

Houston County Commissioners Meeting
February 20, 2024
Warner Robins, Georgia

The Houston County Board of Commissioners met in a regular session at 5:00 pm on Tuesday, February 20, 2024, at the Houston County Annex in Warner Robins, Georgia, with Chairman Perdue presiding and Commissioners Byrd, Gottwals, Robinson, and Talton present. County Attorney Tom Hall, Director of Administration Robbie Dunbar, and Director of Operations Brian Jones were also present.

Commissioner Byrd led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Reverend Doctor Rutha Jackson, author of *The Battlefield of Belonging*, gave the invocation and spoke about Black History Month, focusing on the history of racial equality struggles and advancement in Houston County.

She spoke of pioneering African Americans in Houston County, Silas Smith and Oscar Tommy, Sr. She spoke about the contributions that they and others made for equality advancements for the African American community in Houston County. She concluded by referencing a book, *We Came in Chains: "Lost Links" History and Lineage of African American Families from Houston County, Georgia*, by Lavoris Gail Alexander.

The Chairman and each board member thanked Rev. Dr. Jackson for her service to the community. They also thanked her for sharing her experiences, the racial history in Houston County, and the changes and advancements made in Houston County.

Houston County Fire Chief Chris Stoner spoke of his thanks to the Flint Energies Foundation for their support and the \$40,000 in grant money used to purchase four battery-powered pieces of extrication equipment that will be used to rescue personnel trapped in vehicles following a collision.

Houston County Extension Coordinator Brandi McGonagil spoke of her thanks to the Flint Energies Foundation for the support they received from the foundation and for the \$20,000 Flint Energies Foundation grant that will be used to fund an outdoor classroom for students who participate in activities through the County Agent's Office in Houston County.

Representatives from Flint Energies present included Jeremy Nelms, who made comments regarding the Flint Energies grant program and who then introduced senior Flint Energies staff Vice Presidents Rogie Roberson and Marianne McLemore. He then introduced John LaPino of the Flint Foundation Board.

Community Planner Jake Cox spoke about the United Way Campaign run in 2023 and the results of the campaign. He also mentioned the Jeff Smith Auto Raffle which was another fundraiser and part of the campaign. As an incentive to participate in this raffle, prizes were made available for County employees who participated and a drawing of names for these prizes was held with Chairman Perdue picking the tickets at random.

Chairman Perdue advised that there was a need for an add-on to the agenda and requested a motion to add item #15, a Personnel Request.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the addition of item #15 to the agenda.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the minutes from the February 6, 2024 meeting.

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued from Page 338

County Attorney Tom Hall conducted the first reading of a proposed amendment to the Houston County Code of Ordinances. The proposed amendment to Section 62-56 will add Old Hawkinsville Road to the list of roads where through truck traffic is prohibited. A second reading and Public Hearing will be held at the March 5, 2024, 9:00 am Board of Commissioners meeting.

County Attorney Tom Hall conducted a second reading of a proposed amendment to Section 2-273(b) of the Houston County Code of Ordinances regarding Capital Budget Policies. The proposed amendment will redefine a capital project for inclusion in the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) as being any asset or project "in excess of \$5,000.00" to be "in excess of \$10,000.00."

The first reading of this proposed amendment to the Houston County Code of Ordinances was held at the February 6, 2024 meeting. Public notification of the proposed amendment was published in the Houston Home Journal legal section for three consecutive weeks. A copy of the proposed amendment was on file at the Superior Court Clerk's office for examination and inspection by the public.

Chairman Perdue closed the commissioners meeting and opened a Public Hearing.

As there were no comments, Chairman Perdue closed the Public Hearing and reopened the commissioners meeting.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all to approve an amendment to the Houston County Code of Ordinances Section 2-273(b) to increase the required asset or project amount from "excess of \$5,000.00" to be "excess of \$10,000.00." The amended Section 2-273(b) shall read as follows:

Sec. 2-273 – Capital budget policies.

(b) Houston County will seek to develop a five-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) annually to direct the financing of and appropriations for all capital projects. Houston County defines a capital project for inclusion in the CIP as any asset or project in excess of \$10,000.00 with an estimated useful life of three years.

Chairman Perdue commented that this action would update and modernize the County's Capital Budget Policies.

Mr. Byrd presented a rate adjustment recommendation to the Solid Waste Collection Service Agreement. Staff recommends use of the current rate of 5.5% from the US. Department of Labor Consumer Price Index for water, sewer, and trash for the rate adjustment. It is further recommended the increase of \$1.21 is passed through to the customer. This increase, effective April 1, 2024, will increase trash collections rates to \$23.16, and Landfill disposal rates will also increase by 5.5% per ton for all categories effective the first billing cycle after July 1, 2024.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the increase, effective April 1, 2024, of trash collection rates to \$23.16. Also, to increase Landfill disposal rates by 5.5% per ton for all categories, effective the first billing cycle after July 1, 2024.

Chairman Perdue stated that through this action, the County would be utilizing an existing provision in the contract with Waste Management to keep pace with cost increases and utilizing the CPI (Consumer Price Index). He also said that plans were in place to move to a more economical way of garbage pickup for County residents by moving to an automated pickup method and incorporating a subscription-type service that would allow for residents to

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued from Page 339

choose the level of service they would like to have. He concluded his comments by saying that for the last several months, the quality of service Waste Management has provided for County residents has improved.

Mr. Byrd presented a request for Abandonment of Easement for property located at 306 Tharpe Road, Warner Robins, GA.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of the Resolution Abandoning County Interest in Drainage Easement being any and all interest Houston County may have in a 20' Drainage Easement that is located on the subject property located at 306 Tharpe Road, Warner Robins, GA 31088. The approval and signing of said Resolution will further authorize Chairman Perdue to sign a quit claim deed conveying any and all interest Houston County may have in the Drainage Easement to the property owner.

The easement rights to be conveyed are as follows:

All that tract or parcel of land situate, lying and being in Land Lot 92 of the Fifth (5th) Land District of Houston County, Georgia, being known as the "20' DRAINAGE EASEMENT (TO BE ABANDONED) according to a Plat of Survey prepared by Frank Cook Dated December 14, 2006, and recorded in Plat Book 68, Page 60, Clerk's Office, Houston Superior Court.

This conveyance is subject to any easements recorded or prescriptive for utilities presently existing within the above-described property.

Mr. Byrd presented a request for Right-of-Way Abandonment for property located on Terrell Road. The portion of right-of-way to be considered for abandonment is adjacent to three parcels, and they are as follows: 640 041 (owner Gwendolyn McGinty Peavy); 640 024 (owners Timothy S. and Dana G. Blue); and 640 023 (owner Nancy M. Garcia). Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 32-7-2(b)(1) all property owners with property that sits upon the right-of-way were notified that a public hearing regarding this request would be held today and notice of the public hearing for the purpose of discussing the abandonment was advertised in the Houston Home Journal once a week for two weeks.

Chairman Perdue closed the Commissioners meeting and opened a Public Hearing.

As there were no comments, Chairman Perdue closed the Public Hearing and reopened the regular portion of the commissioners meeting.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of A Resolution of Right-of-Way Abandonment by the Board of Commissioners of Houston County, Georgia abandoning any and all interest Houston County may have in the portion of the original Terrell Road right-of-way that Public Works has determined to be an unused remnant of said right-of-way. The approval and signing of the Resolution will further authorize Chairman Perdue to sign abandonment deeds conveying any and all interest Houston County may have to the property owners owning property adjacent to the abandoned portion of right-of-way.

Chairman Perdue commented that this unused remnant of the original Terrell Road right-of-way can be abandoned and given to the adjacent property owners.

Mr. Talton presented a Memorandum of Agreement between Houston County, City of Warner Robins, City of Perry, City of Centerville, and the City of Byron that details the bidding procedures for road projects to be completed with 2024 LMIG funds.

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued from Page 340

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of the 2024 LMIG Memorandum of Understanding with the cities of Byron, Centerville, Perry, and Warner Robins.

Chairman Perdue commented that this cooperation among local governments in Houston County and the City of Byron is a great example of inter-government cooperation and will help to stretch these tax dollars further.

Mr. Talton presented a correction to Change Order #1 for the Improvements to Serve AE Harris Road approved at the February 6, 2024 meeting.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Byrd and carried unanimously by all to approve the correction to the approved total contract amount of \$1,177,139.25 for the Improvements to Serve AE Harris Road.

Ms. Meg Mehserle, of Perry, Georgia, stood and, out of order, asked the board a question regarding Item #5 concerning the Right-of-Way abandonment.

Chairman Perdue explained the abandonment of right-of-way process and why it is done.

Mr. Byrd also spoke as to the reasons the abandonments of right-of-way are done.

Mr. Talton presented Change Order #1 on the Bear Branch Remote Well Addition.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all to approve Change Order #1 for the Bear Branch Remote Well Addition decreasing the amount by \$119,841.80 bringing the total contract price to \$2,198,827.50.

Mr. Talton presented a request for approval of a bid on one 2024 CAT 950GC 01B Wheel Loader.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the bid on one 2024 CAT 950GC 01B Wheel Loader from Yancey Bros. Co. of Macon, Georgia in the amount of \$312,502 with the option of 60 month / 3,000 hours extended warranty for an additional \$1,770 for a total of \$314,272. This purchase will be funded by 2012 SPLOST.

Ms. Robinson presented a Memorandum of Understanding between Houston County Board of Commissioners, the Georgia 4-H Foundation, and Parrish Construction Group, Inc. for the construction of an outdoor classroom and the reimbursement of funds for the construction.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Houston County Board of Commissioners, the Georgia 4-H Foundation, and Parrish Construction Group, Inc. This understanding shows Parrish Construction Group of Perry, Georgia to be responsible for the concrete installation and finish work on the concrete necessary, and the Georgia 4-H Foundation to be responsible for reimbursement to the County in an amount not to exceed \$20,000.00 for costs related to the project. The County will pay the remaining cost for the project from Extension Office Funds.

Ms. Robinson presented a request for approval of a bid on the 40' X 72' outdoor classroom at the UGA Extension Office.

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued from Page 341

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the bid on one 40' X 72' outdoor classroom at the UGA Extension Office from Short and Paulk of Tifton, Georgia in the amount of \$26,878.43. This purchase will be funded by the Extension Office, and \$20,000 will be reimbursed by the Georgia 4-H Foundation.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Gottwals and carried unanimously by all to approve the appointment of Dr. Jeff Washington to the Houston County Library Board to fill the unexpired term of Jean Jones. This term will begin February 20, 2024 and expire June 30, 2024.

Mr. Byrd spoke in appreciation of Ms. Jones and her service on the Library Board as well as his appreciation of Mr. Washington for his willingness to serve.

Chairman Perdue commented on the fact that Ms. Jones was leaving due to her spouse relocating for work.

Mr. Gottwals confirmed Mr. Perdue's statement.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request for a pay adjustment for the Board of Equalization.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve an increase in the rate of pay for the Board of Equalization from \$50 per meeting for chairman to \$100 a meeting, and from \$50 a meeting for members to \$75 a meeting.

Chairman Perdue commented that members of the Board of Equalization attend initial and ongoing training for their work on this board, thus the need to increase the compensation for the time that they are in this training and for the Board of Equalization meetings they attend.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the payment of the bills totaling \$1,533,519.71.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request to reclassify two positions in the Protective (Building) Inspection Department.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the reclassification of the following positions in the Protective (Building) Inspection Department effective February 20, 2024:

Building Official/P&Z Administrator (#0058) to Grade 33
Building Inspector (#0055) to Grade 19

Also, for the Accounting Department to make any budgetary adjustments.

Chairman Perdue commented that the Planning and Zoning Department was overlooked during the review of County departments for personnel needs and this action is being taken to rectify that omission. He also confirmed with Director of Personnel Ken Carter that there were 2 Building Inspector positions.

Chairman Perdue closed the regular portion of the meeting and opened Public Comments commenting that there would be a limit of three minutes for each person wanting to speak.

Ms. Meg Mehserle of Perry Georgia spoke of her past employment as a poll worker and as a poll watcher. She spoke of her termination from employment and her dissatisfaction and distrust of the election process, Debra Presswood, Houston County Board of Elections Director, and employees of the Houston County Board of Elections.

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued from Page 342

Chairman Perdue let Ms. Mehserle know when her allotted time was over, then asked if anyone else would like to speak.

Ms. Mehserle, again speaking out of turn from her seat, stated that her comments would not be covered by media because the Chairman would not respond to her, and requested a response.

Chairman Perdue again asked if anyone else would like to speak.

Darryl Allen, of Warner Robins, spoke of his dissatisfaction with elected officials on the Federal and local level and questioned their motives, morality, intentions, honor, beliefs, and conservative standing.

There being no further comments Chairman Perdue closed the Public Comments portion of the meeting.

Chairman Perdue opened the floor for Commissioner's Comments.

Chairman Perdue addressed comments made by Meg Mehserle regarding her allegations against Debra Presswood, Houston County Board of Elections Director and the Houston County Board of Elections. He stated that the allegation had been investigated and been found to be wanting. He stated that anyone can get up and make accusations based on hearsay and rumor; he further expressed his support for Ms. Presswood and her staff and the entire Board of Elections in Houston County who run fair, just, legal and equitable elections. He asked that his comments be put into the minutes.

Mr. Gottwals expressed his appreciation for everyone involved in the process. He said that the idea of being successful in an election and being put in a position of power--as it had been said during public comments--being an automatic expulsion from morality and decency, was absurd. He stated that he was not going to try and defend anyone in particular, but that the judgment of just being on a platform or being a duly elected official was reason enough to say that you are abject, absent of any moral integrity was incomprehensible. He stated that nothing had changed from the moment he wasn't an elected official to the moment that he was. He had tried his best to stand with integrity and that to say otherwise was a very unfair assessment. He stated that from personal experience, with everyone on the board, he could say the same thing. He again spoke of his appreciation for everyone willing to be involved and be vocal but that sometimes comments are wrong and that there was no other way about it.

Ms. Robinson thanked everyone for being there and for those who expressed their concerns. She spoke of her appreciation for everyone coming out and being part of the meeting and part of Houston County.

Mr. Talton thanked everyone for being there. He thanked Flint Energies Foundation for what they had done for the county and for the surrounding cities and counties. He thanked Rev. Dr. Jackson for what she has done for the county, and for coming to speak about Black History Month. He also spoke about the collaborative efforts among the cities in Houston County and Byron regarding the LMIG grant. He concluded by saying he was proud to serve Houston County.

Mr. Byrd spoke in support of the Board of Elections Director Debra Presswood and her staff in the fair and secure way in which they run elections in Houston County. He also echoed Mr. Gottwals' comments relative to the morals, values, service, and faith of the current board. He stated that the comment about no response from the board was incorrect but that maybe it was that the response from the board was not the one that was wanted. He stated that those were two very different things.

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued from Page 343

He recognized the recent passing of former Northside High School Principal Ed Dyson, calling him impactful, and one of the most respected human beings that he knew. He stated that Mr. Dyson had been his and Ms. Robinson's principal at Northside High School. He spoke of Mr. Dyson's leadership and the role played in the lives of so many students at Northside. He further commented on the life of Mr. Dyson as a U.S. Army veteran, teacher, coach, being an active member of his church, and his community involvement on the Hospital Authority Board.

Motion to adjourn by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all. Meeting adjourned.

Robbie Dunbar
Director of Administration

Chairman

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner