

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

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

The invocation was given by Pastor Donnie Lumpkin.

Commissioner Costello led the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

There were no public comments.

Chair Corbett requested to add under Discussion Items the Freedom Farms update and video presentation.

Chairman Corbett 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 Rod Costello, Commissioner Ronnie Reed, Commissioner Gentry Lee, Commissioner Scott Chambers, Commissioner Larry Screws, and Chairman Chance Corbett. Commissioner Cedric Darrell Darty 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.

The agenda was approved at the Monday night work session on December 9, 2024.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

2024.12.11 (CM)-1: Approval for November 27, 2024 Commission Meeting Minutes

Chair Corbett requested approval of the minutes from the Commission meeting on November 27, 2024. Commissioner Costello moved to approve the minutes presented in their book; seconded by Commissioner Chambers. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried to approve the minutes.

PROCLAMATIONS, RESOLUTIONS AND PRESENTATIONS:

Presentation: December 2024- Employee of the Month

Chair Corbett recognized Human Resources Director Max Herring who presented the December 2024 Employee of the Month to Mr. Dexter Gilmore from our Sanitation Department.

2024.12.11 (CM)-2: Proclamation: Ariel Smith - Legacies Senior Center (Crawford)

Chair Corbett presented the proclamation request for Ms. Ariel Smith for the work she has done as the first Director for the Legacies Senior Center at the Crawford Community Center. Ms. Smith will come to accept this at the next meeting. The following was read aloud by County Administrator Chandra Wright:

Russell County Commission
PROCLAMATION
Ariel Smith

WHEREAS, *The Russell County Commission hereby recognizes Mrs. Ariel Smith for her leadership and dedication to the Legacies Senior Center at the Crawford Community Center; and,*

WHEREAS, *Ariel began this journey as a college student conducting a survey at Crawford Market Days and upon learning of the county's desire to open a senior center, quickly inquired about the director position; and,*

WHEREAS, *working with Commissioner Chance Corbett, Ariel jumped right into the process by giving of her time to help come up with a great plan to launch the first senior center in the Crawford community of Russell County; and,*

WHEREAS, *Ariel's commitment to the Legacies Senior Center helped to quickly gain a membership that even surpassed other senior centers in the area, helping make sure that seniors had a place to go to get a good meal and fellowship with others; and,*

WHEREAS, *Ariel helped train another director and other assistants to help operate the senior center five days a week; and,*

THEREFORE, *we, the elected members of the Russell County Commission, do hereby recognize Mrs. Ariel Smith with this proclamation for her dedication and spirit of giving back. Ariel's effort will be forever remembered for enhancing and enriching the lives of our Russell County seniors.*

This Proclamation is adopted and approved this 11th day of December, 2024.

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

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Chair Corbett recognized Pastor Donnie Lumpkin who shared a presentation video from Freedom Farms and thanked the Commission for the appropriation funding that was given to their project helping the community.

BUSINESS ITEMS:

2024.12.11 (CM)-3: Approval to Advertise for Bids - LED Sign (Tourism)

Chair Corbett requested to advertise and send out bids for one or two signs one for the Crawford Fire Department area and the other for the Ladonia area (to replace the current sign that's several years old and having issues). Chair Corbett moved to send out bids with the deadline for the bids to be received in the Commission office on Friday, January 3, 2025, at 3 pm ET, and the packets will be opened shortly after on January 3, 2025, at 3:30 pm in the Commission chambers. Hopefully, award the bid at the next Commission meeting on January 8th. Seconded by Commissioner Chambers. Chair Corbett stated that this will be out of Tourism Funds and that it is for only the sign itself, not for the construction around the sign. He stated it will be done in house so he will bring that back once the material list for the construction of the sign. He reiterated that these bids are only for the sign itself along with the installation and programming of the sign. He will note in the bid specs that it will utilize the same programming as our other signs so it can be streamlined. Chair Corbett stated that this is Tourism, not ARPA funds. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

2024.12.11 (CM)-4: Usage of Commission Chambers Policy: 2nd Reading

Chair Corbett presented the second reading of the usage of the Commission Chambers that was drafted by the attorney. Commissioner Costello moved to approve the original draft where all governmental functions are approved by the county administrator, and any other persons would have to come through the commission itself for permission. Approval is for the second reading of the first policy. Seconded by Commissioner Lee. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried. The following policy was approved:

POLICY REGARDING USE OF THE RUSSELL COUNTY COMMISSION CHAMBERS

The Russell County Commission Chambers are owned and operated by the Russell County Commission to accomplish the business of the Russell County Commission on behalf of the citizens of Russell County, Alabama. The Russell County Commission has the power to preserve the property under its control for the use to which it is lawfully dedicated. ¹

The Russell County Commission Chambers are contained in the Russell County Courthouse which is a government workplace. The physical characteristics of the Courthouse require that the safety and security of the building be maintained for the protection of those who work in and conduct business in the building. The Russell County Commission may, therefore, exercise its right to control access to the Commission Chambers to avoid interruptions to the performance of the duties of its employees² and to protect the safety and well-being of the employees working in the Russell County Courthouse.

Accordingly, on December 11, 2024, by Resolution Number 2024.12.11 (CM)-4, the Russell County Commission has adopted the following policies.

1. The use of the Russell County Commission Chambers is to be primarily used for conducting the business of the Russell County Commission. Any use beyond this must be approved in advance and must not conflict with that purpose.
2. Use of the Russell County Commission Chambers for government business must be approved by the County Administrator. Requests should be submitted in writing two weeks in advance of the date requested for use. Requests submitted with less than two weeks' notice will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
3. Use of the Russell County Commission Chambers for non-government business must be approved by the Russell County Commission. Requests should be submitted to the County Administrator one week prior to the County Commission meeting before the requested event. The Russell County Commission meets the second and fourth Wednesdays of most months.

¹ Perry Educ. Ass'n v. Perry Loc. Educators' Ass'n, 460 U.S. 37, 46 (1983)

² Cornelius v. NAACP Legal Def. & Fund, Inc., 473 U.S. 788, 805-806 (1985)

2024.12.11 (CM)-5: Tourism Budget FY25

Chair Corbett presented the Tourism Budget breakdown for approval that includes one-time expenses, including the Sheriff's rodeo, and Columbus in the Valley tourism flyer pamphlet. The prior Tourism budget was \$284,136. Of that, take out one-time expenses will bring that down to \$206,136. Chair Corbett requested approval of this Tourism budget so that they can move forward with these projects, and anything outside of this that is deemed to be tourism will come back to the commission for approval. Commissioner Lee moved to approve; seconded by Commissioner Costello. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

2024.12.11 (CM)-6: Hobo Pantry

Chair Corbett recognized Commissioner Screws who requested to accept the proposal from Hobo Pantry to be approved to get it going for Seale. Chair Corbett stated that the proposal is upon construction, future sales tax the Commission would abate 50% of the future sales tax until we reach a total amount of \$300,000 for a nice facility in an area that needs it. We will receive those future sales taxes of 50% up to \$300,000, and then at 100% therefore owned. Commissioner Screws moved to approve this request; seconded by Commissioner Lee. In discussion, Commissioner Lee stated that this needs to be monitored closely and be a separate line item each time, instead of just a total sales tax. Chair Corbett stated that we'll get Ms. Wright to talk to the Department of Revenue. Chair Corbett added that this company plans to break ground in the first quarter of 2025, possibly January, and it should be a huge addition to the Seale area. County Administrator Chandra Wright called the vote of the Commission as follows: District 3: Commissioner Costello, yes; District 4: Commissioner Reed, yes; District 1: Commissioner Lee, yes; District 2: Commissioner Chambers, yes; District 7: Commissioner Screws, yes; and District 6: Chairman Corbett, yes. Motion carried. Commissioner Lee added that, from the Monday night discussion, this would bring in 20 new jobs and that's why he was in favor of it. Chair Corbett they are looking to receive an estimate of up to \$100,000 in sales tax a year.

2024.12.11 (PR)-1: Probate Judge Fees

Chair Corbett recognized Judge Harden who presented the \$5 renewal of the Indexing Fund, which comes from anytime anyone records a deed or a mortgage in their office, the office receives \$5. When it does, it's the discretion of the Probate Judge where he normally uses those funds to offset things he would normally have to put in his budget such as furniture, fixtures, computers, software, and it normally averages about \$40,000 a year in that fund. Judge Harden asked for approval for it to continue at \$5 until it goes through legislation to go up to \$7 or \$10. Commissioner Chambers moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All

Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried. Also, Commissioner Costello moved to have the attorney draft and send a letters to both the senators and representatives (signed by the chair) to support increasing it to the amount of \$7.50, with a cap of \$10. Seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

2024.12.11 (SH)-1: Request for Opioid Settlement Funds Purchase

Chair Corbett recognized Sheriff Heath Taylor who requested approval of purchasing 2 sensors from Reassurance Solutions for the cost of \$12,300, with the sensors being installed into two cells at the jail to monitor the breathing of the individuals that are put into the cells. He stated that this is directly related to inmates that would come into the facility that they do not know have taken some or ingested some type of narcotic and pass out while in custody, in relation to the fentanyl going around, so they will have the opportunity to give them medical aid, if needed. Sheriff Taylor requested approval of the \$12,300 purchase to come out of opioid settlement money that has been approved by the county attorney. Commissioner Chambers moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Reed. Commissioner Lee asked if this would be under the bid law. Chair Corbett stated that the bid law is currently \$30,000, so this is way under it. County Administrator Chandra Wright called the vote of the Commission as follows: District 3: Commissioner Costello, yes; District 4: Commissioner Reed, yes; District 1: Commissioner Lee, yes; District 2: Commissioner Chambers, yes; District 7: Commissioner Screws, yes; and District 6: Chairman Corbett, yes. Motion carried.

COUNTY ENGINEER:

County Engineer Shawn Blakeney had nothing to present at this time.

SANITATION:

2024.12.11 (SD)-1: Purchase Dumpsters

Sanitation Director Ward Dudley asked permission to order 20 more dumpsters: 10 four-yard dumpsters and 10 six-yard dumpsters, ordering them from Ingram Equipment and it is a budgeted item through a SourceWell contract, for a total price (delivered to us) of \$26,978.50. Commissioner Lee moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Chambers. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

ADMINISTRATOR:

2024.12.11 (CM)-7: 2025 Severe Weather Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday

County Administrator presented the resolution request in order to participate in the 2025 Severe Weather Preparedness Annual Sales tax holiday, to be signed by the chair, and returned to the Alabama Department of Revenue. This event happens the last weekend of February 2025. Commissioner Costello moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Chambers. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried. The following was approved:

**RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR RUSSELL COUNTY'S ANNUAL
PARTICIPATION IN THE "SEVERE WEATHER PREPAREDNESS
SALES TAX HOLIDAY" AS AUTHORIZED BY 40-23-230
THROUGH 40-23-233, CODE OF ALABAMA 1975**

WHEREAS, during its 2012 Regular Session, the Alabama Legislature enacted Act No. 2012-256 (40-23-230 through 40-23-233, Code of Alabama 197.2), effective April 26, 2012, which provides an exemption of the state sales and use tax for certain purchases related to severe weather preparedness supplies during the first full weekend in February 2012 and the last full weekend of February in subsequent years; and

WHEREAS, 40-23-233, Code of Alabama 1975 authorizes the county commission to provide for an exemption of county sales and use taxes for purchases of items covered by the Act during the same time period in which the state sales and use tax exemption is in place, provided a resolution to that effect is adopted at least thirty days prior to the last full weekend in February; and

WHEREAS, the Russell County Commission has affirmatively voted to grant the exemption of county sales and use taxes on purchases covered by 40-23-230 through 40-23-233, Code of Alabama 1975, during the last weekend of February, beginning at 12:01 a.m. on the last Friday in February and ending at twelve midnight on the last Sunday in February, beginning in February 2025 **and continuing on the last full weekend of February each year thereafter** until and unless annual participation is rescinded by further action of the county **commission; and**

WHEREAS, Code of Alabama 1975, § 11-51-210(e) requires that the county commission notify the Alabama Department of Revenue of any new local tax or amendment to an existing local tax levy at least 30 days prior to the effective date of the change; and

WHEREAS, the exemption of certain county sales and use taxes for the last full weekend of February herein adopted by the county commission is an amendment to the county's sales and use tax levy warranting notice to the Alabama Department of Revenue as provided in Code of Alabama 1975, § 11-51-210(e);

WHEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE RUSSELL COUNTY COMMISSION that it does hereby provide for an exemption of the county sales and use tax on purchases of items covered by 40-23-230 through 40-23-233, Code of Alabama 1975, beginning at 12:01 a.m. on the last Friday in February and ending at twelve midnight on the last Sunday in February, beginning in February 2025 **and continuing on the last full weekend of February each year thereafter** until and unless annual participation is rescinded by further action of the county **commission.**

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be spread upon the minutes of the December 11, 2024 meeting of the Russell County Commission and be immediately forwarded to the Alabama Department of Revenue in compliance with Code of Alabama 1975, § 11-51-210(e).

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Russell County Commission has caused this Resolution to be executed in its name and on its behalf by its Chairman on this the 11th day of December, 2024.


 Chance Corbett
 Chairman, Russell County Commission

2024.12.11 (CM)-8: Budget Transfer Request

County Administrator presented the following budget request. She stated that in doing the budgeting process, the overtime pay was included in Line Item #113, which is Other Salaries and Wages. By the recommendation of the auditors, she requested a budget transfer from Line Item # 113 to Line Item # 149. She stated that this allows us to break down overtime pay and this will have an impact on any offices or departments that have employees that work overtime. Commissioner Costello; seconded by Commissioner Reed. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

CORONAVIRUS RESCUE ACT FUND:

2024.12.11 (CM)-9: Remaining ARPA Funds \$49,268.54

County Administrator stated that during the final recommendations of the remaining ARPA funds, \$75,000 was allocated to the Building Inspection Department. During their process of allocating those funds a remaining balance of \$49,268.54 has been unspent and not allocated at this time. Chair Corbett mentioned there is obviously a need to get this money spent so that they are getting in the right projects, and we had projects that were waiting. Those included fencing projects at the new Seale playground that was completely renovated and installed. The Engineer and Parks & Rec. Director with Ray have pulled the projects for fencing: Ft. Mitchell to replace some recently damaged fence, Seale playground, Ladonia gate, and field one and two in Ladonia which totals \$44,719.93. Also, Ray mentioned that he and Shawn Blakeney have a piece of equipment that is in dire need of purchasing. So, Chair Corbett moved to, as revenue replacement, they use ARPA funds for Parks & Recreation fencing and equipment for the Highway Department. Seconded by

Commissioner Chambers. In discussion, it was verified that "field one and two" is in Ladonia. Commissioner Lee noted for the minutes, that since this is more than the ARPA money, the remainder will be taken out of the budget. Ray stated that the highway equipment is for \$7,995, and the \$3,446.39 will come out of the Highway Department funds budget, and it will be adjusted as needed. County Administrator Chandra Wright called the vote of the Commission as follows: District 3: Commissioner Costello, yes; District 4: Commissioner Reed, yes; District 1: Commissioner Lee, yes; District 2: Commissioner Chambers, yes; District 7: Commissioner Screws, yes; and District 6: Chairman Corbett, yes. Motion carried.

ATTORNEY:

2024.12.11 (CM)-10: Executive Session

Attorney Hicks presented the request to go into Executive Session following today's public meeting to discuss the consideration the government body is willing to offer or accept when considering the purchase, sale, exchange, lease, or market value of real property. Ms. Hicks stated that as an attorney licensed to practice law in the state of Alabama, she stated that this is an appropriate reason to go into executive session. She stated that the Commission would simply leave this meeting, go into executive session and adjourn the meeting from the executive session. Commissioner Costello moved to approve the request; seconded by Commissioner Chambers. All Commissioners present were in favor and said aye. Motion carried.

COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION:

Commissioner Costello wished everyone a Merry Christmas and safe holiday for next week.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Announcements were made.

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