

MINUTES OF HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSION  
SEPTEMBER 11, 2006

PRESENT: Chairman Mark S. Culver, Commissioner Curtis Harvey, Commissioner Bobby R. Snellgrove, Commissioner Frances M. Cook, Gary Sherrer, Attorney, Mark Pool, Engineer, and Roy Roberts, Administrator

ABSENT: Commissioner Phillip L. Forrester

Chairman Mark Culver called the 10:00 A.M. meeting to order, established that a quorum was present and welcomed everyone.

The chairman reported normally, this would be just another regular commission meeting, but five years ago today, at 7:46 A.M., our world changed. He stated the citizens of this country became aware of the sometimes cruel world in which we live and our vulnerability to the acts of those who have no regard for life and whose only means for self justification is terrorism. He asked everyone to think back to that day five years ago, and people would remember where they were and what they were doing during the attacks. He pointed out Ms. Nancy Bristow, Accounting Manager, was within a few blocks of the World Trade Center when they fell. Chairman Culver stated the county is fortunate to have Ms. Bristow with us. He reported she will always remember where she was and the unimaginable events of the day. He stated out of that, our nation rose as one drawn together by a courage to fight those who caused this travesty by sense of community and patriotic support of our nation's service men and women and those who stand on the front line in fire and rescue to save all of our lives in times of need. He reported there has been an outpouring of faith in God; a God who has purpose and gives us strength in troubled times. The chairman reported we still continue to be encouraged by the actions of 40 or so American heroes. who with no regard for their own lives, took Flight 93 down in a Pennsylvania field so that it would not create further mass destruction in Washington, D.C. He reported we will not forget that day, what it meant to our nation and the impact it continues to have on our lives. Chairman Culver reported we can rest easier in the fact that our levels of protection and security have been raised to suppress the possibility of such events as September 11, 2001, but stand as one nation ready to defend the freedom that we have earned over the years and to carry forward the memory of those lost five years ago.

Chairman Culver called on Rev. Troy Fountain, Pastor, Wiregrass Church, to come forward to the podium for the invocation. The chairman asked everyone to pause for an eleven second moment of silence in memory of those who lost their lives and their loved ones who are trying to move forward with their lives. Rev. Fountain then gave the invocation. Commissioner Snellgrove led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

#### Announcements and Public Comments from Chairman and Commission

Chairman Culver reported it has already been in the press but he would like to reiterate that Dothan/Houston County has been recognized as having the lowest cost of living in the State of Alabama. He stated he thought it is something we can all be proud of and be glad that we live where we do because it is a great place to live.

#### Awards and Presentations

##### 1. Flood Plain Presentation – Shelby Womack, EMA Director

Mr. Womack reported a couple of years ago, the Corps of Engineers asked him if he needed any part of Houston County restudied for flood plain purposes. Mr. Womack stated he asked them to do the lower part of Cowarts Creek which runs from Highway #55 down to the state line. He reported he received the maps back three weeks ago, and there is a drastic difference in what FEMA and the Corps of Engineers have drawn out as flood plain. Mr. Womack referred to the flood plain maps and stated there is a large area that people live in and they are having to pay flood insurance. He pointed out if they contact FEMA there is a good possibility they can be taken out of the large area, and it will be a significant savings to those who are having to pay the flood insurance. Mr. Womack reported it is up to the property owners to ask to be taken out. Commissioner Cook asked if they would automatically be lowered by their insurance company? Mr. Womack stated no, they will have to petition FEMA to be taken out of the flood plain based on the best available study which was done by the Corps of Engineers. Mr. Pool reported the City of Dothan had a similar situation in Chapelwood and they contacted all of the property owners and notified them of the necessary steps they should take. The engineer stated he thought the county needed to have some way to contact the property owners. Mr. Womack reported a lot of the property owners were living there before it was mapped, and are probably not paying flood insurance. He pointed out now on a new mortgage or loan on a home they would be required to pay flood insurance. Mr. Womack reported the property owners can call his office and they will walk them through the steps. Chairman Culver reported this is the reason for the presentation, and he asked the media to please help the county to notify the public. Mr. Womack stated those people who live in the drainage area that goes into Cowarts Creek are the ones affected by this. Commissioner Snellgrove asked if the people living in that area would have to notify FEMA? Mr. Womack stated yes they have to make an application to be taken out of the flood plain. Mr. Womack stated they can go on line to FEMA or they can call the local EMA office and they will help them any way they can. Commissioner Snellgrove stated this runs from

Grangerburg back up into the Ashford area. Chairman Culver stated this is such a broad area and he did not know how to contact everyone and the best way would be through the media. Commissioner Cook asked if something could be placed on the county's website? Chairman Culver stated yes.

2. Employee of the Month – Road and Bridge Department.

Mr. Pool asked Mr. Ronnie Berryhill to come forward and presented him with the Employee of the Month Certificate. Mr. Pool reported Mr. Berryhill has been with the county since May 5, 1997, and he is an Operator II. He stated he has had perfect attendance and is an excellent employee. Mr. Pool pointed out he is a two time winner of the award. Chairman Culver thanked Mr. Berryhill on behalf of the Commission.

Consent Agenda

1. Re-appointments to Houston County Port Authority – Dr. Fred Garrett and Perry Thomas, Jr.
2. Re-appointment to Houston County Department of Human Resources – Mike Schmitz

Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the consent agenda to re-appoint Dr. Fred Garrett and Perry Thomas, Jr. to the Houston County Port Authority and to re-appoint Mike Schmitz to the Houston County Department of Human Resources. Commissioner Harvey seconded; and the motion carried unanimously.

Regular Agenda

1. Request to authorize Supernumerary Tax Official COLA.

Chairman Culver reported last year the legislature passed a bill that allows for supernumerary tax officials to receive the same increase in their supernumerary pay as the retired state employees would receive. He stated it requires a Resolution from the commission and only impacts one person at this time. Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the request to authorize the supernumerary tax official a cost of living adjustment at the same percentage of increase as the retired state employees. Commissioner Snellgrove seconded; and the motion carried unanimously.

2. Request to approve 2006-'07 Budget.

Commissioner Snellgrove made a motion to approve the 2006-'07 budget. Commissioner Cook seconded the motion. Chairman Culver asked Mr. Roberts to present the budget.

Mr. Roberts thanked the department heads, elected officials, the commissioners, the accounting department, and Joan Clark for all of their work on this budget.

He then presented an overview of the budget. Mr. Roberts reported the current year will be completed in good financial shape. He stated the county will be able to begin the new budget year with fund balances well above expectations. Mr. Roberts reported the higher starting points will allow the county to purchase capital equipment rather than leasing. He also stated the county can plan for improvements in infrastructure like roads and bridges. Mr. Roberts pointed out there are improvements in employee benefits and pay. Some of the following highlights are included in the budget: 1. Animal Control will move back under county control after many years under the Health Department. 2. The county supports the Houston County Port Authority's purchase of land in Taylor for economic development. 3. The county will assist the City of Ashford in expanding the Senior Citizens Center. 4. The Sheriff funded for new Domestic Violence Unit and additional Dispatchers.

5. Employee benefit and pay changes include: a) 4% cost of living adjustment, b) prior year job review and grade change adjustments not funded included in this budget, c) funding for increase in county life insurance from \$10,000 to \$15,000 per employee and a reduction in the rates employees pay for voluntary life insurance. d) County absorbed the 7% increase in Health Insurance for active employees and 10% for retirees. This was funded with savings created when the county returned to a Preferred Rating vs. Standard Rating, e) Dental rates remained the same.

6. Capital improvements include: a) vehicle purchases for the Commission, Mailroom, Sheriff Department, Jail, Sanitation, Road and Bridge, and Work Release. b) Construction equipment for Road and Bridge, c) Break pavilion for the Administration Building, d) Fiber optic line to Road and Bridge to improve data transmission and phone system performance. This will reduce operating cost and has a two year payback. e) Firing range building for the Sheriff's Department, f) Audio/video transmission equipment for Sheriff's Department, g) Building addition for the County Engineer's office, h) Purchases of county shop equipment

Major expenses include: a) Window washing for the Administrative Building and Courthouse. b) Jail HVAC heat pipes humidity control, c) Jail showers, d) County Building key system, e) Fire alarm panel for the Administrative building, f) Omussee Park road resurfacing and parking lot paving, playground equipment, grills, picnic tables, and 4 RV hookups to be completed, g) Chattahoochee Park to add playground equipment, grills, and picnic tables. A 50/50 grant for bathrooms for the north side of the lake. Addition of fishing pier on east side of lake, h) Aerial photography project to be completed for Reappraisal.

Road and Bridge projects: a) Bridge Replacement projects: East Cook Road, Baxter Road, and Hopkins Road, b) Resurfacing Old Headland Road, c) Intersection improvements, traffic signals and turn lanes on Brannon Stand and Murphy Mill Road.

Mr. Roberts reported the budget also includes a carryover of Houston County participation in the State Drop Program beginning October 1, 2006. This budget continues the commission's standing plan to have at least two months of operating expenses in reserve to allow for any unforeseen disaster.

Mr. Roberts reported the revenues are projected to be \$32.9 million, and expenditures could come in around \$35 million. He stated based on budget projections the county would end the budget year with \$6.3 million.

Mr. Roberts reported the budget includes a total of 16 new full time or part time positions, and \$2.9 million funding for agency requests and the rescue squads.

Chairman Culver thanked Mr. Roberts for an excellent presentation. He stated this year the commission is trying to take care of the employees. He reported there were a lot of employee related issues including a cost of living, additional insurance, pavilion out back so employees can have somewhere to have lunch and take smoke breaks. He stated he felt this budget had a commitment to the employees. Chairman Culver stated this is a very good budget and the employees, department heads, and commissioners have all done a good job in managing the funds the citizens of this county allow us to use on their behalf. He reported it is incumbent on all of us as employees of the county to try to do the best we can to take care of those funds. Chairman Culver stated he would hope everyone would agree that the county is doing that. He stated Houston County is in very stable condition and there are no increases in revenues in this budget. He reported after the election, the commission will be gathering to put together a long range plan for the quadrennial. He stated in January or February the commission may come back and make some amendments to the budget based on what the commission as a whole puts forth as the quadrennial plan. Chairman Culver reported they will probably do it about the same time as the annual report is presented. The chairman stated he appreciated the commission's time and effort along with the staff in going through all of this.

Commissioner Cook thanked the department heads and the employees because she stated they worked hard for the commission to come under budget and she stated she felt that spoke volumes for the employees and department heads. Commissioner Cook also thanked Mr. Roberts, and the accounting department.

Commissioner Snellgrove echoed what Chairman Culver and Commissioner Cook had said and he stated he appreciated the department heads coming to the meeting with a lot of needs and not wants. He reported it is much easier to work with not only department heads but the elected officials who are primarily asking

for the needs of the county. The chairman called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

3. Request from Town of Cowarts to help fund traffic signal at U.S. 84 and Forrester Road.

Commissioner Snellgrove made a motion to approve the request from the Town of Cowarts to help fund the traffic signal at U. S. Highway #84 East and Forrester Road. Commissioner Cook seconded the motion. Chairman Culver reported the amended amount is \$30,000. Commissioner Snellgrove stated a red light will be installed on Forrester Road and Glen Lawrence crossing on Highway #84 East. He pointed out it is about a mile and a half east of the Ross Clark Circle. Chairman Culver called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

4. Request to approve Pine Acres Road as a county maintained road and to accept right-of-way deeds.

Chairman Culver stated he knew Commissioner Forrester would like to make the motion if he was here. Commissioner Snellgrove made a motion to approve Pine Acres Road as a county maintained road and to accept right-of-way deeds. Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion; and it carried unanimously. (Please see attached in Minute Book)

5. Request to excavate small area at Chattahoochee State Park Lake.

Commissioner Snellgrove made a motion to approve the request to excavate a small area at Chattahoochee State Park Lake. Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion. Mr. Pool reported this is a needed project and will help with the vegetation control. Chairman Culver reported the county had received a letter from the Department of Conservation that states the problem with the water being shallow can be alleviated by deepening as far as possible along the bank fishing area with an excavator or drag line. The chairman reported the commission has a lot of partners in the Chattahoochee Park project and he stated they appreciated the Alabama Department of Conservation and the State Parks. He pointed out this is their recommendation. Mr. Pool reported the Department of Natural Resources has also made the same recommendation. The chairman called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

6. Request to sell .204 acre parcel of land to Albert and Mollie Phillips for \$2,750.00.

Commissioner Cook made a motion to approve the request to sell .204 acre parcel of land to Albert and Mollie Phillips for \$2,750.00. Commissioner Snellgrove seconded the motion. Chairman Culver reported this is a piece of land that the deed was recorded incorrectly, and the commission is

correcting it along with including another parcel of land that has been the assumption that it was their property all along. Commissioner Snellgrove asked Mr. Pool to explain where it is? Mr. Pool then showed a map of the property. The Chairman called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously. (Please see attached in Minute Book)

7. Request for emergency purchase of backup parts for telephone system including Sheriff's Department and EMA.

Commissioner Snellgrove made a motion to approve the request for the emergency purchase of backup parts for telephone system including the Sheriff's Department and EMA. Commissioner Harvey seconded the motion. Chairman Culver reported this request is a result of the lightning strike that occurred at the Courthouse, and the extra parts have been used. He pointed out if something happened immediately, the Sheriff, Communications, and EMA would be without communications, and that is why it is deemed an emergency purchase. Chairman Culver called for the question; and the motion carried unanimously.

#### Reports from Staff:

- a. County Administrator

Mr. Roberts reported the sales tax information had been received and it exceeded the prior year not at the same level.

- b. County Engineer

Mr. Pool reported work on Pine Acres Drive will begin today and the work will be done in phases. He stated Hodgesville Road is being resurfaced, and a week after completion, work will begin on the ditches and shoulders. Mr. Pool stated people need to be careful driving out there for at least the next month. He reported on Brannon Stand Road, the bridge below Highland School is closed today from 9:00 A.M. until 1:00 P.M. for guard rail replacement. Mr. Pool reported the bridge on Paul Lamp Road will be closed for four months for bridge replacement. He reported crews would begin cutting grass over the whole county within the next week.

- c. County Attorney

There was no report.

#### Adjourn

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

