

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION**

July 16, 2024
6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Rob Grant, Susan Andrews, Greg Gantt, Scott Lightsey, Bobby Irions. Staff Present: Russell Britt, County Attorney; Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk; Elizabeth Barfield, Chief Financial Officer; Jamie Webb, Facility Maintenance Director; Brian Griffith, Public Works Director; Greg Panzer, Economic Development Director; Craig Greenhaw, Development Authority Chairman.

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. **MINUTES** The motion to approve the minutes of the June 11, 2024 Quarterly Planning Session and the June 18, 2024 Regular Session was made by Commissioner Irions, seconded by Commissioner Lightsey, and passed unanimously.
4. **INTRODUCTION**
 - A. **Economic Development Director**. Chairman Grant advised that they have been working on this for several years and thought it would be appropriate to introduce him to the Board. Chairman Grant asked Craig Greenhaw, Chairman of the Development Authority, to introduce Greg Panzer, the new Economic Development Director. Chairman Greenhaw advised that this is the culmination of a lot of work and that he appreciates the support of the Board. Chairman Greenhaw stated that Mr. Panzer is impressive, a hard worker, entrepreneur, that he has worked in marketing and politics, that he is excited to have him here tonight, and that the Development Authority is looking forward to working with him. Mr. Greg Panzer stated that he was pleased to stand in front of the Board this evening and that while its going to be a challenge in some aspects that it is also an easy challenge because Harris County sells itself with all of the strengths of the natural resources and its proximity to logistics. Mr. Panzer said is looking forward to working with the Board. Chairman Grant stated that Mr. Panzer also has a vested interest in our County because he also lives in the County.
5. **APPEARANCE OF CITIZENS**
 - A. **Reid Ivey - Driveway Erosion on Kelly Drive**. Mr. Reid Ivey addressed the Board and stated that he lives at the end of Kelly Drive and that his yard is at the end of where the water flows down the road; that the ditches need to be cleaned out to keep his driveway from flooding; that the County has repaired it three (possibly four) times before; and that he wants the water diverted before it gets to his house.

In response to questions from the Board, Brian Griffith, Public Works Director, advised that the issue has been reviewed and that he is not comfortable with working on private property and that if the water is diverted that it will go into someone else's yard. County Attorney Russell Britt stated that he concurred with Mr. Griffith and that the County would be "in violation of the gratuity clause" and that "regardless of what has happened in the past unless there's a clear and substantial public benefit from doing so such as to prevent any kind of injury or harm to public infrastructure such as the road." Conversation included that the property along the road is owned by Georgia Power; that the County maintains the portion of road and ditches that are County property; and that the homeowner and Mr. Griffith should reach out to Georgia Power to discuss the issue.
6. **NEW BUSINESS**
 - A. **Presentation of the FYE June 30, 2023 Annual Audit: Robinson Grimes**. Chairman Grant introduced the presentation of the FYE June 30, 2023 Annual Audit and advised that the audit was submitted as required. Chief Financial Officer Elizabeth Barfield addressed the Board and advised that the fund balance was down by approximately \$2.5 million due to capital projects and all of those were planned expenses; that unrestricted reserves went up from the the prior year; that planned expenses were \$222,000 under budget; that we had \$33.6 million in budgeted expenses and actual expenses were \$29.5 million and under budget by \$4.1 million; that no reserves were used for the General Fund;

that it was a great sign of management and our sound financial position; that the pension liability increased from \$3.1 million to \$10.6 million due in part to pension change that was made and market values in our audit are as of December of 2022; and that the plan change was \$2.5 million and that market value can fluctuate from year to year. Steven Voynich, CPA and Partner from Robinson Grimes, also addressed the Board and stated that there is a clean opinion on the financial statements; that they represent the County well; that there are no compliance findings related to the expenditures of federal awards; that there is the same material weakness as in prior years related to internal controls and segregation of duties; that without the timely review of financial reports that we could miss out on enhancements and efficiencies in the financial reporting process; that the County should look out for non-tax revenues such as grant funding; and that the County should continue to pursue the current direction and cross-training on key functions.

In response to questions, Elizabeth stated that they are definitely looking for a Staff Accountant and have two people that seem to be qualified and a good fit; that she can provide the budget vs. actual reports for 2023; and that the Finance Department is working on keeping current and working on the information that they are getting caught up on; and that past financials can be provided with a quarterly look and monthly going forward.

A motion to accept the FYE June 30, 2023 Annual Audit was made by Vice-Chair Andrews, seconded by Commissioner Gantt, and passed unanimously.

- B. **Courthouse Renovation Phase II - Guaranteed Maximum Cost.** Chairman Grant advised that the Courthouse renovation Phase II will consist of interior renovations and entrance improvements over the next two years. Jamie Webb, Facility Maintenance Director, stated that this has been a long process and that he has met three or four times in the last month to obtain a guaranteed maximum price for Phase II; that the phases of Phase II are actually areas; that they will be working in the third floor courtroom during October so that they can work within the court's window; that the low voltage network infrastructure (camera systems, key card access, etc.) will be incurred by the County outside of the guaranteed maximum price; that the public will have access to all public areas but the public will be restricted from entering the offices of the judges and non-public areas of offices; that the tentative start date is August 5th; and that he asks for patience during the renovations as the Courthouse will be a construction zone over the next twenty-two months. Mr. Webb stated that the original estimate was \$8 million overall but that only \$1.5 million has been spent so far and he believes that the total of the ultimate renovations will come in under budget. A motion to accept the Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) of \$3,999,916.00 was made by Chairman Grant, seconded by Commissioner Gantt, and passed unanimously.
- C. **Resolution to Accept Greystone Drive.** Chairman Grant informed the Board that all documents necessary for the acceptance of Greystone Drive have been received. A motion to approve the Resolution accepting Greystone Drive was made by Commissioner Gantt, seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews, and passed unanimously.
- D. **Resolution to Adopt Comprehensive Plan 2024-2029.** Chairman Grant introduced the item related to the Comprehensive Plan. Jim Livingston, Executive Director of the River Valley Regional Commission, addressed the Board and stated that the Joint Comprehensive Plan has been submitted to the Department of Community Affairs, feedback received from them, adjustments made to the Plan, and that the Joint Comprehensive Plan will need to be approved by Resolution. A motion to approve the Resolution adopting the Harris County Comprehensive Plan 2024-2029 was made by Commissioner Lightsey, seconded by Commissioner Gantt, and passed unanimously.
- E. **Harris County Water Bill Late Fees.** Chairman Grant stated that Commissioner Gantt has requested that the Board discuss the water bill late fees and proposes that process be implemented for residential and commercial water accounts to be able to request a waiver of late fees billed in April, May and June of 2024 via application. Commissioner Gantt advised that the postal service has had difficulties recently, that people were getting their bills late, and that some payments were received late by the water department. Commissioner Gantt believes that a process might enable a remedy for those people that have been unfairly impacted and to distinguish on-time payers from those that may be regularly late. Discussion included that the County itself has been late paying their water bills; that the situation was not created by the County; and that there

are multiple ways to pay the water bill. A motion to create and implement a process effective until October 31, 2024 for water account customers to request a one-time only waiver of late fees billed in April and May of 2024 for those customers who have timely paid their December of 2023, January of 2024, and February of 2024 was made by Commissioner Gantt, seconded by Commissioner Lightsey, and passed unanimously.

- F. **Observation Tower Change Order for Lightning Arrestor and Gate Hardware.** Chairman Grant stated that after the observation tower opened to the public that it was realized that the door hardware needed to be upgraded to enable the door to lock automatically and to allow people in the tower to safely exit when the door locked. He further advised that the lightning arrestor that was included in the engineering drawings but was not listed in the bid specifications. A motion to approve the Change Order in the amount of \$15,056.00 for the lightning arrestor and gate hardware was made by Chairman Grant, seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews, and passed unanimously.
7. **COUNTY MANAGER.** County Clerk Andrea Dzioba provided a brief update on the progress of the Public Works building and Pine Mountain Valley Park. Chairman Grant advised that a written update will be provided once a month during the second meeting each month for the projects going on during this fiscal year and that the Recreation Department should be able to present some really good news to the Board in the next month or so related to Pine Mountain Valley Park and the playground.
8. **COUNTY ATTORNEY.**
- A. **REQUEST FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION.** County Attorney Russell Britt said that he had a need for an executive session under litigation.
9. **RECESS FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Commissioner Gantt requested that the Board also discuss personnel in executive session. Chairman Grant made the motion to go into Executive Session for litigation and personnel at 7:42 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Irions and passed unanimously.
10. **RESUME REGULAR SESSION.** The motion to go back into Regular Session was made at 8:11 p.m. by Commissioner Irions, seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews, and passed unanimously.
11. **ADJOURNMENT.** There being no further business to discuss, the motion to adjourn was made by Vice-Chair Andrews, seconded by Commissioner Irions, and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Rob Grant, Chairman

Attest:

Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk