

MINUTES OF THE HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION  
MARCH 23, 2009

PRESENT: Chairman Mark S. Culver, Commissioner Curtis Harvey, Commissioner Bobby Snellgrove, Commissioner Frances M. Cook, Commissioner Phillip L. Forrester, Gary Sherrer, Attorney, Mark Pool, Engineer, and Bill Dempsey, Chief Administrative Officer

ABSENT: None

Chairman Mark S. Culver, called the 10:00 A.M. meeting to order, established that a quorum was present, and welcomed everyone. Dr. Ron Pankey, Pastor, First Church of the Nazarene, gave the invocation. Commissioner Harvey led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to approve the minutes of the last meeting. Commissioner Forrester seconded; and the motion carried unanimously.

Announcements and Public Comments from Chairman and Commissioners

Chairman Culver stated he had received several calls regarding the federal government's Stimulus Program, and he gave a brief update on the county and the stimulus money. He reported this program contains broad, detailed information. The chairman reported the commission believes the county is going to get approximately \$250,000.00 to be used for road projects. He pointed out Mr. Pool has the plans ready on County Road #81 and a couple of bridges along with some other things.

Chairman Culver reported it appears the MPO, which is comprised of Houston County, Dothan, and all of the municipalities within the Metropolitan Planning Organization, is going to receive approximately \$2.1 million that will be used on several MPO projects that include resurfacing S. Brannon Stand Road from Highway #53 north to the bridge, resurfacing Honeysuckle Road, Westgate Parkway, and resurfacing Cowarts Road from where it leaves Highway 84 into the Cowarts city limits.

The chairman reported they are also submitting on the water project that they previously approved and have plans ready for down on Smithville Road. He stated they are evaluating on whether to submit on a sewer project. He pointed out a lot of these monies are going through the same processes CDBG funds go through which means the county does not qualify for a lot of them because of the median income and other factors. He encouraged the non-profits and others to go the state stimulus website because not just local governments are having the ability to get the money. He pointed out there are monies for charities, individuals, education and just about anything that is out there.

Chairman Culver reported the website is [www.stimilus.alabama.gov](http://www.stimilus.alabama.gov) for non-profit organizations or foundations.

The chairman reported the State of Alabama is getting quite the largest portion and they have four projects on their schedule. Mr. Culver stated they have two bridge projects and one of those is the Big Creek Bridge on Highway 231 South. He reported they will be resurfacing Highway #231 South from the Florida State Line to County Road #93. Mr. Pool reported the state is using the old numbers from 18 years ago, and the county does not have a 93, and he was not sure how far the resurfacing would go. Chairman Culver reported the state will be resurfacing the southeast side of the Ross Clark Circle. He stated the county has a lot of interest in getting the Ross Clark Circle done. Chairman Culver reported these are good projects and very much needed.

The chairman reported the City of Dothan and some other surrounding towns have the capability of obtaining some additional funds through Housing and Urban Development and other programs that they have that the county does not. Mr. Culver reported he had spoken to the mayor about them compiling something advising the public showing the total amount of money the community has received once everything has been awarded.

Chairman Culver congratulated everyone associated with the event held Saturday at the National Peanut Festival. He stated it was quite successful, and approximately 6,000-8,000 people attended the event. He reported the entertainment was great and there were some of the most patriotic entertainers he had ever met.

Commissioner Forrester reported Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, at 10:30 A.M. there would be a Ribbon Cutting for Friends of the Library at the Houston-Love Memorial Library. He stated the Friends of the Library is a support group that has done quite a bit in promoting and keeping before the general public the efforts that are being made to get a new library. Commissioner Forrester stated it would be nice to have a good turnout in an effort to support that group.

The commission recognized Ms. Sydney Smith, daughter of Dothan Eagle reporter, Debbie Ingram, and welcomed her to the meeting.

#### Regular Agenda

1. Request to adopt Resolution – “Supporting the Alabama Airport Airspace Safety Act” – Art Morris, Director, Dothan Regional Airport.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to adopt the Resolution supporting the Alabama Airport Airspace Safety Act. Commissioner Forrester seconded the motion; and it carried unanimously. Chairman Culver read the Resolution and presented it to Mr. Morris. The chairman reported the Commission is one of the appointing authorities and they continue to support the airport and will do whatever they can to support it. The chairman stated he had spoken with some of the utilities that have some concern about this, and told them the commission was going to present the support resolution. He stated he thought they wanted to work it all out.

Mr. Morris thanked the Chairman and commissioners for their support. He stated he was there not just as the manager of the local regional airport, but also as a representative of the Aviation Council of Alabama, which represents all of the airports in the State of Alabama. Mr. Morris reported this was a very important piece of legislation which is actually in both houses of the legislature. He pointed out there have been a couple of airports in the state that have had their airspace restricted through construction of facilities. He reported in one case it was a condominium, and in the other case it was a tower that was erected in the approach zones of the airport that actually ruined their approaches. Mr. Morris stated that affects the economic development of the community because if your approach is destroyed, certain classes of aircraft cannot come into your airport. He stated he felt the utility companies and cell phone companies understand that as well, and the Aviation Council of Alabama is working with them to resolve the issues they have. He reported they have been working on this project for the past five years and he felt they were going to be able to move forward. Mr. Morris reported he felt this was very important to the economic development of local communities in the state as a whole. He thanked the commission for their support.

Mr. Morris reported the federal government has allocated approximately \$12 million for the State of Alabama for airports and it is administered through the Federal Aviation Administration and the State Aeronautics Commission. He pointed out the State Aeronautics Commission will disseminate funds to general aviation airports that have projects that are ready to go by June 1<sup>st</sup>. He reported the Federal Aviation Administration will deal directly with the air carrier airports like Montgomery, Mobile, Huntsville, and Dothan separately. He stated they were in the process of applying for funds but they were very limited on what they can be used on. He pointed out they can only be used for runway improvements, which the airport already has a runway project underway, and they are not allowed to apply it to existing projects. Mr. Morris stated the monies could be used for terminal building improvements, and Dothan's terminal building is still relatively new. He reported the only thing they felt the money could be used for was entrance roads signage coming into the airport. He pointed out that was the only eligible item that was not already funded. He reported they anticipated receiving approximately \$30,000-\$40,000 for the project. Mr. Morris reported he had talked with a lot of other airports and he did not know if Alabama would be able to use all of the funds allocated because of the time frame. He stated the airport appreciated whatever they can get and they will put the money to good use. Mr. Morris thanked the commission for their support.

Chairman Culver reported Mr. Morris had done a great job at the airport and he stated the commission appreciated his efforts through all of the difficulties and regulations. (Please see in Resolution Book)

2. Request from Chief Administrative Officer for authorization to write off non-collectable sanitation fees owed to Houston County.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the Chief Administrative Officer's request to authorize the write off of non-collectable sanitation fees owed to Houston County in the amount of \$200,520.16. Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion.

Chairman Culver reported this is something the commission does periodically due to deaths, bankruptcies, imprisonments, or people for whatever reason who have disappeared. He assured everyone the county makes every effort possible to collect the debts but many of them are just not collectable over time. Chairman Culver reported under the new procedure, the past dues have been turned over to a collection agency. He pointed out in the past, the county was trying to do it in-house. The chairman stated he thought the new procedure would cut down significantly on the number of past dues in the future. He reported the commission felt the new process will generate revenue that will compensate for this without having to go up on rates. He stated the commission plans to maintain the current rate for quite some time based on a more efficient collection process. Chairman Culver reported he wanted the citizens to know that they are not giving someone a free ride and the county is trying to collect every penny owed.

Mr. Dempsey reported this is part of a bigger picture issue where the county had broken down the collections and billing into three phases.

He stated one of these is the new billing process to pick up about 10% more customers than the county has had in the past. Mr. Dempsey reported the commission is well aware of some of the issues there, but they have picked up a lot of customers in excess of 700-1,000.

Mr. Dempsey stated the second phase is improvement in collections from January 1 billings forward. He reported on January 1<sup>st</sup>, the county began partnering with Wiregrass Electric Coop, and with a local collection agency, Prim, Freeman, & Mendheim. Mr. Dempsey stated it will allow the county to identify past due billings, but also notify customers who are past due much quicker. He stated customers who are past due should be notified within 30 days.

He reported the third part of the process is to look at all of the outstanding billings prior to January 1, 2009. He reported 92% of the request is five years or older so part of the phase three is get all of the books clean and he felt the county was in a good position to do that.

Mr. Dempsey reiterated what Chairman Culver had previously stated that it would not contribute to any rate increases. He stated the county's ability to collect on time and to identify customers who should be paying would contribute to future rates. Mr. Dempsey stated the county has a better handle on this and a better system in place than ever before.

Commissioner Snellgrove stated the commission needed the public to understand that they have exhausted all efforts to collect the money over the last 4-5 years. Mr. Snellgrove reported some of the notes were 7 years old. He stated the commission has reached the point where they are spending a dollar to collect a dime and it is not feasible to spend that kind of money to collect the small amount they were collecting. Commissioner Snellgrove reported the notes would not be

thrown away. He stated that he would like to see the commission look into the possibility of contracting out or either letting some collection agency have it at either 50 cents or 25 cents on the dollar. Commissioner Snellgrove stated anything the county might collect would be of benefit to the commission as well as the taxpayers. Commissioner Snellgrove asked how many people were involved in the write off? Mr. Dempsey stated it represented approximately 3,300 accounts.

Mr. Dempsey reported they would investigate the possibility of turning it over to someone who might pay the county a fee. He pointed out in doing that, he asked him to consider that the county did not want to spend a dollar chasing a dime either. Mr. Dempsey reported if there was a lot of work the department has to do in order to try to do it successfully; they would chose not to.

Chairman Culver called for the question and the motion carried unanimously. (Please see attached in Minute Book)

3. Request to accept Homeland Security Grant, award bid for crime scene vehicle, and the appropriate budget amendment.

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to accept the Homeland Security Grant, award bid for the crime scene vehicle to Sirchie Finger Print Laboratories – Vehicle Division, and make the appropriate budget amendment. Commissioner Snellgrove seconded the motion. Chairman Culver reported the grant is in the amount of \$200,000, and the bid came in at \$199,897.00. He stated it is a 100% grant and will not cost the county any money. Chairman Culver called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously. (Please see attached bid summary sheet and budget amendment in Minute Book)

4. Request to award bid on EMA vehicle and the appropriate budget amendment.

Commissioner Snellgrove made a motion to award the bid on the EMA vehicle to the low bidder meeting specs, Bondy's Ford, in the amount of \$23,058.80, and to make the appropriate budget amendment. Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion.

Chairman Culver reported this is the truck the county does every two years. He pointed out the state pays for this and at the end of the lease, it ends up being the county's vehicle. The chairman asked for any questions? He reported there was a question raised about looking at diesels, but they are more expensive. He asked Mr. Matthews if they are driving any diesels? He stated no. The chairman asked if they were going to be doing anything different with the vehicle than they have done in the past with the other vehicles? Mr. Matthews reported they were stepping up one class because the other one was not heavy enough to pull the trailer. Chairman Culver stated his department has to pull the trailer periodically. Mr. Matthews stated yes.

Commissioner Cook asked how often the truck would be driven? She stated the county was trying to cut down every day on the gas. Mr. Matthews stated it would be driven every day. Chairman Culver reported this would just replace the vehicle that either Mr. Matthews or Mr. Steve Carlisle currently drive. The chairman reported the truck would be driven in the normal duty, but when needed, they would pull the trailers.

Chairman Culver pointed out this is from the local vendor. He asked for any more questions or comments? There being none, he called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Culver asked if the commission determined the disposition of the old vehicle? Mr. Dempsey stated he had looked back but he did not know of anything at this time. Mr. Culver reported typically the commission gives these vehicles that are provided by the state to the Sheriff's Department, and then the Sheriff's Department gets rid of some of their older vehicles. Chairman Culver stated the commission wanted to be sure they were not just adding new vehicles; they are replacing vehicles. Chairman Culver stated he thought that was the intention.

Commissioner Cook stated the only reason she said anything was because the commission was trying to cut down on the consumption of fuel. She stated if it is something that is needed, she wanted everyone to know they are looking at it. Chairman Culver reported there is a new procedure that each commissioner was given that evaluates every vehicle purchase the commission makes based on need and based on where it can be serviced. Chairman Culver stated fuel mileage needed to be on there also. He stated it is usually on the sticker on the vehicle, and he did not understand why they could not get it. Mr. Dempsey stated he was told it was not available. Chairman Culver stated he thought that was erroneous because the miles per gallon is on the sticker on the side of the vehicle. He stated for future reference, if someone went down to the Ford or Dodge place and looked at one it has it listed. Mr. Dempsey reported what is in the package is in accordance with Policy #39 with all of the specs, the reason for the purchase, and recommendations. Commissioner Cook asked if the state buys the vehicle? Chairman Culver reported the vehicle is leased and the state pays for it. She asked if the state buys the fuel? Chairman Culver stated no. He reported the state gives the county the vehicle at the end of the lease and it is a good deal for the county. Mr. Pool reported typically, these type vehicles are diesel and they have a much higher resale value. He pointed out they are designed to pull heavy loads, and especially if the county is getting it free. The chairman reported the state would not buy a Mack truck just because it is free either that there are some limitations. He stated usually the vehicles end up back in inventory typically not pulling things. He reported the vehicles are given to the Sheriff's Department and whether or not it is a diesel at that point or needs to be might be debatable. Commissioner Snellgrove asked how much diesel fuel was per gallon compared to gasoline? Mr. Pool stated he did not know, but it is higher. Commissioner Cook reported in their business, they had found the diesel was more fuel efficient in pulling heavier loads. The chairman asked how much more was the price of a diesel truck? It was reported \$5,000 more. Commissioner Cook stated the resale was more. Chairman Culver

reported the county was not going to resale it they were going to use it. (Please see attached bid summary sheet in Minute Book)

5. Request to approve items to be sold on GovDeals.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the items to be sold on GovDeals.

Commissioner Harvey seconded; and the motion carried unanimously. (Please see attached in Minute Book)

Staff Reports:

Chief Administrative Officer

Mr. Dempsey reported the computer training lab is now available, and will be coordinated through Ms. Sheri Stephenson in the Personnel Department. He reported they anticipate the lab being used quite a bit for training as well as some other issues. Mr. Dempsey stated if any department head would like to see it or reserve it they should call Ms. Stephenson. Chairman Culver encouraged anyone who would like to see the lab to do so. He stated he thought it would help the county.

County Engineer

Mr. Pool reported he had handed each commissioner an annual report which he said was actually a seven year report. He then gave some highlights:

Completed 900 more work orders than in past years. He stated it could have been due to only having 35 rainy days which is much less than normal.

He stated they striped 166 miles with the new striper. Mr. Pool pointed out the annual report is from January 1 to January 1. He reported they put down 27,972 raised pavement markers. Mr. Pool stated in figuring the price of \$1,000 per mile and \$4.00 per delineator results in a savings of \$272,000. He pointed out 3 counties paid \$150,000 each for the truck and it results in a \$122,000 savings the first year for Houston County.

Mr. Pool reported there were 172 requests from the small towns. He pointed out a few years ago, they were around 100, and they have seen an increase.

He reported they did 49 miles of resurfacing last year at a cost of \$75,000 per mile. He stated if it had been let through the state, it would have been approximately \$125,000 - \$130,000 per mile.

Mr. Pool reported they completed 4.8 miles of dirt road paving. He pointed out Singletary Road was 2.8 miles, and it was in a shape where they did not have to do much work. Mr. Pool stated normally the cost is approximately \$300,000 per mile and that threw the average off last year. He reported the dirt road paving cost was \$131,000 per mile.

The Engineer reported the litter pick-up was down due to not being able to get as many inmates. He stated the report was detailed. Chairman Culver thanked Mr. Pool for a good report.

County Attorney – there was no report

Chairman Culver stated Mr. Clark Matthews had some comments he wanted to make about an issue. He reported they talked about burning tires at the Administrative meeting. He stated that burning tires was a violation of ADEM Code R 335-3-3. Mr. Matthews reported this fall and early spring they have had a rash of people burning tires and they are calling the Sheriff's Department, and at that point, they get involved. He stated the fine is \$25,000 per day for the violation. Mr. Matthews reported they are trying to ask the citizens not to burn the tires anymore and tell them what the law states. He stated most people understand that and they allow the volunteer fire departments to put the fire out. Mr. Matthews reported they are trying to get the word out to all of the towns and municipalities to help them stop it. He stated it is a nuisance to neighbors and pollutes the environment. He stated they wanted everyone to know there is a fine if you burn tires.

Adjourn.

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Cook seconded; and the motion carried unanimously.