

Houston County Commissioners Meeting
June 18, 2024
Warner Robins, Georgia

The Houston County Board of Commissioners met in a regular session at 5:00 pm on Tuesday, June 18, 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.

Pastor Ryan Reid, of the United Growth Church in Bonaire, gave the Invocation and spoke about his church. He introduced himself as a Houston County native who grew up in Kathleen and spoke of his father who was also a pastor. He mentioned that growing up he had no plans to be a pastor, but he felt God had different plans for his life. Describing his church, Pastor Reid said their focus is to build people up, lead people to Christ and help them to be more like Jesus. He said growing disciples and serving the community are two main goals of his church. He concluded his remarks by mentioning that his fellowship meets at Ted Wright Park in Bonaire each Tuesday at 6:00 pm.

Chairman Perdue and the Commissioners expressed their appreciation to Pastor Reid for coming to the meeting to give the invocation, and for his work in the community.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the minutes of the June 4, 2024 meeting.

Chairman Perdue presented the FY25 budget and spoke at length about the tax appraisal process, why appraisals are made, the State law requiring appraisal of property in Houston County, how and where to go about filing an assessment appeal, how the millage rate is calculated, and the tax cap in Houston County.

Chairman Perdue opened a Public Hearing on the FY25 budget and tax assessments.

Dan Carter had a question about the abbreviations on his tax assessment notice letter.

Chairman Perdue explained what each was and their purpose.

Thomas Reynolds spoke about the percentages he pays in various taxes; local, state and federal, and the increase in the assessed value of his house over the last four years.

Yesmin Wilson spoke about several of the rental properties she owns and the assessment values that have increased on each of them. She inquired if there could be a cap on the percent increase of the assessed value each year on properties in Houston County.

Ricky Solomon had a question regarding the definition of a buyer or seller; whether a property was bought as a rental or as a primary residence. He also asked if that would make any difference on the assessed value.

Chairman Perdue advised that it would not, and the difference would be the homestead exemption a person could apply for on the property they reside in.

Ken Cramp suggested including a page that explains the assessment process, like the one that was handed out at the Commissioners meeting, with the mailed-out assessment notice. He mentioned that having this information in hand would answer a lot of questions. He asked whether an additional property tax exemption could be considered for residents who

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had lived in their homes a long time, suggesting at least 20 years. He spoke about the increase in garbage fees and how this did not please him and concluded his comments by saying that the assessment this year may also seem higher due to the State not including the rebate on property taxes as was done last year.

Ken Berstein spoke about the increased assessments on residential property and wondered if this was an artificial increase by the County ahead of the proposed House Bill 581 that will be voted on in November.

Chairman Perdue advised it was not and that the County has always been transparent about the way it operates.

Mr. Byrd commented on the range of square foot assessments and sales data showing these assessments.

Robert Hardy spoke on the prevalence of home title theft in Georgia and gave out information as to how property owners can keep from becoming a victim of this crime.

Joseph Morris spoke about retirees having to pay school taxes and suggested either removing this tax for individuals over a certain age or at least decreasing the amount of school taxes they are required to pay.

Meg Mehserle spoke about large corporations and conglomerates from outside of Georgia purchasing homes and turning these properties into rental homes and how this may be indicative of broader and more nefarious intentions by globalists. She then spoke off-topic about election integrity and feelings about being let go as a poll worker from the Houston County Board of Elections.

David Tribble had a question about when commercial property in Houston County faces a similar assessment revaluation as residential property in Houston County has.

Chairman Perdue advised that this process has already begun and that commercial revaluations should be completed within the next three years.

Jennifer Tribble spoke about the delay in sales data on the public website and how this hampered her ability to find comparable assessed values of homes like hers using recent sales date information. She concluded her remarks by questioning whether refinancing a home's mortgage would trigger a new assessed value on it and then the homeowner faces another increased assessed valuation that the County is doing, causing a double reevaluation.

Jacqueline Rozier had a question regarding conservation designation of property and whether the required acreage requirement could be lowered from 10 acres to 4 acres so smaller parcels of land could be considered for conservation use and help property owners save money.

Chairman Perdue advised that this designation is a state regulation and any changes to the amount of acreage for conservation designation would come from the General Assembly through changes in law.

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

Chairman Perdue read the FY25 budget resolution into record.

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A Resolution Adopting
The Fiscal Year 2025 Budget

For Houston County

WHEREAS, the Houston County Board of Commissioners has prepared a line-item budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024 and ending June 30, 2025; and

WHEREAS, the Houston County Board of Commissioners has adhered to the provisions of O.C.G.A. Section 36-81-3, as amended; and

WHEREAS, a public hearing was held on June 4th, 2024, and it is now in the best interest of the County that the budget be adopted,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Houston County Board of Commissioners that the annual budget for Houston County for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024 and ending June 30, 2025, attached hereto and made a part hereof, is hereby approved and adopted in the amount of:

General Fund	\$81,315,291E911
Telephone Fund	\$6,196,256Fire
District Fund	\$5,373,683
SPLOST Fund	\$34,492,259
Water Fund	\$9,315,547
Solid Waste Fund	\$14,060,986
Internal Service Fund	\$15,361,102
ARPA Fund	\$13,996,283
DATE Fund	\$283,006
Drug Fund	*\$113,000
Jail Inmate Fund	*\$263,449
Law Library Fund	*\$89,520
District Attorney Fund	<u>*\$494,103</u>
	181,354,485

*Other Special Revenue Funds

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that during the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024 and ending June 30, 2025, the General Fund shall appropriate \$2,384,186 from previously assigned Fund Balance for Personnel Adjustments.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that any increase in appropriation for any department or salary line-item in excess of the approved budget shall require approval by the Board of Commissioners authorizing said funds to be expended.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve Chairman Perdue signing the FY25 Budget Resolution adopting the FY25 budget in the amount of \$181,354,485.

Mr. Byrd thanked Chairman Perdue for his excellent presentation on the property assessment, and the FY25 budget and thanked County staff personnel; Robbie Dunbar, Danyelle George, Will Davis and the County department heads for their work and contributions on the FY25 budget.

Chairman Perdue also expressed his appreciation for the work on the budget by Robbie Dunbar, Ken Carter, Brian Jones, Will Davis, Danyelle George and Chief Chris Stoner.

Chairman Perdue closed the meeting for a five-minute comfort break.

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Chairman Perdue called the meeting back to order after the comfort break.

Mr. Byrd presented a request to renew a professional services contract with Traylor Business Services Inc. for personal property verifications.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of a professional services contract with Traylor Business Services Inc., of Kennesaw, Georgia for a twelve-month term, beginning June 23, 2024.

Mr. Byrd presented a request for an amendment of the timber sale agreement with Cedar Creek Timber Company.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Mr. Gottwals and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of an amendment with Cedar Creek Timber Company of Wrightsville, Georgia to extend the term of the agreement from July 19, 2024 to October 31, 2024.

Chairman Perdue commented that it should be dry enough now for the timber at the landfill to be harvested. He also stated that the County has already been paid for the timber and is not having to wait for the harvesting of the timber to receive payment.

Ms. Robinson presented a request for abandonment of right-of-way for property known as Tax Parcel Numbers 01250 1100 and 01250 1110 adjacent to an unpaved portion of Old HWY 96 in Bonaire.

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

There being no comments Chairman Perdue closed the Public Hearing and reopened the regular portion of the meeting.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of a Resolution abandoning the unpaved portion of Old HWY 96 adjacent to Mr. Driggers' property.

Commissioner Byrd commented that this action will put this property back on the tax digest.

Ms. Robinson presented a request from Scott Messer, owner of 309 Nelson Drive, for deannexation from the City of Warner Robins.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Gottwals and carried unanimously by all to approve the deannexation of the property located at 309 Nelson Drive, Warner Robins, Georgia and authorize the signing of the appropriate resolution to be sent to the City of Warner Robins.

Chairman Perdue commented that the City of Warner Robins also must agree to the deannexation request to make this final.

Ms. Robinson presented a request to renew Independent Contractor Agreements with four attorneys to provide legal representation in cases where the Houston County Public Defender's Office has a conflict of interest.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Byrd and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of an Independent Contractor Agreement with Jeffrey L. Grube for a term of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025 in the amount of \$90,000, Jonathan Perry Waters for a term of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025 in the amount of \$90,000, David G. Daniell for a term of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025 in the amount of \$90,000, and Carl Veline for a term of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025 in the amount of \$90,000.

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Chairman Perdue explained that the need for so many conflict attorneys arises due to cases where multiple defendants in the same case qualify for public defender representation. The Public Defender's office can only represent one of the offenders; the others would have to be represented by outside contract attorneys.

Mr. Talton presented a request to renew the Oaky Woods Wildlife Management Area Lease Agreement.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of the Oaky Woods Wildlife Management Area Lease Agreement between the Department of Natural Resources and Houston County. This agreement will have a term of one year with the option to renew it for up to five years after the signing of this agreement.

Mr. Talton stated that even though the County is not in the recreation business, the County's support of Oaky Woods provides recreational opportunity for residents throughout Middle Georgia to have an outdoor recreation opportunity.

Mr. Talton presented a request for approval of the award of the Solid Waste and Recyclable Materials Collection Contract.

Chairman Perdue asked Robert Brown of Atlantic Coast Consulting, the County's consultant on the proposal requests for the solid waste contracts, to speak about the new solid waste collection plans for Houston County.

Mr. Brown spoke about the number of proposals submitted, the vetting process and the new subscription-based solid waste plan that Houston County was considering. He stated this new subscription-based solid waste plan, beginning July 1, 2025, will allow for consumers to choose their desired level of service, and thereby the cost they would pay for their solid waste collections. Property owners would be able to choose from having the following services: pick up for garbage, yard waste, and/or recycling.

Chairman Perdue thanked Mr. Brown for his help in the RFP process.

Mr. Byrd commented on the thorough and competitive process of the proposals and having subscription service gives control to the resident as to the level of service they want and in so doing, choosing the level of cost they will pay. He finished by expressing his thanks to Robert Brown and the staff with Atlantic Coast Consulting and the County employees who participated in this effort.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the award of the Solid Waste and Recyclable Materials Collection Contract to Ryland Environmental to begin on July 1, 2025.

Mr. Talton presented a request for an amendment to the contract with Flock Group Inc.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Gottwals and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of a contract amendment with Flock Group Inc. of Atlanta, Georgia to prepay the remainder of the contract. This prepayment is due to the deadlines associated with ARPA funded projects. Also, to allow the Accounting Department to make any necessary budget adjustments.

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Chairman Perdue stated that spending this money up front on this ARPA-funded project will allow for this project to be fully funded and get the project off the County's books. He finished by saying all ARPA grant money must be obligated by the end of this year.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request for approval of the final adjusting Change Order for the Stratford Hills Subdivision Pressure Improvement project.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the final adjusting change order for the Stratford Hills Subdivision Pressure Improvement project with Pyles Plumbing & Utility Contractors Inc, of Macon, Georgia. This decrease in the amount of \$18,700 will reduce the original cost of \$76,650 to \$57,950.

Chairman Perdue thanked the contractor and County staff for their work in helping bring costs down.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request for approval of the final adjusting Change Order for the Water System Improvements to Serve Sewell Road, Phase III.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the final adjusting change order for the Water System Improvements to Serve Sewell Road, Phase III with John R Walker, Inc., of Macon, Georgia. This decrease in the amount of \$58,426 will reduce the original cost of \$1,130,186.40 to \$1,071,760.40. Also, to allow the Accounting Department to make any necessary budget adjustments.

Chairman Perdue thanked the contractor and County staff for their work in helping bring costs down on this project as well.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request for approval of a bid on a price increase of \$1,947 for the purchase of one new Chevrolet 3500 Extended Cargo Van. This purchase approved at the November 7, 2023 Houston County Board of Commissioners meeting was unable to be fulfilled by the low bidder.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the bid on one new 2024 Chevrolet 3500 Extended Cargo Van from Brannen Motor Company of Unadilla, Georgia at a price of \$45,500. This purchase will be funded by 2018 SPLOST.

Chairman Perdue thanked Vanessa Zimmerman, Purchasing Director, for her work in finding a suitable replacement.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the payment of the bills totaling \$5,607,887.26.

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

Thomas Reynolds again expressed concerns about the increase in property values being made ahead of the November vote on House Bill 581. He also commented that he and many others were against the proposed annexation of property on SR 127. He thanked the Commissioners for their support of Oakey Woods and concluded his comments by speaking about the trash contract going to a subscription plan.

John Schwindler spoke about the price adjustments of local gas stations, the speed at which the prices seem to change and that the prices appear to be the same throughout the County and wondered out loud how that could be. He also spoke of a pile of trash left over from a construction job at a gas station near his house and requested County assistance with getting that pile removed.

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Chairman Perdue advised that Community Planner Jake Cox would meet with him and help get the situation with the trash pile taken care of.

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

Chairman Perdue opened Commissioner's Comments.

Mr. Byrd commented on how productive the meeting was with the approval of the FY25 budget and the County's new garbage contract and is thankful to be able to serve the citizens of Houston County.

Mr. Talton thanked everyone for attending and closed by saying that the Board is here for the citizens of Houston County.

Ms. Robinson thanked everyone for being at the meeting and sharing their comments and ideas on ways to improve the County. She concluded her comments by mentioning the change in Commission meeting dates in July which will be July 9th and July 23rd because of the 4th of July holiday week.

Mr. Gottwals expressed his appreciation for the smooth meeting. He spoke about the perceived money grab that he has been hearing regarding the assessments that have gone out to residents, and the vote in November on House Bill 581 that caps the percentages by which assessments can go up on residential homestead property. He stated just the opposite was the goal of the Board by hopefully being able to roll back the millage rate. He also mentioned that the other local governments represented on the tax assessments need to do their part as well to hold the line or even roll back their millage rates as well. He closed his comments by saying with serving over a year in office he has seen nothing but transparency and work on behalf of County staff and this Board for the benefit of Houston County residents.

Chairman Perdue also commented on the delay in one week of the July Commission meetings with the July dates being July 9th and July 23rd. He also commented on tomorrow's celebration of Juneteenth and the freedoms we enjoy in our nation and that County offices would be closed tomorrow in honor of that day. He concluded his comments by saying that today was the 16th birthday of his eldest daughter and wished her a very happy birthday.

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