

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
QUARTERLY PLANNING SESSION AND LEGISLATIVE DINNER**

July 27, 2023

4:30 p.m.

Harris County Water Works, 920 Grant Road, Cataula, GA

Commissioners Present: Rob Grant, Susan Andrews, Bobby Irions, Greg Gantt, Scott Lightsey. Staff Present: Randy Dowling, County Manager; Russell Britt, County Attorney; Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk; Kris Summerall, Payroll and Benefit Technician; Paul Bates, Regional Client Manager, ACCG Retirement Services; John Leggett, Benefit Consultant, MSI Benefits Group; Jim Livingston, Executive Director, Rick Morris, Director of Planning and Government Services, and Tracie Hadaway, Senior Planner, from River Valley Regional Commission (RVRC).

**CALL TO ORDER.** Chairman Grant called the meeting to order at 4:33 p.m.

Chairman Grant welcomed everyone to the meeting and expressed thanks for them coming and touring the new Water Works building.

**Introduction of Chris Lutz, new General Manager for Callaway Gardens Resort.**

Sonny Horton thanked the Board for the support that has been provided by Harris County to him over the years. Sonny Horton introduced Chris Lutz, new General Manager for Callaway Gardens Resort. Mr. Horton stated that Mr. Lutz had been living in LaGrange and that they were fortunate to have found Mr. Lutz. Chris Lutz addressed the Board and stated how excited he was with his new position; that he has been in hospitality almost his whole life; that he has worked for Sesame Place, with Disney, and Great Wolf Lodge; that they want to continue to honor the traditions and history; and that they want to continue with infrastructure and to make improvements.

Chairman Grant thanked Sonny Horton for his service over the years and wished him the best.

**Jimmy Cotty - Manufactured Housing.** Chairman Grant advised that Mr. Cotty was unable to attend this evening. Chairman Grant expects that he will be in attendance at the October/November Planning Session instead.

**Jim Livingston - RVRC - Joint Comprehensive Plan Update and Schedule.**

Jim Livingston, Rick Morris, and Tracie Hadaway were in attendance to discuss the Joint Comprehensive Plan Update and Schedule. Jim Livingston said that Rick Morris has written every Comprehensive Plan for the County so far; that we have a compressed schedule; that citizen participation is important; that they believe that the Library will be a good venue for the required two public hearings; they are working on six comprehensive plans in the region currently; and that Rick Morris will be heading up the update. Mr. Livingston advised that this is a Joint Comprehensive Plan and that it includes the cities also; that Harris County is a tier four county; and that "needs and opportunities" and community work program need to receive attention. Discussion included that this will be a good opportunity for citizens that have felt like they didn't have a voice to provide feedback; that citizens are an important part of the process; that it needs to be determined what the community wants; that stakeholders need to be identified; that there has been progress in technology; that they perform surveys now for all of the comprehensive plans; that getting citizen engagement and then not listening to the citizen engagement is worse than not getting citizen engagement; that a randomized citizen survey sample is possible but RVRC does not have the ability to do that; that the Board believes that they can come up with groups in the County that will be helpful like students, educators, young professionals, Chamber members, etc; that the feedback and input is important; that any plan is a projection for who we want to be; that the Comprehensive Plan is important to people in the County; that the Capital Improvements Element will be updated at the same time; that Rick Morris will send out an e-mail next week regarding stakeholders; that the Board should provide RVRC with a list of stakeholders; and that the stakeholder committee should be about 10-15 individuals.

**Proposal to Have the County Provide Health Care Upon Early Retirement.**

County Manager Randy Dowling explained the proposal and advised that there would not be a change in plan and the this would be offered as an option and that is could incentivize early retirement for those that are eligible and would like this as an option. He further explained that there are employees that would like to retire but stay for healthcare benefits. This proposal could provide a bridge for eligible employees that would like to retire but would need a bridge from age 60 to age 65. He said that this proposal does not change any of the retirement plans or medical plans. He informed the Board that there are currently 16 employees eligible now and that the assumption is that the replacement will come in at a lower cost. Paul Bates, John Leggett, and Kris Summerall were available to respond to any questions that the Board may have. When asked Kris Summerall said that she felt that eligibility at age 60 would be a better choice for the

County than 55. Paul Bates advised that Henry County and Douglas County provide medical benefits to retirees and that individuals who typically retire at age 62 usually jump onto a spouse's coverage. John Leggett said that they have about 15 clients that offer some kind of retiree coverage; that most cut it off at Medicare eligibility age; and that a lot of people will stay in a job because they will not have health coverage if they retire. The Board consensus was to allow employees eligible to retire and are at least 60 years of age to retire and have access to health benefits; that the employee pay 50% of the premium (medical and dental, vision is paid 100% by the employee) for themselves and the employee pays 100% for dependents; that the premiums will be deducted from their retirement payments; and that this option will be available from November 1, 2023 until October 31, 2024.

**EMS Automatic Overtime During Vacation.** Commissioner Lightsey stated that this has been a problem for years. He said that there is built-in overtime into their salaries and when the employee takes a vacation, the employee loses the overtime pay that they normally would have received. Discussion included that they are always scheduled overtime; that they are hourly and not salary; that Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) rules are being followed; that the employees still receive straight time while they are on vacation; and that the County would need to do it for other employees with similar schedules. There was no consensus to implement this request.

**Legislative Dinner.** Dinner and discussion was held with the local legislative delegation (Richard Smith, Vance Smith, and Randy Robertson). County Attorney Russell Britt informed the group that this topic was discussed a few years back and that the language is currently restricted to recreation. He advised that the Board has an interest in expanding the language to expand for facilities and the 911 radio system for example. Discussion included amendments to the Public Improvements Authority language going through Local Legislation during the 2024 General Assembly. It was reiterated by Randy Robertson that any proposed amendments to the Public Improvements Authority language needed to be unanimously agreed upon by the Board of Commissioners. Chairman Grant advised that he has appreciated all of their assistance and support of what the Board would like to accomplish.

*The local legislative delegation left the dinner.*

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

**RECESS FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Vice-Chair Andrews made the motion to go into Executive Session for personnel at 8:06 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Lightsey, and passed unanimously.

**RESUME PLANNING SESSION.**

**ADJOURNMENT.** There being no further items to discuss, the motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Lightsey, seconded by Commissioner Gantt and Vice-Chair Andrews, and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

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Rob Grant, Chairman

Attest:

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Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk