

## Houston County Commissioners Meeting

August 1, 2023

Perry, Georgia

The Houston County Board of Commissioners met in regular session at 9:00 am on Tuesday, August 1, 2023, at the Houston County Courthouse in Perry, GA, with Chairman Perdue presiding and Commissioners Byrd, Talton, Gottwals, and Robinson present. Also present were County Attorney Tom Hall, Director of Administration Robbie Dunbar, Director of Operations Brian Jones, Director of Personnel Ken Carter, Director of Purchasing Vanessa Zimmerman, Chief Financial Officer Danyelle George, Director of Animal Control Alan Smith, Community Planner Jake Cox, Utility Director Terry Dietsch, Fire/HEMA Chief Chris Stoner, Chief Building Inspector Tim Andrews, Will Davis, and Amanda Clark.

Commissioner Byrd gave the Invocation.

Commissioner Talton led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commander of the 116th Operations Group, Col. Eric Smith, spoke of growing up in a military family. He attended Valdosta State University where he went through the ROTC program. He was commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant and trained as a navigator. He moved from the Air Force to the Air National Guard and has been with the 116<sup>th</sup> for the past sixteen years, where he now serves as the Operations Group Commander. Col. Smith and his wife of twenty-two years have lived in Houston County for three years, and he expressed how welcoming and supportive the Houston County community is for military personnel assigned to Robins Air Force Base.

Chairman Perdue and each of the commissioners expressed their appreciation to Col. Smith for his service and work at Robins Air Force Base and for the spirit in which he spoke of the bright future for the base and the 116th Squadron. Col. Smith was also congratulated for the new grandchild on the way.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the minutes from the July 18, 2023 meeting.

Chief Building Inspector Tim Andrews presented a Special Exception application #2707.

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

Chairman Perdue recognized Mr. Evan Godbee, who spoke on his screen printing and internet sales business application.

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

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 occupation 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.

Motion by Mr. Byrd second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all to approve the Special Exception Application #2707 for Even Godbee for a screen printing (internet sales) business to include any and all stipulations as noted on the Zoning & Appeals recommendation and Section 95 Requirements staff report.

Mr. Andrews advised the applicant on the next step in the process, which would be obtaining their business licenses through the Commissioner's office.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the following schedule for Special Called meetings and public hearings regarding the 2023 Tax Levy and Millage Rate.

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August 8, 9:00 am in the Board Room at the Houston County Courthouse  
August 15, 9:00 am in the Board Room at the Houston County Annex  
August 15, 6:00 pm in the Board Room at the Houston County Annex

Mr. Byrd presented a SPLOST Intergovernmental Agreement and two resolutions for the Board to execute and take all necessary action to call a referendum to be held November 7, 2023, on a one percent SPLOST on all sales and uses within Houston County for a period of six years, beginning October 1, 2024.

Chairman Perdue commented that the three cities had executed the Intergovernmental Agreement between the four municipalities. He appreciated the cooperation and compromise among the governments during the process. He also gave a breakdown of the SPLOST, with Countywide projects receiving 45%, Centerville 2.7%, Perry 7.19%, Warner Robins 26.53%, and unincorporated Houston County receiving 18.3%. He further mentioned that the SPLOST vote in November would be a special election in conjunction with the municipal elections.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Mr. Talton and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of the 2024 Intergovernmental Agreement for the Use and Distribution of Proceeds From the 2024 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax for Capital Outlay Projects, the Resolution Approving a SPLOST Intergovernmental Agreement and Authorizing the Chairman to Execute the Agreement on behalf of the County, and the Resolution Calling for an Election to Impose a County Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax.

Mr. Byrd thanked the mayors from each of the three cities and Chairman Perdue for their cooperation and work together on the SPLOST and recognized senior staff from each government for their involvement.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request from the City of Warner Robins for the annexation of property located at the south side of Watson Blvd., 2,150 feet west of the intersection of Watson Blvd and HWY 41.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to concur with the City of Warner Robins annexation request for property located at the south side of Watson Blvd., 2,150 feet west of the intersection of Watson Blvd and HWY 41, containing 2.64 acres and also known as Tax Parcel # 000480 02B000. The property is currently zoned County C-2 and the proposed zoning is City C-2.

Chairman Perdue advised that there was an error in the initial application for this annexation reading County R/AG but that the actual zoning is County C-2.

Mr. Gottwals presented an Acknowledgement of the Existence of the Transportation Corridor Protection for the extension of Commodore Drive from GA Highway 127 to Saddlecreek Road.

Chairman Perdue opened the floor for public comments, but as there were none, the meeting continued.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Byrd to approve the acknowledgement of the existence of the Transportation Corridor Protection for the extension of Commodore Drive from GA Highway 127 to Saddlecreek Road.



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Mr. Gottwals presented an Intergovernmental Agreement with the City of Perry that covers the enforcement of state minimum standard codes within the boundaries of the wastewater treatment facility project.

Chairman Perdue commented that Perry is building a structure in the county's unincorporated area and that Perry officials, staff, and engineering consultants would thoroughly inspect this facility.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Ms. Robinson and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement between the Houston County Board of Commissioners and The City of Perry for the enforcement of state minimum standard codes within the boundaries of the wastewater treatment facility project.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request from Purchasing for a change to the purchase of two 2023 Ford F-150 Extended Cab trucks that was approved at the December 20th, 2022 Board of Commissioners Meeting.

Chairman Perdue spoke about the lack of availability of vehicles due to the lingering effects of the COVID pandemic affecting the industry. He stated that the County is looking into updating the process for purchasing vehicles to allow for their purchase when available and still with a focus on getting the best deal possible.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the purchase of two 2023 Ram 1500 Quad Cabs in stock from Jeff Smith Chrysler Dodge Jeep of Perry at a total purchase price of \$85,800 or \$42,900 each, which is an increase of \$7,858 over the purchase price approved on December 20th, 2022. Funds for this purchase will be paid from Water System Capital Funds.

Ms. Robinson presented a request for the emergency repair of Becky Drive Culverts.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the bid of \$181,000 to Southern Concrete Construction, Inc., of Albany, Georgia for the emergency replacement of the culverts under Becky Drive. This project will be paid for from Insurance Premium funds.

Director of Operations Brian Jones advised that the pipe for the project should be delivered to the County soon.

Chairman Perdue advised that since the homeowners association had already lowered the pond to do their own repairs on other structures, it was advantageous to the County to move quickly on this project.

Ms. Robinson presented a request for approval of a bid on the Flournoy Road Paving project.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the award of the bid on the Flournoy Road Paving Project go to The Scruggs Company of Valdosta, Georgia, in the amount of \$1,914,004.22. This project will be funded by the 2006 SPLOST.

Chairman Perdue stated that this paving of Flournoy Road would exhaust funds collected for the paving of dirt roads from past SPLOST revenues.

Ms. Robinson presented a request to waive the animal limitation ordinance to allow five dogs for Gary and Alissa Steverson at their residence.

Chairman Perdue opened a Public Hearing.

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Animal Control Director Alan Smith spoke first and gave a summary of the situation involving Mr. and Mrs. Steverson, owner of the dogs, and their neighbor who brought the complaint.

Mr. Steverson spoke about how the dogs were emotional support to him, having experienced both a battle with cancer and surgeries. He acknowledged the dog barking issue but said he has since taken steps to rectify the situation. Mrs. Steverson thanked the Board for hearing their issue and spoke about how the dogs were like family to them.

Mr. Caum, Steverson's neighbor who brought the complaint to animal control, wanted to let everyone know his side of the situation. He said that all he wanted was to enjoy his property without the constant sound of nearby dogs barking, that they would bark anytime he went outside. He mentioned that he spoke with the Steverson's about the noise and thought the situation was handled, but after a few weeks, the dogs started barking again, making him call Animal Control.

Chairman Perdue thanked both parties for being neighborly and working to address the situation among themselves before contacting Animal Control officials. He then stated he wanted to clarify that Mr. Caum said that since Animal Control came out, the barking problem had been acceptable.

Mr. Caum agreed that was what he had said and that his only concern was now that as previously, after a few weeks, the continuous barking would start again.

Mr. Gottwals asked if Mr. Caum had written a letter he would like to present and if he favored the waiver.

Mr. Caum said he was not and was concerned that the previous behaviors would be repeated.

Statham's Landing Homeowners Association Board member John Rowans spoke about the situation. He voiced his support for the waiver.

Steve Muldin spoke in support of the Steverson's and advised the Board that their dogs were not a hindrance or issue for the golfers playing at Statham's Landing.

Chairman Perdue closed the public hearing and opened the floor for Commissioner's comments.

Commissioner Robinson advised that having five dogs is a clear violation of the ordinance. Still, the ordinance was written to allow for a variance on a case-by-case basis, much like having a variance for a home occupation. She said that if passed, this waiver would not be an open-ended one but one that through attrition, the number of dogs would get back to the allowed maximum number of three.

Commissioner Talton asked Animal Control Director Smith what the original complaint was about.

Mr. Smith stated that dogs were barking and the total number of dogs once the barking complaint was investigated. Mr. Smith further noted that if passed, the waiver would be reviewed yearly and, if found to be in violation, the situation would be brought up again before the Board of Commissioners to be rescinded. He also said that there would be a quarterly checkup for compliance if the Commissioners granted the waiver.



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Commissioner Byrd commented that granting a variance in this instance creates a slippery slope for opening the door to future variances of this type and that he has a responsibility to uphold the ordinance.

Commissioner Gottwals questioned Mr. Smith about what would happen if the barking and noise began again. Would Mr. Caum have any recourse?

Mr. Smith said that yes, he would, and that fines and penalties could be issued and eventually the waiver could be rescinded. The number of dogs would have to fall in line with the animal control ordinance.

Commissioner Robinson advised that the Board needed to look at all the facts and circumstances here, the owner's attempt to quiet the dogs, the neighborly way the approach was made for corrective behavior, support by other neighbors and the homeowners association, and weigh all this when voting.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Gottwals to approve the animal limitation waiver for Gary and Alissa Steverson at 104 Wedge Way, with the stipulation that no new animals be acquired as the number reduces through attrition to the number allowed by the ordinance. Upon voting, Ms. Robinson, Mr. Gottwals, and Mr. Talton voted yes. Mr. Byrd voted no. Motion approved.

Mr. Talton presented a request to fill the vacant animal control officer position.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the hiring of Bruce Rozier to fill the vacant animal control officer position at a Grade 11 Step E, effective August 2, 2023.

Mr. Talton presented a request to reclassify the Senior Clerk position (#0021) at the landfill to an Office Manager (#0015).

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all to approve the reclassification of the Senior Clerk position (#0021) to an Office Manager (#0015), for the Landfill position only, effective August 7, 2023.

Mr. Talton presented a request to add 4 School Resource Officers to the Houston County Position Control.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the addition of four (4) School Resource Officer (SRO) positions to the Houston County Position Control effective August 1, 2023, and to authorize the Accounting Department to make any necessary changes to budget line items.

Chairman Perdue reminded those in attendance that the cost for these SRO officers is revenue neutral with costs for salary, benefits, uniforms, and equipment being paid fully by the Houston County Board of Education and Westfield School.

Motion by Mr. Talton, seconded by Ms. Robinson and carried unanimously by all to approve the payment of the bills totaling \$5,501,536.32.

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

Brian Jones, Director of Operations for Houston County, thanked the Board for the merit raise and advised that several public works employees requested that he bring their thanks to the Board.

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Without further comments, Chairman Perdue closed the Public Comments and opened the Commissioner Comments portion of the meeting.

Mr. Gottwals commented that he believed the Commission had a good but challenging meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

Ms. Robinson commented that any decisions regarding animals are always emotional and summarized the animal limit waiver and her thoughts and opinion regarding it.

Mr. Talton commented on all that had been accomplished during the meeting regarding annexations, SPLOST IGA, and other actions moving the County forward. He concluded his comments by recognizing the students and teachers in Houston County heading back to school tomorrow and wishing them the best of luck.

Mr. Byrd wished all the best to everyone going back to school and urged the public to exercise patience with the additional traffic on the road. He also spoke about the cooperation within Houston County exhibited by the SPLOST IGA. He ended his comments by recognizing the Becky Drive Repair and the response to the immediate need to handle this repair while the water level was down.

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

Robbie Dunbar  
Director of Administration

Chairman

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner