

RUSSELL COUNTY COMMISSION
BUDGET MEETING MINUTES
September 19, 2006
3:00 P.M. EST

A recessed meeting of the Russell County Commission was called to order in the Commission Chambers at the Russell County Courthouse. The following Commissioners were present: Gentry Lee, Gordon Cox, Ronnie Reed, Cattie Epps, Mervin Dudley and J.D. Upshaw. Peggy Martin was absent.

Commissioner Epps motioned to reconvene the budget meeting from September 12, 2006. Commissioner Lee seconded the motion.

The County Administrator stated: With the approval of the Commission, I would like to place the Ladonia Sewer project on today's agenda. This item was not on the original agenda.

Commissioner Lee motioned to approve the item for the agenda. Commissioner Upshaw seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously by a show of hands.

Chairman Cox stated Commissioner Martin is not present at this time; 1:40 p.m.

The Administrator stated: The Sheriff's department budget requests have been placed on the agenda for today's meeting. The reason for this is I need some type of consensus from the commission regarding the Sheriff's request for salary increases before we move forward with the rest of the agenda.

Commissioner Lee stated: We need to make a decision on that because it will affect the rest of the budget.

Ms. Horne Jordan stated: If we move forward with the 20 percent increase, that will change the items we already have budgeted. Any changes really will affect this draft.

Chairman Cox called for a recommendation.

Commissioner Lee stated: Nothing would delight me beyond description more than if I could make a motion to grant the 20 percent salary increase the Sheriff has requested. Since we last met, I have poured over the numbers. To some people, when you say 20 percent it doesn't mean anything. When you convert that into numbers, it becomes apparent that unless some major changes are made in the budget that has been presented to us. The bottom line is, we just don't have that money. The commission, by law, can not appropriate more expenses than it has revenue. I have not been able to come up with a solution and I'm pretty good with numbers.

Commissioner Reed stated: If we go with a 10 percent increase, how much money are we looking at for that?

Commissioner Lee stated: \$600,000.00.

Commissioner Reed stated: If we are able to do a 10 percent increase, I'd like to go ahead and motion for that at this time.

Chairman Cox stated: It took two and a half months to work up the budget that has just been presented to us. If you are asking for a quick answer to your question it can't be done. All of the budget would have to be redone to calculate a change as significant as that.

Commissioner Reed stated: I withdraw my motion at this time.

Commissioner Upshaw stated: I have thought about this myself and I see no way for us to do now, what should have been done all along. Looking at one or two of these positions, the Chief Deputy and the Corrections Officers salaries need to be reviewed and adjusted. These positions are grossly below where the salaries should be. I am willing to look at these two areas and try and bring them up closer to what they should be; but not 20 percent at this time for everyone.

Commissioner Epps stated: I agree with the Sheriff to a point. Like Commissioner Lee, I wish we could honor the Sheriff's requests. I do feel the Chief Deputy and the Corrections officers salaries need to be adjusted. During the course of this year I hope we will be able to judge how our funds are being collected and plan for more work on bringing these salaries up to where they need to be. I can't remember at this time but did we pay off the bond for the jail? Or are we close to paying that off?

Commissioner Lee stated: I'm speaking off the cuff here, so I might need help from the Sheriff on this. The money that pays for the construction of the jail; we have been told by the Sheriff and the architect that built the jail, we are going to have to do some major renovations to the jail or add on to it. Basically, that is what this money was set up to do. Originally the law added \$30 to every case that comes through our court system. This money could only be used for the jail.

That money had to be supplemented for many years from the General Fund because it wasn't enough to make the payments.

Several years ago, the jail needed \$460,000 worth of renovation. We didn't have the money to do that so we asked the Legislation to change that law that would have expired anyway as soon as the jail was paid off. We asked to change that and extend it indefinitely and to allow us to use those funds not only to pay for it but to maintain the jail and operating expenses. If the bond was paid off, that money could be used for maintaining and adding to the jail. We really would have to have our attorney to do some checking into whether we could use those funds for salaries.

Sheriff Tommy Boswell stated: I came here today with the intention of listening. I need to offer this to you and believe me, I am eternally grateful for all that you try to do for my department. I do feel like raising a part of it or one or two salaries would only be detrimental to the moral of the employees that are left out. I would rather you consider a raise for the entire department at a lesser percentage than we asked for, than to pick out a few individuals and raise them.

After much discussion, Commissioner Lee stated: Ms. Jordan has presented us with a good lean budget. I am sure we will have some additions and changes that will upset that budget. If it is a tremendous additional amount, then we will have to look at some of the programs that we have and see if they need to be adjusted or done away with altogether.

LeAnn Horne Jordan stated: First I want to mention to the Sheriff that he does a tremendous job and we are very fortunate to have him. My feeling is, and I echo what some of the Commissioners have said, in that you can't put one department in front of another. All employees should be treated equal. What I want you to consider is if we increase all the departments this amount what the expense to the county will be. This year we have a lot of one time expenditures for projects the commission is doing. Those aren't what you need to look at when planning the budget. The ongoing expenses are the salaries and benefits. Therefore, if we go forward with the 20 percent or other increase; there will have to be some items cut or reduced funding to accommodate those increases. Once you give an increase, you have to maintain that year after year. I wanted to tell you that I wish we could give a 20 percent raise to every employee. If we had the revenue for it, I would support the increase totally. Whatever the Commission decides and votes on, I will go back and try to reach your expectations; but I may have to come back with some items for you to consider cutting for a balanced budget.

Commissioner Martin entered the meeting at 3:40 p.m. Mrs. Martin stated: I apologize for being late.

Chairman Lee stated: Ms. Horne needs to know if we are going to do anything we need to do it because if she has to adjust the budget she will have to get started working on that.

Chairman Cox called for a recommendation from the Commission or Administrator.

LeAnn Horne Jordan stated: I do want to point out that in the course of time, some positions do become out of line in the pay plan. A couple of positions the Sheriff mentioned fall under that category; those being the Chief Deputy and the Corrections Officers. If I may make a suggestion that the entire pay plan is reviewed at some point during this coming year to see what positions may need to be realigned and make those positions come in line with the job duties. This is something that should be done from time to time anyway. Whatever percentages you do choose, I need to know so that I can look at the expenditures accordingly.

Chairman Dudley stated: I don't have all the answers but I think if we work to initiate that review of the pay plan and set the parameters to work with and give the responsibility to the department heads; we may be surprised what comes back. Let the supervisors handle that so when it comes up on the anniversary date, that is already figured in. If they get a 5 percent raise, they will get it then and not have to wait until October 1. That will be already in place so there won't be any of the issues we are faced with here today.

Chairman Cox called for recommendations on the Sheriff's budget requests. There were no recommendations.

Chairman Cox called for project requests from the Commissioners.

Commissioner Dudley stated: Funds should be afforded toward establishment of a county-city industrial park in rural Russell County. We talk of doing things with the City like sewage and water, all this takes revenue. What better way to increase revenue than to come up with something to keep the kids that are graduating here at home with good paying jobs.

Commissioner Epps stated: I would like to fund the Senior Activities Center in District 5 in Fort Mitchell in the amount of \$50,000 for lights and other expenses. The center is used about every weekend and I believe brings in about the amount of money it takes to take care of the minor things.

The County Administrator stated: I wanted to point out to the Commission that I discussed these projects and that included the grant match for the sidewalk that is also in the budget; that includes the lighting and other expenditures, since this is already in the budget.

Commissioner Lee stated: I have one question about Mr. Reed's request for discretionary funds in the amount of \$10,000 for non profit organizations. I would like to know more about that.

The County Administrator stated: This is for two new agencies to be added to appropriations and he wasn't quite sure how much for those. Since that time those agencies have sent in request for funding.

Chairman Cox called for appropriation requests.

The County Administrator stated: Several people are here to submit a change in their funding request. I would like to address the funding for Recreation. Under recreation, I have \$260,000, which will continue on with phase two as I understand. However, I was not sure, under this \$260,000 we are going to continue to fund the different leagues until our complex in Seale is completed. This is what I have understood from the Commissioners. Out of the \$260,000, \$230,000 was allocated for the project in Seale. \$15,000 is for improvements to the Ladonia Sports and Recreation. The Seale Baseball League is \$7,500 and the youth football is also \$7,500. The Hurtsboro Recreation is \$2,000.

Commissioner Lee asked Suzanne Burnette of Lee-Russell Council of Governments if the East Alabama Services for the Elderly is under her charge. Is there a duplication of services there?

Ms. Burnette stated: No, they have programs for like retired senior citizens volunteer program, senior adult day care, etc. I don't know what they are requesting from the county. We contract with them to provide in home care for elderly citizens.

Chairman Cox called for the list of appropriation request:

Hurtsboro Library – no representative available

Chattahoochee Indian Heritage Association- no representative available

Red Cross Disaster Fund- no representative available

Health Department- no representative available

East Alabama Mental Health- no representative available

Lee- Russell Council of Governments- Ms. Suzanne Burnette stated: We have requested funding in the amount of \$4,250.00 over last year's request. The additional funds are for the Senior Center, as you know. As you know, the total funding request for the Lee-Russell Council of Governments is \$89,250.00. We know budgets are tight so we would appreciate your consideration.

Commissioner Lee asked: (About) the \$12,422.00 for the Senior Center Management, could you explain this?

Ms. Burnette stated: This will pay for the center manager's salary plus any benefits, if available. This is a part time position.

The Phenix City Russell County Library- no representative available

African American Historic Society- no representative available

Russell County Extension Office- no representative available

Phenix City/ Russell County Chambers of Commerce- Commissioner Lee stated: Mr. Cross asked me to explain that he had an important meeting with someone moving to the area, but he requested that I tell you to give him what he asked for.

James McGill of Phenix City/ Russell County Chambers of Commerce stated: The amount requested is \$57,000. The figures for expenditures are indicated on the request letter given to you. We appreciate the opportunity to be considered.

Russell County Soil & Water Conservation- no representative available

Tri Rivers Development Association- no representative available

Wiregrass RC & D- no representative available

Phenix City/ Russell County Council for Abused and Neglected Children- no representative available

Junior Educators of Tomorrow- no representative available

Russell County Historical Commission- no representative available

House of Restoration- no representative available

The Children and Family Connection- no representative available

CVCC Foundation- no representative available

T.E.A.R.S. - no representative available

United To Save Ourselves- no representative available

The Lazarus Society – Tommy Powell stated: Each one of you received our requested (amount) and in your packet you will find a copy of our budget for the past 3 years. We appreciate your consideration for our funding request.

Commissioner Reed stated: Teen University is new to our appropriations and would like to request consideration for funding.

Chairman Cox stated: We will recess for 10 minutes.

Chairman Cox called for any department head who would like to address the commission.

Revenue Commissioner Naomi Elliot stated: I would just like to request the one additional full-time employee for my office. The remaining of the budget is satisfactory.

Sheriff Tommy Boswell stated: My request for an additional dispatcher is much needed with the growing population. We are stressed in this area. If one person is out sick or for other necessary reasons, it creates a bad situation.

Tag Commissioner Paulette Colbert stated: I am requesting one full-time position for my office.

Commissioner Dudley stated: Mrs. Colbert, what salary does the position for your office start?

Ms. Colbert stated: Grade 5 step 7 with the 3 percent that's budgeted starts at \$21,649.81- without benefits. Benefits added, it is \$28,131.85

Commissioner Dudley asked Sheriff Boswell: At what position his dispatcher would start- \$19,000 is the figure we have.

Director of Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency Chance Corbett stated: I have (thought) about this for a long time, on the additional position we requested for a full-time position employee and request for a vehicle. I am willing to drop the request for a vehicle and go with a part-time employee at a salary of \$14,500.00 plus whatever taxes. This is requested over contract services. I would like to stay with the position upgrade for Kathy Russell with an increase of \$ 2,340.00 and my pay increase still stands also.

County Administrator stated: I need to know what grade and step this upgrade will be.

Commissioner Lee stated: Place it in the closet slot for that amount of pay increase.

The County Administrator stated: Mr. Corbett, if the Sheriff's Department surpluses a vehicle could that serve as a vehicle for your vehicle request?

Mr. Corbett stated: Yes, I have spoken with the sheriff and this could very well serve that purpose if the opportunity arises.

The County Administrator stated: What I was going to present to you today wouldn't be accurate at this point. A recommendation has been made with regard to the Health Insurance for county employees. I would like for the Commission to consider continuing to pay for employee insurance benefits, as we are doing now. However, if an employee elects the higher Insurance, the employee has to pay the difference. United Health Care is \$362.00 month that we pay. Blue Cross Blue Shield is \$304.00. If employee elects to use United Health Care that employee pays difference of \$58.00 to stay with United Health Care and not with Blue Cross Blue Shield. County will continue to pay 100% unless employee selects United Health Care then employee pays difference. Stated added the option. The savings is considerable by decreasing \$58.00 per employee per month that chooses plan B. Also, if staffing requests are given back, perhaps part-time employees working 28 hours a week with the provision that if someone retires or otherwise is no longer employed with the county, that part-time position fills the position of the person leaving. I suggest this in an effort to help keep costs down during a tight budget time. This is an effort to meet half way on cutting costs. I also need some type of percentages from the Commission so I can run some figures and see what direction we can move in. All of your requests are valid. I know you need the additional help and I will honor whatever decisions the Commission makes to the best of my ability.

Commissioner Lee stated: I believe the Sheriff's request for a dispatcher will almost have to be full-time.

LeAnn Horne Jordan stated: These are my recommendations. To review what items are up for approval; they are, (1) Part-Time Planner position for Emergency Management. (1) Full-Time Dispatcher for the Sheriff's Department, which Commissioner Epps has motioned to approve. (1) Part-Time position for the Revenue Commission Office for a six month training period then moving to full-time status once training is completed. (1) Part-time status position for the Tag Office at the rate of pay position paid when employee left. Commissioner Epps stated: We rejected the Probate Judges request for an increase in pay for a current employee.

Chairman Cox called for a second to the motion on the floor.

Commissioner Reed stated: I feel the positions need to be full-time.

The County Administrator reviewed the proposed requests for approval. (1) Part-Time Planner position for Emergency Management. (1) Full-Time Dispatcher for the Sheriff's Department, which Commissioner Epps has motioned to approve. (1) Part-Time position for the Revenue Commission Office for a six month training period then moving to full-time status once training is completed. (1) Part-time status position for the Tag Office at the rate of pay position paid when employee left.

The motion died for lack of a second.

Commissioner Lee stated: In our six month probation period, what is the purpose of that?
The County Administrator stated: After thirty days, your benefits go into effect. The vacation and sick leave time is earned after six months employment.

Commissioner Dudley motioned that we accept the recommendation for (1) the Sheriff's slot as presented. (2) Mrs. Elliott's office as she so stated; in the same way that she requested it for a full-time slot. (3) Mrs. Colbert's office for a full-time position as she requested. Also, Emergency Management's request for a part-time slot.

Commissioner Lee seconded the motion for three full-time positions and one part-time for Emergency Management.

The Administrator polled the Commission. District 1 (Lee) voted yes. District 2 (Cox) voted no. District 3 (Martin) voted yes. District 4 (Reed) voted yes. District 5 (Epps) voted no. District 6 (Dudley) voted yes. District 7 (Upshaw) voted yes. The motion carried with five yes votes and two no votes.

The County Administrator stated: I still need a percentage to work with on the salary increases.

Commissioner Lee stated: I would like to motion we accept the County Administrator's recommendation that the County continue to furnish health care to employees from the lower premium company. Should an employee choose to select the higher priced insurance, that employee will pay the difference.

Commissioner Reed seconded the motion.

The Administrator polled the Commission. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

Commissioner Lee stated: The Mapper/Appraiser requested change in the positions of the employees in his office. I move we approve the request as presented.

Commissioner Epps seconded the motion. The Administrator polled the Commission. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

Commissioner Dudley motioned to approve the Coroner's request for an economical transport vehicle not to exceed \$10,000.00

Commissioner Reed seconded the motion.

Commissioner Dudley requested to modify his motion to include contract service funds in the Coroner's budget, limited to \$2,000.00.

The Administrator polled the Commission. District 1 (Lee) voted no. District 2 (Cox) voted no. District 3 (Martin) voted no. District 4 (Reed) voted yes. District 5 (Epps) voted yes. District 6 (Dudley) voted yes. District 7 (Upshaw) voted yes. The motion carried with four yes votes and three no votes.

Commissioner Lee stated: We need to move on the Emergency Management Director's salary increase and Deputy Director's classification upgrade as requested.

Commissioner Lee motioned that the EMA Director's salary be increased to \$53,000.00 and the Planner's salary is increased by \$2,340.00 and title changed to Deputy Director to be placed in the closest slot for that salary increase amount.

Commissioner Reed seconded the motion.

The Administrator polled the Commission. District 1 (Lee) voted yes. District 2 (Cox) voted no. District 3 (Martin) voted yes. District 4 (Reed) voted yes. District 5 (Epps) voted yes. District 6 (Dudley) voted no. District 7 (Upshaw) voted yes. The motion carried with five yes votes and two no votes.

The County Administrator stated: We are closing out our books for the year. The time to cut off purchase orders is near. The Ladonia Sewer Project came in over budget, requiring we go into our reserves. At this time I would like to request approval for a budget amendment to transfer funds from General Fund and increasing fund balance to \$386,000.00. We are transferring funds from 112 to 116; decreasing contract services in 112- \$52,000.00 and increasing sewer in 11650 in the amount \$52,000.00.

Commissioner Lee motioned to approve the recommendation from the Administrator.

Commissioner Martin seconded the motion. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

Commissioner Lee motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Reed seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned.