

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION  
REGULAR SESSION  
September 27, 2021

PRESENT: Chairman Mark Culver, Commissioner Curtis Harvey, Commissioner Doug Siquefield, Commissioner Brandon Shoupe, County Engineer Barkley Kirkland, Chief Administrative Officer Peter Covert and County Attorney Pres Register.

Chairman Culver called the 10:00 a.m. meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the September 27, 2021, Houston County Commission Regular Session. He declared a quorum as a majority of the commissioners were in attendance.

ABSENT: Commissioner Ricky Herring

The invocation was given by Pastor Aaron Beasley from Southside Baptist Church and Commissioner Siquefield led in the pledge of allegiance.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved on a motion by Commissioner Harvey and seconded by Commissioner Siquefield. The motion carried unanimously.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Culver announced that the next Commission Meeting that is scheduled for October 11<sup>th</sup> will not take place on that day because that is a holiday as Columbus Day is observed that day. The Commission will meet on Tuesday, October 12<sup>th</sup> and the Administrative meeting will be as usual on the prior Thursday. County offices and state offices will be closed as well as Federal offices. Commissioner Siquefield commented that he appreciated the Dothan Eagle putting out some good information about broadband. He continued to state that when the coronavirus pandemic ended everyday routines, we had to learn to live with and made it through it but the state's broadband coverage is something that must be addressed. As some students were prepared by being in areas where they could get broadband but those that could not get broadband, they had to go to other areas such as libraries to get their work done. Commissioner Siquefield said that they have seen that a lot of this has changed so some had to make these alternative arrangements and now we see the importance of it and the governor has made it possible for broadband to expand out into the rural areas. He thanked the Dothan Eagle and he encouraged Alabama residents to take a "Speed Survey" at <https://alabamaspeedsurvey.org>. He encouraged Houston County residents to go the website as it will benefit those areas that are lacking in the broadband. Commissioner Siquefield hopes they can get this working in the future.

#### AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

1. Recognition – Stephanie Chandler, Asst. Chief Administrative Officer

Chief Administrative Officer Peter Covert approached the podium. Mr. Covert began by stating that it was his pleasure and his honor to stand before them today to let them know that their Asst. Chief Administrative Officer, Mrs. Stephanie Chandler, whom he also asked to come to the podium, has successfully completed hours of classroom training and passed arduous testing to achieve the designation to receive a certificate in county administration. He added that the certificate is not easily obtained nor is it widely held and the commission should be proud, as he is, of their Asst. Chief Administrative Officer, Mrs. Stephanie Chandler. Mr. Covert presented the certificate to Mrs. Chandler on behalf of the commission. A round of applause was given to Mrs. Chandler and she thanked the commission for the opportunity to complete this certificate. Chairman Culver added that part of the certificate is that she has to work for Peter Covert. He congratulated her and stated that the commission asks and encourage county employees to get training as the association (ACCA) has done a really good job of providing opportunities for training throughout the staff to include jailers, administrators and others and they encourage the staff to get the training.

## 2. Recognition – Chris Judah, EMA Director

Chairman Culver called Mr. Judah to the podium. Mr. Judah began by stating that it was hard to follow Stephanie's speech (laughter) and that he was trying to not get into the habit of doing these (recognitions) but sometimes you just have to take the time to recognize some people that do a great job and sometimes the time to do that is limited as well. Mr. Judah continued by stating that he loves his job and working with the residents in Houston County is a great honor and it is a never ending thing nor a never ending daily battle to get the things done that they need to do as the county does not have the budget that the city of Dothan has and he does not have 200 people working in his staff and they have to do the best they can. Mr. Judah added that they have some volunteers that do great and he has some relationships that they build that are outstanding. One of the things that they have done over the last few years is to develop a relationship with the media and the local media is fantastic. He stated that if you do not have that relationship with the media you cannot do the things you need to do. Mr. Judah said that he and his staff are privileged to of formed a professional relationship with an individual with WDHN, their news director, David Baxley, and he has been great as he has brought some professionalism and integrity here and they talk almost on a daily basis as they share a lot of good information. He reported that they (WDHN) deliver a lot of positive injection into this county as they always call and talk about it. Mr. Judah then asked Mr. Baxley to come forward and he added that it seems like every time they develop a good relationship, they lose somebody. He stated that Mr. Baxley is moving on to a bigger market in Birmingham and Mr. Judah did not want him to leave without letting him know the appreciation that they have for him and what he has done for this county and that a lot of people don't know what all he has done. Mr. Judah then read and presented him a certificate of appreciation. Mr. Baxley thanked Mr. Judah and stated that the one thing that he vowed when he came to Dothan in 2020, was to have larger biceps than Chris (laughter). He continued by stating that Chris is right in that every day they spoke and he recognized Leigh Martin and the staff at EMA and said he appreciated them as well. Mr. Baxley said that since he has been here (in Dothan) they have tried to make a respectable news organization and he knows that in this time and age that there are so many issues in the nation that are going on, and even here in Houston County, that he really appreciates the

relationship that he has had with the commission. Mr. Baxley stated that he firmly believes that he will see Commissioner Shoupe run for Governor one day and he thinks that is going to happen. He pointed out Mr. Harvey and said that they had talked a bit and with Mr. Siquefield they made sure they covered his commission chair announcement which will be next year. Mr. Baxley said that they have had so many relationships just in this building and not just with EMA but also with the commission and he appreciates that relationship. He said that he has enjoyed living in Houston County and he appreciates the Sheriff's Dept. as he cannot leave out Sheriff Valenza and Sgt. Rafferty as they have helped them (WDHN) get the word out when they need vital information out. He hopes as a media organization, that WDHN has, and will continue, to have provided the people with what they needed and he knows that will continue and he hopes that the relationship continues as well and not only with EMA but with the commission. Applause was given by all. Chairman Culver thanked Mr. Baxley and wished him luck in Birmingham. He added that Chris said something in his comments and he wanted to make sure everybody caught it, that the commission appreciates Mr. Baxley's positive take on reporting the news and that is something that is important that has been lost, unfortunately, and in his thirty years of being Chairman that he really appreciates them reporting the news and not trying to make the news. Mr. Judah added that Mr. Baxley's staff is fantastic, as well, as they have several staff members that are helping with the community outreach program such as meteorologist and an anchor that goes out and speaks with the community and this has been very successful.

Mr. Judah stated that in addition to building relationships outside, you have to build them inside and without a good staff you cannot do the things you need to do. He added that he does not have a want list but he has a need list but that one of the things that he needs and he has is a good staff. He said that they make it worthwhile because they volunteer their time when they are not working. He then asked his staff to come forward and he introduced Kathy Turner first. Mr. Judah said that most are familiar with her emails when there are weather issues. He stated that she is the executive assistant and she pretty much keeps Mr. Judah in line, keeps the office in order and many other things as she wears many hats. He wanted to publically thank these staff members for what they do and that everyone understands that he has good people. He then read and presented Ms. Turner with a certificate of appreciation. Ms. Turner commented that she appreciates Chris Judah and that he is an awesome director and that she loves her job. She stated that she has been with EMA for five years and she appreciates everybody. Mr. Judah then introduced their newest addition, Heather Thomas and stated that she has been with EMA for a short period of time which is about two months but that she has been able to accomplish quite a bit. He reported that Ms. Thomas is working and is in charge of the new community outreach program and has started partnerships with SARCOA and several other agencies. They have already been to five senior centers and they have groups waiting for them to come and speak and do some presentations. Mr. Judah added that she is also working with Leigh Martin and is doing a great job. He then read and presented Ms. Thomas with a certificate of appreciation. Ms. Thomas thanked the commission for the opportunity to do the outreach program and getting the word out of what EMA has to offer and making the citizens of Houston County better prepared for what could come. She added that she is thoroughly enjoying what she is doing and she looks forward to building more relationships than what they have already started and if there is anything the commission needs or if they have suggestions, please let her know.

Mr. Judah then pointed out that all three of his staff have helped with replacing weather sirens and he had a portion of the siren on the table that had been hit by lightning. They have had some issues with the sirens and they are trying hard to fix that problem. Mr. Judah then asked Leigh Martin to come forward and stated that this one is pretty special. He stated that Ms. Martin has been doing this job for quite a while and they could not do it without her as she does a little bit of everything. Mr. Judah added that not only is her birthday this week but as of next month she will be with the county for twenty-one years. Mr. Judah said that he would like to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Martin as for the last two years there has been a lot of turnover at the state and several counties as almost every county around here either has or is about to have a new director. He stated that Brown's Ferry, in north Alabama, is our sister nuclear plant and we are the back up for them as they are our back up. Their director, Eddie Hicks, which is the longest serving EMA Director in the state of Alabama, retired last year and Ms. Martin has been carrying that county as well as Henry county as she is the RAD subject matter expert and he is very proud of that. They recently had a graded exercise last week and not only did they have FEMA here but they had the director of FEMA for region four that showed up unexpectedly to grade and evaluate Houston County EMA. Mr. Judah is proud to report that they came out outstanding and they will be writing a report and the commission should be getting a letter on that as well. He wanted Ms. Martin to know that she is doing a fantastic job and he then read and presented her with a certificate of appreciation. Ms. Martin commented that it has been a long twenty-one years and the other ladies need to step up to the plate because she has about four more and she will be going to say "sayonara". She added that she loves what she does and she appreciates all that Houston County has done.

Chairman Culver commented that they are very blessed to have the staff and resources that they do. He thanked Mr. Judah.

#### REGULAR AGENDA

1. Request to enter into an agreement with Northstar Engineering Services for design and survey of a storage facility.

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the agreement with Northstar Engineering and Commissioner Siquefield seconded. Chairman Culver reported that this facility is being made possible with a CDBG grant that Emily in SEARPD has helped with and the grant is also paying for a vehicle that should be coming in a couple of weeks. He added that there will be some balance left on the building but they do believe there will be other funding to be used for that. This building will help to move all items from the Farm Center along with some equipment and they are ready to move forward on it as quickly as they can. Commissioner Shoupe stated that he knows that they have the mobile unit coming in and it will be stored in this building but it won't be ready before that comes in and he asked how long it will take to get the building constructed. Mr. Phillip Santora, Northstar Engineering Services, stated that with the approval of the commission today, they will begin surveying next week and within a matter of two months they will have the plans completed and at that time they will put it out for bid. He added that to construct a building of this size and do the limited site work that is needed he would estimate three to four months and putting everything together it will be about six months to have a complete building. After a call for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

2. Request to approve pass through grant for Alabama Dept. of Public Health Strategic National Stockpile Program – Chris Judah, EMA Director

Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to approve and Commissioner Harvey seconded. Chairman Culver stated that this is a normal and customary grant that is done annually. Assistant Chief Administrative Officer, Stephanie Chandler commented that a budget amendment needs to be added to the motion. Chairman Culver then stated that the motion should be stated as “Request to approve pass through grant for Alabama Dept. of Public Health Strategic National Stockpile Program and accompanying budget amendment”. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Request to appoint Peter Covert to the IAC Operations Council

Commissioner Shoupe made a motion to approve the appointment of Peter Covert to the IAC Operations Council and Commissioner Sinquefield seconded. Chairman Culver stated that council is more or less the oversight committee that oversees the IAC which is the organization that is administering all these funds that the federal government has sent down for the 38 counties across the state that have chosen to participate. He added that Houston County has a little over 20 million dollars that they are working with and they have a meeting in October to move forward with the projects that have been discussed. The council will oversee the operation of that and they felt like Peter Covert would be one for that as he has already provided some input to the IAC. The motion carried unanimously.

4. Request to sell 1 Canon Copier and 3 toner cartridges on GovDeals from the Revenue Dept.

Commissioner Sinquefield made a motion to approve the request. Commissioner Harvey seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

#### STAFF REPORTS

Chief Administrative Officer – No Report

County Engineer – County Rd. 8 is closed at 3 different locations.

County Attorney – No Report

Commissioner Shoupe stated that so he does not disappoint the Chairman, he asked County Engineer Barkley if Gilmore Road was still open. (laughs)

Meeting adjourned.