

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION**

March 19, 2024
6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Rob Grant, Susan Andrews, Greg Gantt, Scott Lightsey, Bobby Irions. Staff Present: Randy Dowling, County Manager; Russell Britt, County Attorney (via telephone); Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**. Chairman Grant called the Regular Session to order at 6:30 p.m.
2. **INVOCATION / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** Vice-Chair Andrews gave the invocation. Chairman Grant led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**
 - A. **Vance Smith, Georgia State Representative**. Georgia State Representative Vance Smith appeared via telephone to provide an update on the 2024 Legislative Session. Rep. Smith stated that Georgia would like to bring electronic chip manufacturing back to the United States, especially to Georgia, and that the Chips Act was heading to the Senate Rules Committee on March 10, 2024. Discussion also included that Harris County's Local Legislation (HB 1174) passed the House (158-0) and the Senate (51-2) and that it will be sent to the Governor; that SB 0344 is a grant program for broadband that would allow corporations to subtract the grant funds from their taxable income; that although he voted against SB 233 (relating to education) due to add-ons that had the bill increase to 39 pages from 10 pages it passed (91-86) in the House; that there have been 4000 bills drafted and they vote on approximately 300 in the House; and, that overall, the Session was "going pretty good."
4. **MINUTES** The motion to approve the minutes of the March 5, 2024 Regular Session was made by Commissioner Irions, seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews, and passed unanimously.
5. **NEW BUSINESS**
 - A. **Appointments to the Harris County Library Board**. Chairman Grant provided information related to the needed appointments to the Harris County Library Board and stated that Maurine Avery, Harry Lange, Heather Peebles, and Laura Seavers expired on December 31, 2023. Further, he said that Maurine Avery and Heather Peebles did not seek re-appointment and Bob Patterson has resigned from his position. Chairman Grant stated that the Library Board desires for Harry Lange and Laura Seavers to be reappointed for a term effective January 1, 2024 until December 31, 2026; to appoint Stephanie Barnes and Stephanie Taylor to terms expiring December 31, 2026; and Patricia Holloway to complete the unexpired term that ends on December 31, 2025.

A motion to reappoint Harry Lange and Laura Seavers to terms expiring on December 31, 2026; Stephanie Barnes and Stephanie Taylor to terms expiring on December 31, 2026; and Patricia Holloway to the unexpired term that expires on December 31, 2025 to the Harris County Library Board was made by Commissioner Lightsey, seconded by Commissioner Gantt, and passed unanimously.
 - B. **SPLOST 2025**. Chairman Grant advised that SPLOST did pass by a narrow margin and that there are a lot of things in the SPLOST that are needed such as fire trucks, Deputy Sheriff vehicles, and water and sewer improvements. Chairman Grant said that over time that the margin of passing has narrowed which he believes is due to citizens becoming more engaged in the process. He stated that he was in receipt of a petition with about 500 names of people that were opposed to spending \$14 million on the Agricultural Complex. Chairman Grant said that the Board needs to put the estimated cost of the Agricultural Complex to "bed" and make a decision. He stated that they need to do something related to the arena.

A motion to put a top and concrete apron on the existing arena that we have now and that the County's portion is not to exceed \$2.5 million with \$1.5 million coming out of the Recreation part of SPLOST 2025 and anything over the \$2.5 million may be fund-raised or donated by a private entity but that the County will maintain control over the arena and its operations was made by Chairman Grant and seconded by Commissioner Gantt.

Commissioner Lightsey stated that he believed that the reason for moving the arena from where it was currently located was due to the area being prone to flooding. Chairman Grant said that he agreed with that statement and that is what the Commissioners in 2013 wanted to do but that is not what is being contemplated this evening.

Vice-Chair Andrews said that they would need to see a plan, architectural drawings, or a schematic in order to vote on the motion. Vice-Chair Andrews advised that the SPLOST collection does not begin until 2025 and there is no way to know what the costs will be at that time. She stated that it would be irresponsible to not have restrooms or a plan and to vote on a motion that "came out of the blue" without having knowledge of what exactly they are voting on. She stated that it would not be responsible to put \$2.5 million into the facility without schematics or restrooms.

Commissioner Gantt said that this motion just puts a "hard ceiling" on the amount of money that they are willing to spend on this facility. He stated that the individuals that he has spoken with want a low ceiling and that \$2.5 million is plenty for this facility even in 2025 dollars. Vice-Chair Andrews said that she could agree with that but that she does not agree with a description that will hold them to only placing a top over what is there at a cost of \$2.5 million but that she could agree to placing a cap of \$2.5 million on what is spent out there. Vice-Chair Andrews stated that she can not agree with a motion without any more detail than what the Chairman has described. A brief discussion was held related to a possible amendment to the motion.

County Attorney Russell Britt advised that in order to amend a motion they would need a motion and a second to amend and that requires a majority vote.

Vice-Chair Andrews made a motion that the motion be amended to put a cap of \$2.5 million from SPLOST to be spent on the Agri-Center and that the motion does not include a description of what would be done and that they could make that determination at a later date.

After a short discussion to clarify her motion, Vice-Chair Andrews made a motion that the motion be amended to put a cap of \$2 million from SPLOST 2025 on whatever is determined to be spent on the AG complex in the future. The motion to amend failed for lack of a second.

County Attorney Russell Britt advised that there is still a main motion on the floor which has a second and is debatable. He stated that the Board may postpone to the next meeting under the Local Rules of Order or they can postpone to a date and time certain.

Vice-Chair Andrews believes that this would be a "band-aid" on a problem and she did not want to bind the hands of a future Board. County Attorney Russell Britt advised that a future Board could rescind the vote of a prior action of the current Board and that is a viable option if a future Board crosses that road. Discussion was held about what was approved in 2013 related to SPLOST 2014 and that the County Attorney would need to obtain information from Administration in order to review what has been completed and what the financials show.

Commissioner Lightsey requested that this item be tabled until the next meeting on April 2, 2024.

6. COUNTY MANAGER

Chairman Grant inquired on the status of the audit and the financials. County Manager Randy Dowling advised that the County is working on last year's audit; that we have an official extension from the Georgia Department of Revenue until June 30, 2024; that we are working on next year's budget; that we are continuing to reconcile the bank accounts; and are updating the budget-to-actual reports. He said that he should have a budget-to-actual report through

December 31, 2023 at the next meeting. Mr. Dowling advised that the new budget will be submitted to the Board at the beginning of May and hopefully by that time all of the budget-to-actual reports, the audit should be almost completed by then, and then the Board will have a new budget to consider. In response to questions from Commissioner Gantt, County Attorney Russell Britt advised that it was his understanding that there is an audit extension so that there are no repercussions from the State at this time and that it is a best practice to have monthly financials be completed as timely as possible and that there are sometimes delays due to circumstances.

- A. **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.** This project is ongoing and should be finished by June.
 - (2) **SPLOST Continuation.** The referendum was successful and that the collection period begins April 1, 2025 and ends on March 31, 2031.
 - (3) **Five-Year Road and Bridge Master Plan.** The Request for Qualifications is being advertised and the deadline for the submittals is March 27 and it will go to the Board for consideration on May 7, 2024 and it can help guide future decisions.
 - (4) **LMIG Resurfacing.** The Board awarded the bid to Robinson Paving to repave 4.1 miles of Ripshin Road and the project should be complete by the end of June. Also, County Manager Randy Dowling advised that an additional amount of funding has been received and project recommendations for the additional funding amount and the next LMIG will be considered by the Board on April 2, 2024 and that the 2024 Local Road Assistance (LRA) and 2025 Local Maintenance Improvement Grant (LMIG) will be bid out at the same time and is expected to cover 8-10 miles of resurfacing.
 - (5) **New Public Works Facility.** This project is under construction but has had weather delays due to 10" of rain above normal.
 - (6) **Observation Tower at Ellerslie Park.** The tower is almost finished and the door will have an automatic lock and there will be surveillance cameras. There will be coordination with First Responders to be able to train for an emergency event.
 - (7) **Pine Mountain Valley Park.** The ownership was completed in September of 2023, surveys of citizens have been completed, a property survey was completed, a Phase I environmental assessment completed, and a landscape architect has been working to prepare the concept plan. A concept plan will be presented to the Board on April 2nd for their review.
 - (8) **Aerial Flight for GIS System.** The flight has been completed and the information should be uploaded to QPublic soon.
 - (9) **Airport Runway Lighting Project.** This project is was completed yesterday.
 - (10) **Conduct Airport Open House.** Annual open house will be held on May 4, 2024. Flyers will be going out this week.
 - (11) **New Elevated Water Tank.** This project will go out for bid on April 10th with Board consideration on May 7th. It is expected for construction to begin in mid-2024 and completed in early 2025.
7. **COUNTY ATTORNEY.** Russell Britt, County Attorney, said that he had no additional business to come before the Board this evening.
8. **REQUEST FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Chairman Grant stated that he would like to an executive session to discuss real estate and personnel.
9. **RECESS FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Chairman Grant made the motion to go into Executive Session for real estate and personnel at 7:42 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Irions and Commissioner Lightsey, and passed unanimously.

10. **RESUME REGULAR SESSION.** The motion to go back into Regular Session was made at 8:18 p.m. by Commissioner Irions, seconded by Commissioner Lightsey, and passed unanimously.
11. **COUNTY ATTORNEY (cont'd).**
 - A. **Real Estate.** A motion to transfer 5.040 acres which is part of parcel 059 001 in the Hamilton Business Park to the Development Authority for economic development was made by Chairman Grant, seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews, and passed with four in favor (Grant, Andrews, Irions, Gantt), none opposed, and one recusal (Lightsey).
12. **ADJOURNMENT.** There being no further business to discuss, the motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Irions, seconded by Commissioner Lightsey, and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Rob Grant, Chairman

Attest:

Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk