

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
PLANNING SESSION**

February 24, 2022

4:30 PM

Ellerslie Park Lodge, 3280 GA Hwy 85, Ellerslie

Commissioners Present: Andrew Zuerner, Susan Andrews (late), Rob Grant, Bobby Irions, Becky Langston.  
Staff Present: Randy Dowling, County Manager; Nancy McMichael, County Clerk.

**CALL TO ORDER.** Chairman Zuerner called the meeting to order.

**Retirement Plan Proposals (DB & DC).** Paul Bates, ACCG Retirement Services representative, was present and briefly reviewed the options available to the Board regarding the County's DB & DC plans. Following discussion, the consensus was to have no cap on the DC contribution by employees and for the County to increase its limit of contribution of up to 50% of the first 4% contributed by the employee; and to increase the DB multiplier to 2.00% to start July 1, 2022. Mr. Bates is to provide the appropriate documents for approval and execution by the Board during the April 5 Regular Session.

**Branding of Man O'War Railroad Recreation Trail.** Kim Tharp, Charles Sweat, and Andy Fritchley (Atomic Brand Energy) reviewed the presentation regarding the branding of the walking trail to include signage, mile markers, etc.. which would be provided, installed, and maintained by the Chamber at no cost to the County. There was a brief discussion regarding additional signage near the railroad trestle that gives the history of the infamous "hornets" lettering on the trestle and that such signage should match the other signage to be provided by the Chamber. Ms. Tharp said that part of the Chamber office will be converted into a visitor's center since it is adjacent to the trail. Following discussion, consensus was in favor of branding the trail as presented. Ms. Tharp and Mr. Dowling are to work on drafting the MOU regarding the trail and signage to bring before the Board.

**TSPLOST Campaign.** Discussion took place regarding the advertising to educate citizens about the upcoming TSPLOST election with the such to start 5-6 weeks prior to the May election; and that Ms. Tharp will develop communication strategy with Mr. Dowling.

**Development Authority Budget.** Charles Sweat, member of the Harris County Development Authority, reviewed the presentation regarding the need for an Economic Development Director and the possibility of the County funding the Development Authority in the amount of \$125,000 to hire not only the Director, but to provide funds for benefits, expenses and travel, and that in other areas, the person is usually an employee of the county (or city) but reports to the Authority. Discussion included that the individual could be a County employee, but answer to the Development Authority; that the job description would need to be sent to CVIOG for review and appropriate grade classification; and that further discussion should take place during the upcoming budget process.

**Impact Fee Briefing, Ordinance & Proposed Fee Schedule.** Lee Walton, Paige Hatley, and Bill Ross were in attendance and reviewed the presentation. Discussion took place regarding whether or not impact fees are needed at this time, and that the CIE, currently being reviewed by the state, must be adopted by the County before the Ordinance can be adopted, if the decision is to implement impact fees. Following discussion, consensus was to review the presentation with the Advisory Committee to get its recommendation as to the fees and bring back to the Board.

**Ellerslie Park Development.** Randy Dowling, County Manager, reviewed the development schedule of Ellerslie Park. Discussion included the results of the recent survey (on the website) as to what citizens would like to see; that although a splash pad was the number 1 request, consensus was to not have a splash pad; that only kayaks and canoes will be allowed in the lake but will not be provided or rented (people bring their own); to move disc golf up on the list; that the observation tower design has yet to be decided on, but a citizen has indicated he will pay for the cost of the tower; and to include security lighting. Consensus was to include the cost in the budget, where it may be "sliced and diced".

**Budget Calendar.** Randy Dowling, County Manager, reviewed the budget calendar, which is the same as it has been in previous years. There were no objections. He asked the Board to let him know if there are any projects they want to see in the budget; that the projects currently included are the Water Works office, the Solid Waste building, the EMS/VFD building, the Public Works building, and the water line that is part of the US 27 widening project. He also said that Phase II of Hadley Road is included; that Phase V of the Railroad Recreation Walking Trail is included; that because the County did not get the grant for the elevated water tank for the

Mulberry Grove area, the cost for the design of the tank will be included in next year's budget and with the construction of same the following year; and that he plans to request a 6% COLA for full time employees based on inflation data. Commissioner Langston said that a park needs to be built in the western section of the County, Commissioner Grant said that a playground is needed in Moultrie Park, and Commissioner Andrews said there is a dirt strip at the corner of Old Mayo Road that should be paved.

**Roads.** Commissioner Langston said that a citizen may be contacting Commissioners about the paving of a dirt section of a road beyond where the County owns/maintains the road (Old Brawners Ferry Road).

**Board/Authority/Committee Meeting Attendance.** Commissioner Langston said that the Board should be aware how their appointees attend various meetings and the info provided shows attendance at Development Authority, Planning Commission, and Recreation Board meetings. Nancy McMichael, County Clerk, said that if members of the Development Authority and Recreation Board miss three meetings in a row, without a valid excuse, that member's position is to be considered vacant.

**RECREATION OUT-OF-COUNTY PARTICIPATION POLICY.** Commissioner Grant said that during the December 7, 2021, meeting he indicated he would draft a policy regarding out-of-county participants in recreation sports events. Following discussion, the consensus was to leave the issue alone, not make any changes to the Recreation By-Laws, and to let the Recreation Director make the decision, which has been the practice.

**Recreation Ordinance re Background Checks.** Discussion included the possibility of changing the Ordinance regarding Volunteer Background Checks; that the Ordinance indicates the County Manager and County Clerk have the responsibility of handling the background checks for volunteers but should possibly go to the Recreation Director & Assistant Recreation Director; that there are too many citizens whose backgrounds should not be seen by anyone directly related to Recreation, must be kept under lock and key, and should remain being handled by the County Clerk as has been the practice since the Ordinance was originally implemented.

**Proposed Policy for Ag Center & Repeal of Ordinance.** Nancy McMichael, County Clerk, said that as a housekeeping matter, the current ordinance regarding the Ag Center Board needs to be repealed and replaced with a policy regarding the Ag Center procedures. She explained the history of the ordinance and policy, and said that unless there are objections, the policy will be on the next appropriate agenda for action by the Board.

**EMS Station 5 & Northwest Harris VFD Building.** Randy Dowling, County Manager, reviewed the proposed facade for the new EMS Station/Northwest Harris VFD Station. There were no objections from the Board, except to make certain that once the plans are designed and accepted, the County can use the same plans for future stations.

**Personnel Policy Status.** Randy Dowling, County Manager, said that work is continuing on updating the Personnel Policy and that he hopes it can be completed in June with help from the new HR Generalist.

**ADJOURNMENT.**