

Houston County Commissioners Meeting
February 18, 2025
Warner Robins, Georgia

The Houston County Board of Commissioners met in regular session at 5:00 p.m., on Tuesday, February 18, 2025, at the Houston County Annex in Warner Robins, Georgia. Chairman Perdue presided, and Commissioners Byrd, Gottwals, Robinson and Talton were present. County Attorney Tom Hall, Director of Administration Robbie Dunbar, and Director of Operations Brian Jones were also present.

Commissioner Byrd led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Director of Administration Robbie Dunbar gave the invocation.

Dr. Grace Adams-Square, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Middle Georgia State University, gave a presentation about Black History in Houston County to commemorate February as Black History Month. Dr. Adams-Square spoke on several topics related to Black History, focusing on history, current events, culture, religion, and politics in Houston County.

Chairman Perdue and each Commissioner expressed their gratitude to Dr. Adams-Square for her in-depth and informative presentation. They highlighted the significant facts and insights regarding the history of Black Americans in Houston County. The Commissioners also acknowledged prominent Black community leaders in Houston County, such as Willie Talton, Tim Andrews, Ivan Allen, and several pastors.

Chairman Perdue and Sheriff Moulton recognized two Sheriff's Department employees for their years of service: Sgt. Tim Leonard has 30 years of service and Capt. Ricky Harlowe has 40 years.

Sheriff Moulton commented on the dedication and service each deputy has provided to the department and the citizens of Houston County.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the minutes from the February 4, 2024, meeting.

Mr. Byrd presented a request for approval of a contract for jail services.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all to approve the service contracts between Macon County Sheriff's Office and the Houston County Detention Center, and The City of Oglethorpe and the Houston County Detention Center for Jail services to be billed monthly on a per day per inmate fee schedule. These contracts will be in effect for one year.

Mr. Byrd presented a request from the Superior Court to approve an independent contractor agreement.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of an independent contractor agreement with Sasha Riedel Knight to provide defense of certain indigent persons where there is a conflict of interest with the Public Defender's Office. The term of this contract will be March 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025 at a monthly rate of \$7,500.

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued from Page 479

Chairman Perdue commented on the vital work the Public Defender's Office handles daily. He also stated that Judge Lukemire was in favor of this contract.

Mr. Byrd stated that this contract replaces an existing contract.

Mr. Byrd presented a request to approve the renewal of a trucking contract.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve a contract renewal with Decarlton Mims d/b/a Mid Georgia Trucking, of Macon Georgia, to haul and deliver leachate generated from the Houston County Landfill to a water treatment facility with all contractual terms remaining the same. The current agreement is set to expire March 5, 2025, and a contract renewal is needed for services to continue.

Chairman Perdue commented that this contract was last renegotiated in 2020 and that this contract has no price adjustments. He further stated that landfill staff are fully satisfied with the contractor's work and feel it is a good deal for the County.

Mr. Byrd presented a request for the approval of adjustments to the Water Department fees, rates, and charges.

Chairman Perdue gave a presentation explaining the reasoning behind the proposed water rate increases. He explained that during the last audit, it was discovered that the Water Fund experienced an operating loss for FY24. He also discussed the breakdown of residential, public, and commercial rates and the timeline for the rate increase.

Chairman Perdue opened the floor for public comments on water rate adjustments.

Thomas Reynolds expressed his opposition to the water rate hike. He also commented on property taxes and the restructuring of garbage fees.

Mr. Talton explained that the County is playing catch-up through this fee increase.

Mr. Gottwals commented that in his opinion, the rate increase is very minimal and should have been higher for the level of service the County provides.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the adjustment of water rates annually for a period of three years and thereafter increase in accordance with 100% of the *Consumer Price Index for Water, Sewer, and Trash, Not Seasonally Adjusted, All Areas (WST CPI)*, December through December change, as published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. These adjustments will be effective for Water Department customers on July 1st or the first billing cycle of that month. Meter tap fees and hydrant meter costs will be reviewed annually to ensure that they accurately reflect the actual costs of services provided.

Mr. Byrd thanked Utilities Superintendent Terry Dietsch, Director of Operations Brian Jones, the consulting engineering firm Carter and Sloope, and Chairman Perdue for taking this necessary action.

Chairman Perdue stated that these rates resulted from thorough analysis and comparison with the water rates of other jurisdictions, and he believes that this encourages conservative water use.

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued from Page 480

Mr. Byrd presented a request for approval of a contract.

Motion by Mr. Byrd, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve an agreement with Life Safety Inspection Vault (LIV) to provide required reports from local businesses at no cost to the Houston County Fire Department. These reports will cover fire protection systems through a portal to be accessed by the Fire Department.

Mr. Talton presented a request for approval of an extension of a bond.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all to approve the extension of a maintenance bond (One South Bank Letter of Credit 411044 expiring February 23, 2025) for Southfield Section 6, to allow the developer to perform the required work. If the bond is not extended by February 23, 2025, it will be drawn, and the bond will be used to contract the work.

Chairman Perdue commented that these bonds are held to ensure that roads and infrastructure are properly constructed and executed to meet Houston County's Comprehensive Land Development Regulations.

Mr. Talton presented a request for approval of a change order on the Talton Road/SR 127 project.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the approval of change order #1 for the installation of a traffic signal at Talton Road and State Route 127 with McCoy Grading Inc., of Greenville, Georgia. This change order in the amount of \$493,939.66 will bring the total contract price to \$5,905,025.11 with a completion date of July 15, 2025. This project is funded by 2018 SPLOST.

Chairman Perdue stated that this traffic signal will be in place before the start of the next school year. He expressed his gratitude to the Georgia Department of Transportation for its cooperation, assistance, and help in getting this traffic signal approved, which will increase safety at that intersection.

No action was taken regarding the personnel request for the Equipment Operator position at the Landfill.

Mr. Talton presented a request for approval of an adjustment to the solid waste collection rate.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the following residential solid waste collection rates to begin July 1, 2025, or the first billing cycle in that month, to coincide with our new solid waste collection contract.

Trash/Refuse Weekly	\$13.95 per month
Recycling Every Other Week	\$8.00 per month
Yard Waste Weekly	\$8.00 per month
Extra Trash Refuse Cart	\$9.00 per month

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued from Page 481

Chairman Perdue commented that these charges will primarily be a pass-through from the contractor, and the pricing is set up to encourage recycling. He also stated that the fee schedule is set up so that individuals can pick and choose their level of service, which will help them save money by only paying for what they use instead of paying for services they don't use.

Mr. Talton presented a request for approval of the renewal of the Mutual Aid Agreement with the City of Perry.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of the Mutual Aid Agreement with the City of Perry.

Chairman Perdue commented that it is good to see partnerships with other jurisdictions, and this agreement is an example of cooperation.

Mr. Talton presented a request to allow the County to request aid from the Georgia Department of Transportation for the construction of the St. Patrick's Drive Extension SPLOST Project.

Motion by Mr. Talton, second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all to approve requesting aid from the Georgia Department of Transportation for the construction of the St. Patrick's Drive Extension SPLOST Project.

Chairman Perdue commented that he had assurances from Georgia Department of Transportation officials that this project's request for aid and assistance would be viewed favorably. Their consideration would help the County complete the entire project rather than a single phase.

Ms. Robinson presented a request for support from the County of the proposed road improvement project at the SR-26/1-75 interchange.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of a Letter of Support to the Georgia Department of Transportation for the dual roundabouts at the northbound and southbound intersections of SR 26 and I-75.

Chairman Perdue commented that site distance issues at this interchange necessitated these safety improvements. He stated that a Georgia Department of Transportation pool of special funds for improving freight operations and rural development was being used to fund this project. He concluded that the county would handle the ongoing landscaping work and lighting costs of the new roundabouts.

Ms. Robinson presented a request for approval to enter into a statement of work agreement for updating the Houston County Code of Ordinance page.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Gottwals, and carried unanimously by all to approve the signing of an agreement with CivicPlus of Manhattan, Kansas, to assist the County in providing a more up-to-date online code for all to use. The CodeBank and CodeBank Compare features will permit the County to upload ordinances as the Board of Commissioners passes them. They will also build a searchable bank of all resolutions passed to make each ordinance change from this time forward. This agreement in the amount of \$1,375 will be funded by professional services.

Chairman Perdue thanked the County Attorney's Office for researching this new system, which will help keep the county's ordinances updated more frequently.

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued from Page 482

Ms. Robinson presented a request for approval of a bid for two special services vehicles.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the bid on two new special service vehicles from Phil Brannen Ford of Perry, Georgia, for use in the Sheriff's Department. This purchase in the amount of \$103,000 will be funded by 2018 SPLOST.

Ms. Robinson presented a request for approval of a bid for one new patrol vehicle to replace a vehicle damaged in an accident.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the bid on one new patrol vehicle from Phil Brannen Ford of Perry, Georgia, for use in the Sheriff's Department. This purchase in the amount of \$49,850 will be funded from the 2018 SPLOST.

Ms. Robinson presented a request for approval of a bid for two vehicles for the Warrants Division to replace two vehicles damaged in two separate accidents.

Motion by Ms. Robinson, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the bid from Phil Brannen Ford of Perry, Georgia, for the purchase of two vehicles for use in the Warrants Division of the Sheriff's Department. This purchase in the amount of \$95,555 will be funded from 2018 SPLOST.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request to offer financial support to the Georgia Department of Transportation for improvements to US 41 between Lakeview Road and SR 247C.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve giving financial support to the Georgia Department of Transportation for improvements to be made to US 41 between Lakeview Road and SR 247C. This support in the amount of \$15 million will reimburse the DOT for design fees, right-of-way/easement acquisition in Houston County, and other costs associated with the project. This will be funded from 2006 SPLOST.

Chairman Perdue stated that this work will widen Hwy. 41 from Watson Blvd. to Lakeview Road, a project totaling \$54 million. He also commented that Chairman Mosely of Peach County will contribute to the costs of acquiring right-of-way in Peach County along Hwy. 41.

Mr. Byrd expressed his appreciation to the Chairman and County staff for their work getting the County to this point. He also commented on the benefit of having this road widened and what it will do for Houston County.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request to add a Property and Evidence Manager position to the Houston County Position Control Listing.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the addition of a Property and Evidence Manager to the Houston County Position Control Listing at a Grade 16 effective February 19, 2025. Also, for accounting to make any necessary budget adjustments.

Chairman Perdue thanked Sheriff Moulton for attending. He commented that this position was open due to the retirement of a narcotics officer and that, at the request of the Sheriff, a new position was being created so that the retired officer's replacement could work in narcotics.

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued from Page 483

Mr. Gottwals presented a request to fill the new Property and Evidence Manager position at the Sheriff's Office.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Talton, and carried unanimously by all to approve the hiring of Kimberly King to fill the new Property and Evidence Manager position at the Sheriff's Office at a Grade 16 step E effective February 19, 2025.

Chairman Perdue commented that the candidate for this position has previous experience in the same role with a different jurisdiction, is POST certified, and already knows the computer system that will be used.

Mr. Gottwals presented a request to fill the vacant Heavy Equipment Operator position in the Roads and Bridges Department.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Mr. Byrd, and carried unanimously by all to approve the hiring of Jermembulus King to fill the vacant Heavy Equipment Operator position in the Roads and Bridges Department at a Grade 13 step C effective February 19, 2025.

Chairman Perdue thanked Public Works staff for finding qualified applicants for these heavy equipment operator positions.

Motion by Mr. Gottwals, second by Ms. Robinson, and carried unanimously by all to approve the payment of the bills totaling \$4,270,730.66.

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

Mr. Thomas Reynolds spoke against having Commissioners serve in districts and not in the current at-large arrangement. He also spoke about having school tax relief for residents with no children or grandchildren in the Houston County public school system.

Ms. Jacqueline Rozier spoke in favor of having Commissioner representation by specific districts. She also commented that she felt none of the actions taken this evening would benefit the north side of Houston County where she lives.

As there were no further Public Comments, the Chairman opened the floor to Commissioner's Comments.

Ms. Robinson thanked everyone for attending and for their comments. She stated that it had been a very productive meeting.

Mr. Gottwals commented on the many varied items that were discussed and approved. He commented on the wisdom that Mr. Dunbar spoke of in his earlier invocation. He stated that we are all fallible and hoped that we would pray for wisdom.

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued on Page 485

Houston County Commissioners Meeting Continued from Page 484

Mr. Talton recognized and thanked Sgt. Leonard and Captain Harlowe for their service and congratulated Tommy Jackson on his promotion to the rank of Colonel. He commented on the water rate increase and how the rate change was needed to ensure that residents have confidence that clean water will come out of the tap each time they turn it on. He also stated that the rates will still be highly competitive, even after the increase with other jurisdictions. He closed by commenting on the collaborative efforts made with other local jurisdictions and the Georgia Department of Transportation and recognized this as very important.

Mr. Byrd commented on the water rate increase and how this action has been needed for a long time. He thanked Dr. Adams-Square for her in-depth presentation on Black History in Houston County. He recognized the County employees who were honored for their years of service. He thanked those who are responsible for organizing the agenda. He mentioned the cooperation among local governments and the State of Georgia that many agenda items covered. He concluded his comments by addressing Ms. Rozier's comments about the agenda items not impacting north Houston County by advising that the majority of them benefited Houston County as a whole, which included north Houston County.

Mr. Perdue recognized several high school students who were present at the Commissioners meeting as part of their leadership class requirement to observe a local government meeting. He recognized and thanked each Board member for their work, service, preparation for each meeting and what each bring and how they serve. He concluded his comments by recognizing Sgt. Leonard and Captain Harlowe for their long service to the Houston County Sheriff's Office and the citizens of Houston County.

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

Robbie Dunbar
Director of Administration

Chairman

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner

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