

**HARRIS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
APPEAL HEARING AND REGULAR SESSION**

October 15, 2024

**APPEAL HEARING**

**5:30 p.m.**

Commissioners Present: Rob Grant, Susan Andrews (arrived at 5:50 p.m.), Greg Gantt, Scott Lightsey, Bobby Irions. Staff Present: Russell Britt, County Attorney (arrived at 5:43 p.m.); Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk; Ashleigh Pippin, Animal Control Officer; Brian Williams, Public Works Director.

1. **CALL TO ORDER.** Chairman Grant called the Appeal Hearing to order at 5:30 p.m., reviewed the exhibits included and stated that it was regarding the “dangerous” classification of dogs owned by Jessica Lange.

*Chairman Grant recessed the hearing at 5:32 p.m.*

*Chairman Grant called the hearing back to order at 5:43 p.m.*

Chairman Grant asked Russell Britt, County Attorney, to conduct the appeal hearing.

2. **HEARING.** County Attorney Russell Britt stated that this is an appeal hearing under the Animal Control Ordinance regarding the “dangerous” classification of dogs under the Ordinance, read the definition of a “dangerous” dog from the Ordinance, and reviewed the procedure for the Appeal Hearing.

Mr. Britt swore in Ashleigh Pippin, Animal Control Officer, and asked her to explain her findings regarding the investigation of the dogs.

Ms. Pippin explained that on September 6th that she received a 911 call from Sam Fessler, the 15-year old son of the victim dog’s owner and witness, who advised that three dogs came into his yard who attacked and killed their dog, a pug named Bob. She further stated that Bob’s owners knew who the owners of the dogs were; that they explained that this was not the first time this has happened; and that the dogs had attacked another one of their dogs some years back. Ms. Pippin stated that she then spoke with the owner of the dogs, Jessica Lange, who said that her dogs were home and beat up also; and that this is not the first time this has happened by that it had been “several years since they have killed anything.”

Mr. Britt would like Exhibits A through H that were provided to the Board be included as Exhibit R-1 to the hearing and included with the minutes.

In response to questions from the Board, Ms. Pippin stated that the last report they had related to these dogs was from 2019. Ms. Jessica Lange asked that since the report in 2019, if it wasn’t the same dogs involved as in 2024, if these situations continue to follow her. Ms. Pippin stated that incidents concerning dogs owned by her will continue to follow her if her dogs are out of her yard.

Mr. Britt swore in Jessica Lange. Ms. Lange stated that she has raised three children along side these dogs; that she has had visitors at her home - some with dogs; that the incident was not normal behavior for the dogs; that they are not dangerous dogs; that she is guilty of them being out but that they are not “routine killers;” and that they have not continued to let them loose.

In response to questions from the Board, Ms. Lange said that the dogs were not acting unusual, that one of her dogs has no teeth; that she does feel for the Fessler family; that they do care about other people’s dogs; and that she would like the dogs to be considered “potentially dangerous” instead of “dangerous” and that she would follow all of the restrictions required.

Mr. Britt swore in Dylan Fessler. Mr. Fessler stated that he has always tried to talk to their neighbors; that their dog was drinking and was “ambushed” from behind; and that he doesn’t perceive that anything is going to change.

Mr. Britt read the requirements related to a “dangerous” dog designation.

Ms. Lange requested that the dogs be designated as “potentially dangerous” so that her dogs are not required to be muzzled while walked so that she can be protected by her dogs from other dogs at-large in the neighborhood while she is walking them.

Chairman Grant made the motion to affirm the dangerous dog classification of Animal Control. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Britt advised Ms. Lange that notification will be provided within ten (10) days of this date.

3. **ADJOURNMENT**. The appeal hearing adjourned at 6:04p.m.

### **REGULAR SESSION**

**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; Ashley Marston, Recreation Director; Shalee Mallory, Chief Appraiser.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**. Chairman Grant called the Regular Session to order at 6:30 p.m. Chairman Grant asked everyone to keep Public Works employee Chris Witherspoon's friends and family in their thoughts and prayers after his passing.
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 September 25, 2024 Joint Meeting with the Harris County Board of Education and the October 1, 2024 Regular Session was made by Commissioner Irions, seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews, and passed unanimously.

4. **PRESENTATION**

- A. **Harris County Little League - Baseball and Softball**. Chairman Grant and the Board of Commissioners presented Certificates of Recognition to the 11U Boys Allstar Team - District 8 and Georgia State Champions. Coaches Matt Hall, Andrew Wright, and Brock Draut were in attendance to honor the winners. Certificates were presented to #1 Braxton McGregor, #6 Hunter Hall, #17 Hampton Harper (not in attendance), #24 Kaiden Long, #2 Brayden Villegas, #44 Grant Merritt, #12 Mason Morris, #7 Conner Michaud, #14 Weston Edmundson, #3 Keldrick Stanford, #0 Brandon Street, #10 Ayden Wright, and #8 Chase Martin.

Chairman Grant and the Board of Commissioners presented Certificates of Recognition to the 12U Softball Allstar Team - District 8 and Georgia State Champions. Coaches Matt Karr, Adam Smith, and Jeremy Bolen were in attendance to honor the winners. Certificates were presented to #7 Brinley Harden, #24 Karlie Karr, #5 Laney Ellis, #4 Ava McEldoon, #36 Peyton Brummitt (not in attendance), #17 Ava Valdes, #26 Cadis Duval, #9 Alexa Farless, #3 Da'Kariah Gilbert, #28 Lacie Watts, #53 Liza Price, and #25 Hailey McPherson.

5. **NEW BUSINESS**

- A. **Revaluation of Rural Land**. Chairman Grant introduced the item related to revaluation of rural land and stated that a full land revaluation has not been completed since approximately 2008. Chief Appraiser Shalee Mallory advised that rural land is anything that is not within a city limits or subdivision and that there are about 8,000 parcels that would be affected. Discussion included that one-third of houses are revaluated each year; that rural land has not been revaluated since 2008 but it was attempted in 2016 but the accessibility and desirability tables have been reversed to what they were in 2008; that the staff at the Tax Assessors office do not have the knowledge or staff to complete it alone; that it is a different process than revaluated homes; that HB 581, if passed, would use values from 2024; that out of the 8,000 - 3,000 are homesteaded and 2,000 are Conservation Use Valuation Assessment (CUVA)/Forest Land Protection Act (FLPA) properties; that the County is in danger of failing its ratio study; that the County could fail its digest review and its imperative that our values in line with what is expected; that the County is required to maintain property values at fair market value; that there will be properties that may see an increase in value and some that will see a decrease in value; that the County is risking being penalized; that the County's soil maps and data require

updating; that Ms. Mallory would like the revaluation to be complete for the 2025 digest; that the Tax Assessor does not value properties based upon taxes; and that it is not known what HB 581 may do if passed and that this is bad timing.

Mr. Joe Wright, Representative from GMAS, was in attendance to provide information and answer questions for the Board. Mr. Wright provided background information related to GMASS and their qualifications. He further stated that their goal is to bring Harris County into compliance; that they will continue to track fair market value; and the process that GMASS will use to complete the revaluation.

Vice-Chair Andrews stated that the simple explanation is that the County is supposed to collect taxes on fair market value and that this process is how to determine the fair market value. Vice-Chair Andrews inquired whether the Board of Tax Assessors has reviewed this. Chief Appraiser Shalee Mallory advised the Board of Tax Assessors is recommending that GMASS perform the revaluation and that she is there for the funding. Russell Britt, County Attorney, informed the Board that the Board of Tax Assessors has the obligation to perform the work and that the Board of Commissioners provides the funding.

The motion to approve GMASS performing the revaluation of rural land at a cost of \$26,098.00 and authorize the Chairman and/or County Clerk to execute any necessary documents for same was made by Vice-Chair Andrews, seconded by Commissioner Lightsey, and passed with four in favor (Andrews, Irions, Gantt, Lightsey) and one opposed (Grant).

- B. **Financials - July 2023 through December 2023.** Elizabeth Barfield, Chief Financial Officer, appeared before the Board and stated that revenues have been collected at 34.6% of what was budgeted and this was at a low point of receiving property taxes. She said that the numbers that are reflected fall in line with prior years. She reviewed reports and saw some variances and timing differences; that there are year end closing entries that have not been made; that the unrestricted reserve balances are currently at approximately 36.4% of budgeted revenues as of today; that \$2.4 million was received this week from insurance premiums; that the Tax Commissioner will have fund early next week and that balances will be slowly growing; that they are looking at downpayment information related to the E911 system radio system project; that personal property/tower expenses will be distinguished by the vendor in the invoices so that it can be paid straight from the General Fund and not from the bond proceeds; that the County is moving our credit card business from Synovus to First Peoples which will include an increase in the credit limit; and that the County will have more control over the accounts to help alleviate issues that have occurred with Synovus.

6. **COUNTY MANAGER**

- A. **Project Updates.** County Clerk Andrea Dzioba stated that new Public Works Facility has a roof and that the parking lot being paved today; that Pine Mountain Valley Park is still waiting for playground equipment; that the Community Center has received the first draft of concept plan for property next to the Community Center and they will be reviewing it and then will bring it to the Board; that the ribbon cutting for the disc golf course at Ellerslie Park will be held in December followed by a small tournament and that Eric McCabe will be in attendance since this is his first course design in Georgia; that a Trunk or Treat will be held at the AG center beginning at 5 p.m. on October 24<sup>th</sup>; that new light fixtures have been installed in the Community Center gym; that the Soil to Soul Chamber event will be held on October 26<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. at the Lake Franklin Event Center; that Courthouse renovations have continued; the the Superior Court Clerk offices are beginning to move back into their renovated space and that the third floor in the next to be displaced. Ms. Dzioba briefly reviewed the updated information provided related to SPLOST, LOST, TSPLOST, Single Family Home Building Permits, Solid Waste Tonnage, Active Water Works Customers, and Georgia Fund 1 Monthly Yields.

7. **COUNTY ATTORNEY.**

- A. **REQUEST FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION.** County Attorney Russell Britt said that he had a need for an executive session under personnel and litigation.

8. **RECESS FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Chairman Grant made the motion to go into Executive Session for personnel at 7:53 p.m. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Andrews and Commissioner Irions, and passed unanimously.
9. **RESUME REGULAR SESSION.** The motion to go back into Regular Session was made at 8:21 p.m. by Vice-Chair Andrews, seconded by Commissioner Irions, and passed unanimously.
10. **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 8:21 p.m.

---

Rob Grant, Chairman

Attest:

---

Andrea Dzioba, County Clerk