this and move it forward; seconded by Commissioner Epps. All Commissioners were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

Attorney Hope Hicks spoke about Mr. Bill Friend (*Enforcement Office*) sharing a presentation about three meetings ago with the Commission about a piece of property that is owned by Mr. Milton Cook, and how Mr. Friend has asked Mr. Cook for years to clean it up, and nothing has been done. She stated that the Commission voted to approve the filing of a lawsuit against Mr. Cook, and she has drafted it and will be filing it today.

**COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION:**

Commissioner Reed spoke his concerns with many accidents between Post Ridge and Sandfort Road.

Commissioner Screws spoke of an area in his district that has become a big dump area that he would like something delt with.

Vice-chair Corbett recognized EMA Director David Martin who shared a grant announcement for his EMA department being a recipient of a \$5,000 grant from a Wiregrass RCND project for a community preparedness project they are working on with Russell County Management.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Announcements were made.

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