

Houston County Commissioners Meeting
July 23, 2024
Warner Robins, Georgia

The Houston County Board of Commissioners met in a regular session at 5:00 pm on Tuesday, July 23, 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 Robinson led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Deacon Jim Hunt of Sacred Heart Catholic Church gave the invocation and spoke about the Outreach Facility at Sacred Heart Church. He spoke about the 3,100 community members who the facility has served, with one part-time employee and 70 volunteers. He talked about the garden planted for the community and how the vegetables grown there are available to those in need. He concluded by saying that Houston County is a growing community and that we are all here to help each other.

The Board expressed their appreciation to Deacon Hunt for his prayer and for the services that Sacred Heart Church provides for the community.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the minutes of the July 9, 2024 meeting.

Mr. Talton presented a request for a variance. In a letter dated July 11, 2024, Widner & Associates, Inc. requested a variance to paragraph 3A-6, Chapter 54, Article IV, Sec. 54-90. The issue came before the Board of Commissioners for a variance in accordance with Chapter 3: Commercial Driveways; Sec. 3A-8 regarding appeals in the Regulations for Access Management and Encroachment Control.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the request for a variance to paragraph 3A-6, Chapter 54, Article IV, Sec. 54-90 regarding restrictions of commercial driveways onto residential streets.

Chairman Perdue explained that a commercial driveway existed on this road before the Commissioners enacted this ordinance. He stated that what the Board was doing was offering a variance of the ordinance, not an appeal of Engineering's decision regarding the nature of the road or driveway.

Mr. Talton presented a request for approval of a bid on a 2024 F-150 truck.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the purchase of one (1) new in-stock 2024 Ford F-150 XL SuperCrew 2WD truck for the Building Inspections department from Phil Brannen Ford of Perry, GA at a cost of \$45,700. This purchase will be funded by the 2018 SPLOST.

Chairman Perdue asked Purchasing Director Vanessa Zimmerman what year model of vehicle would be replaced.

Ms. Zimmerman replied that it would be replacing a 2008 model truck.

Chairman Perdue explained that the vehicle maintenance department said that continued repairs on the vehicle would become more costly, making a new vehicle the better option.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request for approval of a bid for the installation of fencing at the Houston County Landfill.

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Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the award of the bid for the litter and access control fencing installation around Phase 6, Stages 1C and 2A Landfill cells to low bidder WilSouth Fence Company of Warner Robins, GA. This project will cost \$16,000 and will be paid for by Landfill Capital Funds.

Chairman Perdue stated that the construction of these cells at the landfill has been completed and certified by the State; the final step is fencing.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request to approve a bid to replace the generator at the Houston County Detention Center.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the bid in the amount of \$578,306 from Anderson Power Services of Perry, Georgia for a replacement generator to be installed at the Houston County Detention Center. This purchase will be funded by the 2018 SPLOST.

Chairman Perdue explained that this was the second generator replacement at the detention center. He stated that the generators at the detention center and courthouse both had failures in the last year, causing the need for two generators to be ordered. He further explained that a need for a larger generator for the detention center had been identified. So, the original generator that was going to be placed at the detention center will now be going to the courthouse, and the larger generator will be going to the detention center. He finished by saying that this new and larger generator will be able to keep more detention center infrastructure and equipment running in case of a power outage.

Ms. Robinson presented a request to write off bad debt in the Water Fund and Solid Waste Fund for FY24.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all to approve the write-off of \$29,224.71 of bad debt in the Water Fund for FY 24 and \$30,815.16 (30,516.27 for Collections and \$298.89 for Disposal) of bad debt in the Solid Waste Fund for FY 24. These amounts are less than 1% of all revenues generated in these departments, and efforts will be made to continue to collect this bad debt.

Chairman Perdue reiterated that this would not be the end of the efforts made to collect this bad debt, but was needed for accounting purposes and in taking steps towards the audit.

Mr. Byrd further commented on the low number reflected in bad debt and congratulated public works staff for their efforts in keeping these numbers low.

Ms. Robinson presented a request to purchase property on Old Perry Road. The parcel was investigated by staff and Carter & Sloope, the consulting engineers for the Water Department, and found to meet the requirements needed for the intended use.

This request is to purchase the property for the closing amount of \$241,293.42.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Talton, to approve the purchase of property.

County Attorney Tom Hall recommended before the vote to add words to the motion giving Chairman Perdue the authority to sign closing documents.

Chairman Perdue thanked Mr. Hall for his quick observation that this needed to be done, and Ms. Robinson restated the motion with the changes.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the purchase of property described below:

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All that tract or parcel of land situate, lying and being in Land Lot 12 of the 11th Land District of Houston County, Georgia, being known and designated as Tract 2, containing 2.19 acres of land, according to a plat of survey entitled "Plat of Mrs. C.G. Galletly Property" prepared by J.B. Lovell and Assoc, dated October 31, 1951 a copy of which is of record in Plat Book 2, Page 429, Clerk's Office, Houston Superior Court. Said plat incorporated herein by reference and made a part hereof for a more complete and accurate description.

Less and Except all that tract or parcel of land shown in Right of Way deed recorded in Deed Book 5068, Page 46, Clerk's Office Houston Superior Court.

The above-described property is conveyed subject to easements and rights-of-way for public roads and utilities as they now exist and building lines and other matters shown on the aforesaid recorded plat of survey.

Also, to authorize Chairman Perdue to sign all closing documents.

Chairman Perdue stated that he is excited about this water tank coming online in this area of Houston County. It will provide the citizens with water and fire protection capabilities.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the payment of the bills totaling \$2,599,766.68.

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

Karen Kinsler spoke of her mother, Martha Kinsler, and inquired as to why and how the tax assessment on her mother's home increased dramatically.

Chairman Perdue explained in detail the tax assessment process that the County is mandated to perform by the State. He talked about the board's commitment to roll back the millage rate to help offset the assessment re-evaluation people are receiving. He concluded by saying that when the final tax bills are mailed out later this year, some people will find that their tax bill will be less than the original estimate mailed out.

Meg Mehserle spoke about election integrity issues and having been let go from being a poll watcher at the Board of Elections. She requested action be taken regarding her complaints.

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

Chairman Perdue opened Commissioner's Comments.

Mr. Byrd spoke about the employee recognition ceremony he attended earlier in the day and complimented the 18 County employees who were recognized for their service, which totaled 355 years working with the County. He further thanked all County employees for their service and work to the citizens of Houston County and closed by saying the employees of Houston County are the County's greatest asset.

Mr. Talton recognized the Southeastern Little League softball tournament going on now with the baseball tournament beginning next week. He also mentioned the international youth and teen barrel horse rodeo championship at the Georgia National Fairgrounds happening now and the 2,500 competitors from around the world participating and the great economic impact that will be realized by Perry, and Houston County. He spoke about being thankful that the resources and infrastructure are there to handle such a large influx of people for this event. He closed by recognizing the opening of the Houston County schools for the new school year next week.

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Ms. Robinson recognized Angela Holt, CEO of the Flint Behavioral Health and Wellness Centers and thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Mr. Gottwals spoke about a recent Peach County GOP meeting he participated in which talked about voting and voter fraud issues and was happy to say that Houston County's Election Supervisor Debra Presswood was singled out as having run a flawless primary election. He also spoke about the new school year coming up in Houston County and the 2500 teachers who are on the front lines of educating the children of Houston County.

Chairman Perdue addressed Ms. Mehserle's concerns about voting issues in Houston County. She was thanked for her ongoing attendance and participation. Chairman Perdue stated that the Commissioners disagreed with her statements regarding the safety and transparency of the election process in Houston County, emphasizing that the Board of Elections and staff are performing at an exemplary level.

Chairman Perdue stated there is no technical way possible for there to be fewer votes on a ballot marking device than the previous day in any instance, specifically for Rozier Park in the year Ms. Mehserle is addressing. He then presented hand-marked paper records for every day of the election and precinct in question, which were in order and accurate.

Chairman Perdue corrected Ms. Mehserle's assertion regarding who terminated her as a poll watcher. A poll watcher is appointed by a party that has a candidate on the ballot or a candidate appoints someone. Ms. Mehserle served at the pleasure of the Houston County Republican Party, not an entity of the Houston County Government. The Houston County Republican party wrote in their email terminating Ms. Mehserle as a poll watcher:

It has come to the attention of our executive committee that you have aggressively pursued our election supervisor and county commissioners with concerns about election integrity even though your current concerns were addressed, and you were instructed on how to handle. [...] Additionally, while previously employed as a poll worker, you caused the polling place to open late. And also, you photographed a ballot which you shared with others. These are violations of the Georgia election law which the Houston County GOP cannot and will not condone.

Chairman Perdue continued by stating that the allegations Ms. Mehserle has raised about the vulnerability of electronic voting machines is not something the Commissioners can address. Georgia Code specifically requires electronic voting to be uniform statewide in O.C.G.A. 21-2-300 (a)(1.) The fact that unfounded claims have been raised against the manufacturer, the voting devices, and state officials is not an emergency that would require using paper ballots. There have been no court orders directing otherwise in the state. Houston County will abide by Georgia Law and continue to use the State's electronic voting machines until the method is changed via court order or legislative action. Houston County has a very generous public comment period at our meetings and enjoys the opportunity to hear from the public and address their concerns. The Commissioners have examined Ms. Mehserle's concern and have now addressed it. Chairman Perdue stated that he and Ms. Mehserle must agree to disagree regarding this matter and that he hopes she brings new issues before the Board rather than this one now that it has been addressed.

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

Robbie Dunbar
Director of Administration

Chairman

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner