

Houston County Commissioners Meeting

June 4, 2024

Perry, Georgia

The Houston County Board of Commissioners met in a regular session at 9:00 am on Tuesday, June 4, 2024, at the Houston County Courthouse in Perry, 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 gave the Invocation.

Commissioner Talton led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

SSgt Derrick Hargrove, a contract specialist at the Air Force Sustainment Center at Robins Air Force Base, spoke about his job and position as a contract specialist. He gave details about the work, duties and responsibilities of his position, and that of his organization within the Air Force. He served in the Air Force for 7 years with his first 6 years as a meteorologist. SSgt Hargrove has been stationed at bases in Germany, Italy and Turkey and traveled all over Europe. He mentioned this is his first duty station back in the United States and that he finds it interesting getting acclimated back into the American culture. He finished by saying that he is new to the area, having moved here in October of 2023, and spoke of his appreciation for the support and welcome he has received into the Houston County community.

Chairman Perdue and the Commissioners expressed their appreciation to SSgt Hargrove for his service and the fiscal responsibility to save taxpayer money with the work he does. The Commissioners welcomed him to Houston County and thanked him for the kind words about the Houston County community.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the minutes of the May 21, 2024 meeting.

Chairman Perdue spoke on some of the rules of public speaking at a Commissioner's Meeting, explaining that rude and vulgar behavior would not be allowed and that everyone speaking would be limited to five minutes. He also explained that anyone not following the rules would be called out of order and escorted out of the meeting and out of the building.

Chief Building Inspector Tim Andrews presented Special Exception Applications #2771 through #2774, and #2776 through #2779.

Chairman Perdue opened a Public Hearing on the Special Exceptions.

Applicant #2771 was present with nothing further to add, there was no opposition.
Applicant #2772 was not present with nothing further to add, there was no opposition.
Applicant #2773 was present with nothing further to add, there was no opposition.
Applicant #2774 was present with nothing further to add, there was no opposition.
Applicant #2776 was present with nothing further to add, there was no opposition.
Applicant #2777 was present with nothing further to add, there was no opposition.
Applicant #2778 was present with nothing further to add, there was no opposition.
Applicant #2779 was not present with nothing further to add, there was no opposition.

With no comments, Chairman Perdue closed the Public Hearing and reopened the regular portion of the meeting.

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Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the following Special Exception Applications to include any and all stipulations as noted on the Zoning & Appeals recommendation and Section 95 Requirements staff report:

#2771	Larry & Dorothy Winningham	Health and wellness training
#2773	Christopher & Ericka Wright	Game Truck Business
#2774	SR Perry LLC	Solar Technician Maintenance Shop
#2776	John Faherty Eileen Ford-Faherty	Apparel Decoration
#2777	Andres Acosta	Short-term Rental & Property Management
#2778	Maebell Burchette	Personal Care

and to disapprove the following Special Exception Applications:

#2772	Matthew & Jesica Martin	Lawn Care Business
#2779	Delbert & April Golden	Lawn Care Business

Mr. Andrews instructed those applicants whose applications were approved on the next step in getting their business license, which is to go to the Commissioner's Office and apply for the license.

County Attorney Tom Hall made a blanket statement for the benefit of all applicants for Special Exceptions for home occupations, that even if the Board of Commissioners approves an application, neighborhood covenants may still impose certain restrictions upon or against home businesses. These restrictive covenants are not superseded by any action the Board of Commissioners takes. The actions taken by the Board will not change any provision within the covenant that prohibits any commercial or business activity.

Leading into the FY25 Budget Presentation, Chairman Perdue spoke at length about the requirements by the State of Georgia for having accurate property assessment values as mandated by the Georgia Department of Revenue. He then spoke about the negative implications should the County be deficient in its assessed residential property values. He finished by presenting the FY25 budget for the County, and speaking on revenue, expenses and a balanced budget.

Commissioner Byrd expressed his appreciation to all who were involved in the budget process.

Chairman Perdue expressed his appreciation to Chief Financial Officer Danyelle George, Senior Accountant Will Davis and Director of Administration Robbie Dunbar for their hard work on preparing the budget.

Chairman Perdue closed the regular portion of the meeting and opened a Public Hearing.

Colonel Kit Allen gave his appreciation for the great explanation and for the promise by the Commissioners of doing their best to not raise taxes.

Frankie Ross thanked the Chairman and Commissioners for their hard work and the thorough explanation given about the budget and tax assessments.

Jennifer and David Tribble thanked the Chairman and Commissioners for the explanation about the tax assessments but questioned why the assessed value on her house could increase so dramatically. Jennifer stated she was concerned with the appraisal process.

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David Tribble had a question about accessories such as a pool and how having a pool could be assessed itself and increase the value of the entire property when his pool is over five years old.

Jacqueline Taylor spoke about having a tax cap for senior citizens and spoke about the hardships that seniors face financially from these high tax assessments.

Greg Sutton said he was concerned about those who are retired and on a fixed income and the impact that this tax assessment would have on their budget. He questioned the permanence of the tax cap in Houston County.

Chairman Perdue commented that the only way to remove the tax cap in Houston County would be for a referendum for the voters of Houston County to vote on removing it.

Robert Barringer commented on the idea of increasing the \$250.00 senior citizen benefit the County offers. He also commented that high taxes contribute to blight because homeowners don't have the money to repair their property.

Janet Wells expressed concern about the appraisal process for residential property in Houston County. She stated that she was willing to hire her own appraiser for an independent verification of her property's value and see how it would compare with the County's assessment. She further commented about surrounding counties offering a decrease on school taxes for residents 65 and over and questioned why Houston County couldn't do the same.

Chairman Perdue replied that Houston County schools are outstanding because of the community's financial support and that decreasing this support would decrease the high quality of the schools.

Zeng Xiang Yan had a question about a freeze on home revaluations.

Chairman Perdue mentioned House Bill 581 and how this referendum if passed, would provide for a floating homestead exemption, which would perform a similar action.

Leroy Smith had questions about commercial property and how, with no improvements made to his property, it could increase so much in value over the past few years.

Chairman Perdue commented that commercial property had not seen as much of a rise in revaluations in the past but that commercial property was now being reassessed in Houston County.

Rev. Dr. Rutha Jackson thanked Chairman Perdue for the thorough explanation and advised that she owns rental property and with these assessments raising taxes on her properties that she will be forced to raise the rental rates for those living in her rental properties. She also expressed the idea of having senior citizens be assessed at a lower rate and concluded her remarks by thanking the Board for holding the line on the rise in millage rates.

Susan Lemme spoke about the history of the home she lives in and the age and condition of it along with its location. She asked, with all these factors, how her home could be assessed to the level it was. She expressed her appreciation for the potential of a millage rate rollback, thanked the Board for an opportunity to give public comments and asked that the Board do what they could to help senior citizens.

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Mike Ross had a question about a law that would stop people from receiving an assessment notice first and then a bill later.

Chairman Perdue advised that the assessment notice would still be received first before the actual tax bill but that the format for the assessment notice will change to make it more understandable.

Betty Douglas thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak and spoke about the high tax assessment increase on her property and how hard it will be on her budget and the budgets of many on a fixed income. She spoke in favor of having a decreased or eliminated school tax for senior citizens as well.

Sara Gilbert spoke about the 20% increase in value of her property that was reflected in the assessment she recently received and hoped for a full rollback of the millage rate. She also encouraged all those in attendance to vote for the HB 581 referendum to be voted on in November that would cap assessment increases to 3% annually. She also spoke about the need to assess property values in a uniform manner across the County and contact the Board of Education about rolling back their millage rate as well.

Chairman Perdue explained that the County was not responsible for setting the Board of Education's millage rate but that he had a conversation with Dr. Scott with the Board of Education, and they were looking to rollback their millage rate. He also advised that the City of Warner Robins was also looking to rollback their millage rate as well.

Thomas Reynolds expressed his thoughts on how retirees were expected to pay all the taxes that they do already, and then have their homes assessed at such a high rate. He wondered if the Board was raising taxes through assessed property values ahead of House Bill 581 passing in November.

Stephanie Hill had a question about how commercial properties are assessed. She also wanted to know if investment properties were assessed at the same rate as owner-occupied properties all over the county or by area. She advised that her home was over 100 years old and questioned how her home was assessed as high as it was.

Chairman Perdue advised that assessments can be made neighborhood by neighborhood for increasing or decreasing values in specific areas. He also advised that homestead exemption is the only difference between rental and owner-occupied homes.

With no further comments, Chairman Perdue closed the Public Hearing and reopened the regular portion of the meeting.

Chairman Perdue thanked everyone for the kind and courteous way in which they spoke to the board. He then called for a short five-minute recess.

Chairman Perdue called the meeting back to order.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the reappointment of Eddie Walker to the Zoning and Appeals board for a term of 06-06-2024 through 06-05-2028.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request to fix a clerical error made at the May 21, 2024 meeting.

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Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Byrd and carried unanimously by all to approve the reappointment of Dr. Jeff Washington to the Houston County Library Board for a term of 07/01/2024 – 06/30/2028.

Chairman Perdue apologized for the error making it onto the last agenda, but this action will reverse and take care of that error.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request for approval of poll workers for the upcoming June 18, 2024 General Primary/Nonpartisan Runoff Election.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve hiring the following poll workers for the June 18, 2024 General Primary/Nonpartisan Runoff Election, and for the Accounting Department to make any and all budget adjustments:

17	Managers (Precinct)	\$175.00	\$2975.00
34	Assistant Managers (Precinct)	\$125.00	\$4250.00
51	Clerks	\$115.00	\$5,865.00
3	Training	\$25.00	\$75.00
5	Janitors	\$15.50	\$77.50
1	Janitor	\$25.00	\$25.00
99	BMD (Ballot Marking Device)	\$2.00	\$198.00
2	Election Supply Load Out Help	\$75.00	\$150.00
3	Election Night Equipment Return Help	\$75.00	\$225.00
3	Election Night Check-In Clerks	\$75.00	\$225.00
17	Supply pick-up/return supplies (Managers)	\$10.00	\$170.00
17	Cell Phones	\$10.00	\$170.00
2	Ballot Scan Clerks	\$100.00	\$200.00
	TOTAL		\$14,605.50

Ms. Robinson presented a request for approval of an Automatic Aid Agreement to enhance fire protection and response in both the city limits of Centerville and the unincorporated County areas north of Watson Blvd.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of an Automatic Aid Agreement between Houston County Board of Commissioners and The City of Centerville.

Commissioner Byrd stated that this agreement is very simple, yet very important to citizens living in Houston County and the City of Centerville.

Chairman Perdue invited Houston County Fire Chief Chris Stoner to introduce his special guest.

Chief Stoner introduced Centerville Fire Chief Jason Jones who expressed his thanks to the Board for their support of this aid agreement between the City of Centerville and Houston County.

Ms. Robinson presented a request to acknowledge consent of an agreement between the City of Warner Robins and Houston County Sheriff Cullen Talton to allow the city Police Department to use CorrectHealth Houston, LLC to perform blood draws for suspected driving under the influence.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the acknowledgement of consent of an agreement between the City of Warner Robins and Houston County Sheriff Cullen Talton for blood draws performed by CorrectHealth Houston, LLC.

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Chairman Perdue commented that this action was needed on behalf of the County to know how to handle the financial agreement with the City of Warner Robins Police Department.

Ms. Robinson presented Independent Contractor Agreements with the Juvenile Court that are up for renewal.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all to approve an Independent Contractor Agreement with Genghis X. Shakhan in the amount of \$17,500.02 for the term July 1, 2024 through December 31, 2024, an Independent Contractor Agreement with Kameyan Sims in the amount of \$52,500.00 for the term of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025, an Independent Contractor Agreement with Glenda Harper in the amount of \$16,666.00 for the term of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025, an Independent Contractor Agreement with Caralyn J. Huddleston in the amount of \$24,500.00 for the term of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025, and an Independent Contractor Agreement with April Kelly Neal in the amount of \$50,000.00 for the term of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025.

Mr. Byrd presented a request for approval of Memorandums of Agreement for services with the Accountability Court of Houston County.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of professional services contracts with Robins Pharmacy, Empowered Living Counseling and Life Coaching, LLC, IHOPE, Inc., Infinite Health Wellness, LLC., and Houston County.

Chairman Perdue expressed his appreciation to the Accountability Court for helping the citizens they serve stay on the right path through personal accountability.

Mr. Byrd presented a request for approval of a bid for the sale of approximately 36.8 acres of timber to be harvested and sold from the Landfill property.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all to approve the acceptance of a bid from Rozier Forest Products, LLC of Jeffersonville, Georgia, in the amount of \$152,342.40 with a contract time of twelve months.

Mr. Byrd commented that a 45% benefit was gained for the taxpayers through the bid process on this action by going with the highest bid.

Mr. Byrd presented a request to upgrade the Emergency Services Records Management Server connection.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of contracts to build a fiber link from the Houston County Annex to the City of Warner Robins enabling speed increase allowing for better service. The total cost of this project is \$66,868.99 which will be paid from 2018 SPLOST funds.

Chairman Perdue stated that the current fiber connection owned by Cox was outdated and needed to be replaced. Updating the connection to the server hosted by the City of Warner Robins will ensure secure connectivity for Houston County law enforcement needs.

Mr. Talton presented a request for approval of a bid on the 2024 Joint Local Maintenance Improvement Grant Road Improvement Project.

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Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the bid from Reames and Son Construction Co., of Perry, Georgia, in the amount of \$6,379,978.91 for the 2024 Joint Local Maintenance Improvement Grant Road Improvement Project. This amount represents a joint bid with the cities of Byron, Centerville, Perry and Warner Robins. Houston County's portion of this contract is \$3,098,486.99 to be paid for by LMIG Funds, ARPA Funds, LRA Funds, and 2018 SPLOST funds.

Mr. Byrd advised that a 47% cost benefit to taxpayers was realized through the bid process by going with the lowest bidder for this work.

Chairman Perdue advised that Local Road Assistance Funds and ARPA Funds will be utilized and leveraged to get more work done.

Mr. Talton presented a request to crush the concrete stockpile at Public Works.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Gottwals and carried unanimously by all to approve a bid from Heidelberg Materials of Bolingbroke, Georgia in the amount of \$11.50 per ton. This work will be paid for out of the Roads and Bridges budget.

Chairman Perdue stated that Heidelberg Materials, the winning bidder, now has a local office in Houston County. He also complimented Roads and Bridges Superintendent Travis McClendon for stockpiling material at Public Works to be used as needed on County construction sites.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the payment of the bills totaling \$5,584,946.90.

Chairman Perdue closed the regular portion of the meeting and opened Public Comments.

Meg Mehserle spoke about her views on election integrity issues and her feelings about being let go as a poll worker from the Houston County Board of Elections.

As there were no further comments Chairman Perdue closed Public Comments.

Chairman Perdue opened Commissioner's Comments.

Mr. Gottwals expressed his appreciation to those who spoke before the Board regarding the reassessed values of their homes in such a respectful and courteous way. He expressed his appreciation to Chairman Perdue for the professional way he presented the FY25 budget and the assessment process.

Ms. Robinson mentioned how good the meeting was with different perspectives and opinions all being voiced in a positive way. She further advised that seeking an appeal was a great way to save money and thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Mr. Talton expressed his thanks for the respectful way everyone brought their concerns about the tax assessments before the Board and for the citizens of Houston County entrusting the Board with making the best decisions possible.

Mr. Byrd echoed the previous Commissioners' comments on the healthy and fruitful discussions in the meeting. He reiterated that the Board focuses on providing the best service and services possible in the most cost-efficient way. He concluded his remarks by speaking on the cooperation exhibited between Houston County and the Cities through the agreements approved during the meeting.

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Chairman Perdue explained that the July Commissioners meetings would be moved back a week due to the 4th of July holiday week and that the meetings in July would be on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays. He thanked those who came to speak about the tax assessment in such a respectful manner during the Public Hearing. He mentioned that he and his family spent the weekend in Honduras on a mission trip to an orphanage. He said this experience really put things into perspective for him, especially how blessed he personally is and how blessed he is to work with the great Commissioners on the Board and the wonderful staff who work with the County.

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

Robbie Dunbar
Director of Administration

Chairman

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner