

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
QUARTERLY PLANNING RETREAT SESSION**

November 3, 2022

5:00 p.m.

Harris County Community Center Meeting Room, 7509 GA Highway 116, Hamilton

Commissioners Present: Andrew Zuerner, Rob Grant, Becky Langston, Bobby Irions, Susan Andrews. Staff Present: Randy Dowling, County Manager; Russell Britt, County Attorney; Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk.

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

**Development Authority: Economic Development Position Proposal.** Craig Greenhaw and Charles Sweat from the Development Authority appeared before the Board. Craig Greenhaw, Chairman of the Development Authority, advised that they have provided a sample employment contract. Mr. Greenhaw briefly reviewed the sample employment contract. County Randy Dowling explained that the position would be a contract employee that would be supervised and directed by the Development Authority but a County employee by contract. Discussion included personnel policies; development of the contract; that it is more simple for the contract employee to fall under the majority of the County personnel policies; that the position is more like a hybrid; that the contract would need to be reviewed for legality; that there is a desire for continuity in the position; and needed future steps by the Development Authority.

**Proposed Employee Handbook.** Commissioner Becky Langston advised that she requested an update related to the Employee Handbook. County Manager Randy Dowling discussed the process of how the information included in the draft was compiled from our existing handbook and reviewing the employee handbooks from multiple counties and cities and pulled sections from all of them for use in the draft. He stated that the draft is organized by how an individual “flows” through the organization and went over sections included in the draft. Discussion included needed orientation process for new employees; on-boarding; comp time accruals; on-call pay; benefits; holidays and proposed addition of two holidays; a proposed vacation leave accrual increase; sick leave accruals; donation of leave to others; office closures; cell phone stipends; IRS rules related to uniforms/clothing; use of County vehicles/personal vehicles for County business; and training related to personnel policies. County Manager Randy Dowling will send the proposed employee handbook to County Attorney Russell Britt for his legal review.

**911 Radio System Improvements.** Commissioner Bobby Irions stated that he was interested in whether the system that we have is expandable and whether additional channels are available. Dean Ginn of Dean’s Two-Way and Rebecca Norwood, Senior Consultant/Engineer with Tusa Consulting Services, were present to provide information and answer questions from the Board. E911/EMA Deputy Director Mike Cardwell, Pine Mountain Valley Fire Chief Jack McClung and Mr. Patrick Pope of the Cataula Volunteer Fire Department were also present. Ms. Norwood advised that Diverse has 17 of the 26 channels and that no owner has claimed the remaining 9 channels. Mr. Ginn advised that the systems are designed with 2 carriers at each site. Mr. Ginn recommended an 800 MHz paging system at 5 sites in the County. Discussion included availability of frequencies; the need to educate users of the system; gateways in vehicles; having a qualified engineering plan; identifying critical buildings; and a recommendation for a requirements document at a cost of \$36,000.00. The consensus of the Board of Commissioners was to stay with the Tetra system and issue a purchase order to see if additional channels are available.

**Proposal to Have the County Provide Health Care Upon Early Retirement.** Mr. John Leggett from MSI Benefits Group, Inc. was in attendance to answer any questions that the Board might have. County Manager Randy Dowling advised that the proposal does not change any of the benefits being offered but would provide an employee taking advantage of early retirement a health care option until the employee is available for Medicare. Mr. Leggett advised that employees would receive information each year like any other employee and that the employee would have the option to drop coverage if desired. Additionally, Mr. Leggett informed the Board that his company would administer it. Discussion was held related to the number of potential employees that would be eligible to receive the benefit; that there are 15 employees that would be eligible; that the County provides an early retirement benefit that employees may not be taking advantage of due to the employee losing health care if the option is exercised; and that there might be a potential savings to the County if the health care option was available.

*Chairman Zuerner stated at 7:57 p.m. that there would be a 10-minute recess. Chairman Zuerner called the meeting back to order at 8:08 p.m.*

**Pine Mountain Amended Application for Annexation.** County Attorney Russell Britt provided an update to the Board with information related to the amended Application for Annexation that was received. Mr. Britt advised that the Board had no objections to the original annexation application. There was a property as part of the annexation that they discovered created an unincorporated island which is prohibited under Georgia law. They have made a drawing change and have submitted the Amended Application for Annexation. County Attorney Russ Britt advised that Community Development Director Brian Williams is fine with it as submitted. There was a consensus of the Board that they still do not have any objections related to the amended Application for Annexation.

**Callaway Property.** County Attorney Russell Britt provided the Board with an update related to the Callaway Property closing and what would be needed from the Development Authority for them to be able to do so. The Development Authority will need to take action on the items when the information is available. Mr. Britt informed the Board that they now plan to close on November 30th.

**New Public Works Building.** County Manager Randy Dowling introduced the information related to the new Public Works Building. Mr. Dowling briefly reviewed the documents provided in their packet that includes the cost, time frame, front elevation, floor plan site plan. The information is almost final and it has been reviewed by individuals in the Public Works Department also. Vice Chairman Grant recommended that it be called the “Mike Brown Public Works Building.” The Board by consensus agreed. Discussion included whether the Public Works could complete some of the site work themselves and the liability that it may create; that there is a need for women’s lockers and showers to be added; that it may be completed by this time next year; that \$1.2 million can come from SPLOST 19 but other funding sources will need to come into play depending upon the bids; that the outside is metal and an industrial looking building; and that the interior will have a lot of finished concrete.

**ARP Funds.** Discussion included whether Diverse had asked for the County contribution and that they haven’t; the desire to partner for broadband; the timeline for encumbering and using the ARP Funds; that we need to consider funding for the water tower since we have to complete this project; and that the funds will continue to dwindle over time if not designated. The consensus of the Board was to use the undesignated ARP funds towards the water tower.

**New Fire Training Facility.** Discussion was held about whether the design had been signed off on yet (it hasn’t); that there will still be more meetings related to the design; that it is still being worked on; that information has been provided to the firefighters during the process; and that the building is now a bit smaller than it was in square footage.

**Intergovernmental Agreements.** Vice Chairman Grant advised that he had requested that this item be included on the agenda based upon discussion that came up during the LOST negotiations. Discussion included how many of these are still active; that the County will need to determine which items need to be revisited; that a column for expiration dates should be added; and that there are some contracts that have expired but the County still provides services.

**Purchasing Policy.** Commissioner Becky Langston advised that she requested that this items be included on the agenda. She would like to take a look at changing some of the threshold amounts in the purchasing policy - downward rather than upward. Discussion included that there are various thresholds; that anything between \$25,000.00 and \$50,000.00 requires three quotes and anything over \$50,000.00 goes to the Board of Commissioners; that the information for purchases under \$50,000.00 goes to the Purchasing Agent; that items have been approved in the budget in order to be purchased; that Commissioner Langston has some concerns and it needs to be adjusted downward; that the thresholds were increased slightly so that departments don’t have to get tons of competitive quotes on every little item that they need to purchase; that Commissioner Irions would like to see more local Harris County businesses included in the bidding process; that some local businesses may not want to do business with local governments due to the amount of paperwork and time; and that the department heads haven’t had any real issues with the purchasing policy.

Commissioner Langston believed that there was something that was said if the threshold was increased that it would be on an emergency basis. Commissioner Andrews asked if there was anything that was approved that was over \$50,000.000. Commissioner Langston said not \$50,000.00 but over \$25,000.00 and that it wasn’t on an emergency basis but that there was one over \$25,000.00. She stated that she believed that it was the aerator in the lake. County Manager Randy Dowling said that anything between \$25,000.00 and \$50,000.00 would need 3 written quotes. Commissioner Langston stated that it was her opinion that it needs to be adjusted down. Commissioner Andrews stated that if there was only one incident that was

disagreed with within a budgeted amount that was given for Ellerslie Park that she didn't think that you should change the whole policy based on one items that may be disagreed with that is known. County Manager Randy Dowling stated that the thresholds can be adjusted down but it would create more workload and an additional person would be needed. Commissioner Andrews stated that she thinks that the policy thresholds are at an appropriate level.

The consensus of the Board was to receive reports on a quarterly basis of purchase orders that fall in the \$25,000.00 to \$50,000.00 range.

*Chairman Andrew Zuerner left the meeting at 9:16 p.m.*

**ADJOURNMENT.** The meeting adjourned at 9:19 p.m.