

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION AND REGULAR SESSION**

July 18, 2023

Commissioners Present: Rob Grant, Susan Andrews, Greg Gantt, Scott Lightsey, Bobby Irions. Staff Present: Randy Dowling, County Manager; Russell Britt, County Attorney; Clint Chastain, Chief Financial Officer; Wayne Morris, Chief Appraiser; Wanda Bates, Deputy Tax Commissioner; Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk.

WORK SESSION

6:00 p.m.

1. **2023 Tax Rates.** Chairman Grant called the Work Session to order. County Manager Randy Dowling informed the Board that it is the time of year to establish the tax rates. He advised that the current millage rate is 9.13; that the rollback millage rate is calculated at 8.88. He stated that if the Board decides to adopt the current millage rate of 9.13 and not roll back, that would trigger three required public hearings to advertise a 2.72% tax increase. He said that the approved budget was based upon the current millage rate of 9.13; that West Point would remain at 5.478 with a roll back rate of 5.139 or a 6.60% tax increase; and that the millage rate is proposed to remain the same and only those property owners with increased property valuations will pay more county property taxes than last year. He further stated that the millage rate must be adopted by the county and approved by the state prior to September 1st in accordance with state law and that the property tax bills are typically sent out on October 1st by the Tax Commissioner's Office with a due date of December 20th.

Commissioner Irions stated that the millage rate did not increase and that it was still at 9.13.

Chief Tax Assessor Wayne Morris stated that even if the County went back to the rollback rate that the County would still need to have the public hearings as the rollback would not meet the requirements for West Point. Additionally, he said that it does not include any of the Homeowners Tax Relief Grant and anyone with a homestead exemption will get an \$18,000 of assessment reduction in their taxes this year. He said that the State reimburses the County for the tax amounts related to the grant and that the County does not lose any money due to the grant.

Vice-Chair Andrews clarified that if a homeowner did not have a their property reevaluated and did not have an increase in their home valuation then they will pay the same amount of taxes as last year since the millage rate has not changed. Chief Tax Assessor Wayne Morris stated that her statement is correct.

Chairman Grant reviewed the historical millage rates and stated that the County has been consistent in its millage rates.

The Work Session adjourned at 6:14 p.m.

REGULAR SESSION

6:30 p.m.

2. **CALL TO ORDER** Chairman Grant called the Regular Session to order at 6:30 p.m.
3. **INVOCATION / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** Vice-Chair Andrews gave the invocation. Chairman Grant led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.
4. **MINUTES** The motion to approve the minutes of the June 20, 2023 Regular Session was made by Commissioner Irions, seconded by Commissioner Lightsey, and passed unanimously.
5. **NEW BUSINESS**
 - A. **Request for Tax Refund: Jennifer Thomas.** Chairman Grant introduced the request related to a \$60.00 refund related to a vehicle renewal that Requestor Jennifer Thomas said was made in error.

The motion to approve the refund for the vehicle renewal in the amount of \$60.00 was made by Vice-Chair Andrews, seconded by Commissioner Irions, and passed unanimously.

B. Request for Tax Refund: Peggy F Lyda and Marlon Spencer Lyda.

Chairman Grant introduced the request related to a \$200.00 refund due to the removal of the Requestors' Homestead Exemption from their Harris County property.

Pamela Jackson from the Tax Assessor's office and Wanda Bates from the Tax Commissioner's office informed the Board that the Homestead Exemption has been reinstated for 2023 but that it was their belief that the Lydas were living in Florida during 2021 and 2022 and the Lydas never appealed the removal in those years.

The motion to disapprove the refund in the amount of \$200.00 was made by Commissioner Irions, seconded by Commissioner Gantt, and passed unanimously.

Chairman Grant announced that there are sound issues with the live feed of the meeting due to a lightning strike that may have damaged the sound mixer. He stated that the sound will be corrected and added to the meeting video.

C. Intergovernmental Agreement Between Harris County, Georgia, and Hamilton, Georgia for Motor Vehicle Maintenance and Repair Services for City's Motor Vehicles. Chairman Grant provided information related to the Intergovernmental Agreement between Harris County and the City of Hamilton for motor vehicle maintenance and repair services for the City of Hamilton's motor vehicles. The motion to approve the Intergovernmental Agreement Between Harris County, Georgia, and Hamilton, Georgia for Motor Vehicle Maintenance and Repair Services for City's Motor Vehicles was made by Chairman Grant, seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews, and passed unanimously.

6. COUNTY MANAGER

A. Bid Award: Observation Tower for Ellerslie Park. County Manager Randy Dowling provided an overview of the agenda item related to the bid award for the Observation Tower at Ellerslie Park. Matt Persons, Preconstruction Manager at Batson-Cook Construction, was available to respond to any questions. Mr. Dowling stated that the agreement from 2022 with the Loudermilk Family Christian Foundation states that the Foundation will fund \$500,000 of the project and the County will fund any cost over \$500,000. On June 29, 2023, four (4) bids were received as follows:

Bidder	Bid Amount	Schedule
Batson-Cooke Construction West Point, GA	\$ 825,662.00	120 days
Carlisle Construction Pine Mountain, GA	\$ 1,172,580.50	120 days
River City Contracting Fortson, GA	\$ 1,219,800.00	180 days
Astra Group, LLC Woodstock, GA	\$ 1,653,799.50	180 days

He stated that the low bidder was Batson-Cook Construction from West Point with a bid of \$825,662.00. Mr. Dowling informed the Board that since the bids came in over budget, the County's engineer and the low bidder, Batson-Cook, discussed several value engineering options. In order to reduce the cost of the project, it was agreed to change the stainless steel handrails to galvanized steel, change aluminum step grating to galvanized steel, delete the fencing at the bottom of the tower in favor of adding a gate to the stairway to restrict the stairway entrance after hours, reduce the overall steel tonnage amount, delete the concrete seating at the base of the tower, delete temporary fencing, change the stair handrails from a square shape to round, and Batson-Cook will donate funds or identify other cost savings. Mr. Dowling advised that these reductions/changes reduced the cost of the project to \$700,000.00.

The motion to award the bid to Batson-Cook in the amount of \$700,000.00, approve a \$355,000 budget amendment from General Fund reserves for the observation tower at Ellerslie Park and authorize the County Manager and County Clerk to execute the necessary documents was made by Vice-Chair Andrews, seconded by Commissioner Gantt, and passed unanimously.

B. **Project Updates.** Randy Dowling, County Manager, advised that this is the first Program of Work for this fiscal year and reviewed various projects as follows:

- (1) Employee Compensation and Classification Plan. CVIOG will begin project in January 2024 and be completed by June 2024 and implementation during Fiscal Year 2024-2025
- (2) Purchase I-Pads for Board Members. The I-Pads are being considered and should be on order very soon.
- (3) Dehumidification System at the Community Center. We are waiting for the actual system to be shipped. It should be shipped in the middle of August and be finished and installed by the end of the summer.
- (4) Update to Comprehensive Master Plan. There was a meeting held with staff and RVRC on June 20, 2023 to outline a schedule. RVRC will attend the July 27 Planning Session to review the schedule with the Board.
- (5) New EMS/VFD Facility. This project is ongoing and is approximately 50% complete. Completion in late October or this Fall.
- (6) New Citizen Request Management System. This is a great online system that should be implemented by the end of this month or next month. Citizens will be able to report any kind of problems to the County so that we can have a tracking system for reporting and fixing problems.
- (7) Re-Stripe Numerous County Roads. The County was awarded a GDOT grant of \$180,000.00 with a 10% match to re-stripe about 30 County roads. This is going to bid this week.
- (8) Construct the Observation Tower at Ellerslie Park. This project was awarded this evening.
- (9) New Public Works Facility. This has been designed and the site is being prepared by County crews. Once that is complete, the project will go out for bid. Expected completion by early 2024.
- (10) Interpretive Panels for Additional Kiosks on MOW Trail. It will be 3 to 4 months to research and install. However, the kiosks have been built and should be installed next week. The new trail map for all of the kiosks showing the beginning and the end and will be placed in all of the kiosks.
- (11) New Fire Training Facility. This is under construction and is at about 28% completion and will be complete by October of 2023.
- (12) RFP for Vendor to Provide a P25 Standard 911 Radio System. This is out on bid and the deadline is July 27th.
- (13) Courthouse Renovations, Phase II. This project should start very soon and be ongoing for the next 12 to 15 months.
- (14) Quarterly Planning Sessions. The next Quarterly Planning Session and Legislative Dinner will be on July 27 at the new Water Works Facility in Cataula.

7. **COUNTY ATTORNEY.**

A. **Conveyance of Property to the City of Hamilton.** County Attorney Russell Britt advised that the City of Hamilton has to acquire two small strips of property within the city jurisdiction in order to erect a park that will benefit the citizens of Hamilton, Harris County and those individuals using the Man O'War Trail. Chairman Grant advised that the City of Hamilton had reached out to him and the City of Hamilton currently maintains the property.

The motion to approve quit-claiming the property to the City of Hamilton was made by Chairman Grant, seconded by Commissioner Lightsey, and passed unanimously.

- B. **Agreement with New Horizons.** County Attorney Russell Britt advised that New Horizons would like the County to consider renewing the agreements. He stated that the last renewal was approved in July of 2019. Chairman Grant advised that he has met with New Horizons and Ms. Winston who is in attendance at the meeting.

Andrea Winston, CEO of New Horizons, and Norman Davis, new County Manager for New Horizons, appeared before the Board. Mr. Davis advised that they are dedicated to expanding the services that will be offered to Harris County citizens. He stated that they have been working with Family Connections, Judge Webb, Judge Lakes, and Kathy Carlisle.

Vice-Chair Andrews said that she has been disappointed in the consistency in the services that have been being provided and wanted to know whether there was a guarantee that daily services will be provided.

Ms. Winston stated that they may not have had a full-time office but that they have continued to provide services to Harris County residents continuously throughout the pandemic. She stated that they have been in Harris County at least twice a month and have been also working with the schools. She said that the need will drive their response. Mr. Davis advised that he is available in Harris County five days a week and that they are making themselves available.

The motion to approve the renewal of the agreements with New Horizons was made by Chairman Grant, seconded by Commissioner Irions, and passed unanimously.

- C. **Distribution Tree Trim / Clearing Easements with Georgia Power Company.** County Attorney Russell Britt advised that Georgia Power has approached the County regarding the need for additional tree trim / clearing easements on County-owned property located at 104 North College Street, 121 North College Street, 122 North College Street, and 211 Walton Street.

Alicia Hardeman, Land Agent-Universal Field Services with Georgia Power, advised that she has also been talking with the City of Hamilton but that she only needs County approval for the easements being requested. She advised that the payments are based on \$8.00 per linear foot, are a one-time payment, and are for the life of the deed.

The motion to approve the execution of the Distribution Tree Trim / Clearing Easements with Georgia Power and the request to grind and mulch the stumps was made by Chairman Grant, seconded by Commissioner Lightsey, and passed unanimously.

- D. **Amendment to Article II Recreation Board, Section 2-34(a) of Chapter 2 of the Code of Ordinances.** County Attorney Russell Britt advised that Harris County has recently added a Human Resources Generalist position and they have gone through the Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC) training to have access to background checks for possible employees and individuals who would like to be recreation volunteers and that an amendment to our ordinance is needed to allow the Human Resources Generalist to review the results of the background checks of recreation volunteers.

The motion to approve the proposed ordinance amending Article II Recreation Board, Section 2-34(a) of Chapter 2 of the Code of Ordinances was made by Commissioner Irions, seconded by Commissioner Lightsey, and passed unanimously.

- E. **REQUEST FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION.** County Attorney Russell Britt requested an Executive Session for the purpose of discussion of personnel and litigation.

8. **RECESS FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Chairman Grant made the motion to go into Executive Session for personnel and litigation at 7:17 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Irions and passed unanimously.

9. **RESUME REGULAR SESSION.** The motion to go back into Regular Session was made at 8:58 p.m. by Commissioner Lightsey, seconded by Commissioner Irions, and passed unanimously.
10. **ADJOURNMENT.** There being no further business to discuss, the motion to adjourn was made by Vice-Chair Andrews and Commissioner Irions, seconded by Commissioner Gantt, and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

Rob Grant, Chairman

Attest:

Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk