

Continued
Russell County Commission
Meeting Minutes
Proposed 2011-2012
September 15, 2011
9:30 A.M. EST

A recessed Russell County Meeting was reconvened. Members present were: Chair Peggy Martin, Vice Chair Gentry Lee, Tillman Pugh, Ronnie Reed, Cattie Epps, Mervin Dudley and Larry Screws. Also present was the County Administrator LeAnn Horne who kept the minutes.

A quorum was established.

Administrator Horne gave an overview of the proposed budget:

This is a first (draft) proposed 2012 budget. The proposed general fund is balanced. As we go through the budget today I anticipate adjustments and welcome input from officials and department heads.

Overview of County's financial position by the County Administrator:

Russell County's financial position is good; evidenced by strong reserve levels and below average debt burden. The County's ending fund balance (reserves) for year end 2010 was \$4.4M which exceeded the state requirement for maintaining reserves. In this year's budget (2010-2011); projections are that county departments will return roughly \$2M out of a budgeted \$13.1M general fund budget however there are two more payroll runs and a final ck run. Therefore; from the \$1.9 fund balance budgeted; the projection for unused funds is \$1.5 that is anticipated to be returned to reserves on this date. The County has met budgeted revenue for this fiscal year and in our major revenue lines there were slight increases. The County's expenditures are well under the budgeted revenue.

Thank you elected officials and department heads for a job well done managing your departmental budgets and being able to return funds to the reserves this year.

The census reported a population growth for Russell County of 3,191 new citizens to our County. We welcome growth; however, with growth the demand for enhanced public services is impacting county departments and services. Departments are stretching to meet those growth demands with the same dollars or less for operations and personnel. As you know most of the county's revenue comes from property taxes (roughly 30% of general fund revenues); sales taxes (roughly 30%) and the remainder is through charges for services. Russell County maintained it's A+ credit rating as reported in 2011 by Standard and Poors credit analyst in New York. The County's property tax base has increased 38% over the past four year's from economic growth from the military base realignment, new industry and industry expansion in the region. Ad valorem taxes are collected in arrears, per state law, therefore the county will not reflect any significant change in ad valorem revenue by year-end from the economic growth.

The proposed general fund budget is \$12,900,325. An overall proposed decrease of \$282,716. The 2011-2012 proposed budget is primarily level funded except for salaries or special projects—conservative budget planning. The projected total county budget is \$30,882,836.

A general overview of the items included in the 2012 proposed budget are:

In November 2010, Russell County Commission awarded a \$6.2 M construction contract for the additions and renovations to the former County Courthouse that will become the Russell County Judicial Building. The interior demolition of the three-story 36,000 square foot building is complete, replacing existing mechanical systems, upgrading existing electrical and plumbing systems. Also a new four-story 18,000 square foot addition is underway and currently you can see the masonry work being conducted so that in the end it matches as closely as possible the existing building. The project remains on scheduled to be completed in January 2012. This debt payment is budgeted in the public building fund and with partial transfer from general fund of \$256,263.

The County Commission approved a jail expansion of 12,324 square foot addition to the Prentiss Griffith Detention facility. The additional space will provide 120 bed count (double bunked). The cost for the expansion is \$3.3 million funded by the County. The existing jail structure is 60,000 square foot. Also there is a jail electronic security system upgrade of \$175,000 and a new judicial computer system for law enforcement that both the Sheriff's Department and Phenix City Police Department utilizes. The county's investment is \$145,000. This will streamline personnel and reduce expense. County Commission received grant funding for (2) additional deputies which is reflected in this budget. The grant reimburses the County for their salaries.

The County Commission approved a new department which this proposed budget includes, the Russell County Parks and Recreation Department. The Commission hired Coach Mike Parker to oversee the departmental projects. The County received a \$250,000 state grant to construct a new multipurpose field to be utilized by ages 13 thru 18. This makes the 5th field at the sports and recreation complex located in Seale. Coach Parker's duties include maintaining the County's 3 walking trails (Dixie, Ladonia, and Fort Mitchell) along with the Fort Mitchell Senior Center. He has plans to expand recreation throughout the County as funding allows. Also funding is included in this budget for grant application made for lighting the fields which rough estimates are: \$183,500 (match required \$133,500 – Grant \$50,000).

Emergency Management has applied for grant funds to provide for additional weather sirens and storm shelters. Grant amount is \$99,029 which is included in this proposed budget.

For the first time in years; there is not an increase in health insurance because Russell County met the classification standard of "Preferred" rate category. Thank you to all who participated in the wellness fair that the State Insurance held. Because of you; we maintained our preferred status. Keep it up and continue to be healthy! Note: Russell County Commission pays the total premium for all county employees which is \$378.00 (per active employee). That is an extra benefit for county employees; many other

counties have made the decision for county employees to pay half or more of their health insurance. So far, Russell County has not had to take such measures.

In the proposed budget is a 3% cost of living adjustment for all county employees. There were no raises provided in the 2010-2011 budget.

Appropriations are basically level funded. These are funds that are returned to area civic and quasi governmental agencies. The amount proposed in the 2012 budget is: \$564,686. The decrease in the recreation funds were moved to establish the parks and recreation budget. Funding for Volunteer Fire Departments is included in the proposed budget in the amount of \$ 75,000.

Proposed funding from General Fund transferring to support county engineering projects is \$560,000. A decrease of \$300,000 to offset the two new bond payments for commission projects discussed above.

It was a budgetary goal not to *exceed* the fund balance that was utilized in this year's budget—2010-2011 for 2012.

What is not included is any new positions or any salary adjustments exceeding the 3% cost of living.

Commissioner Lee asked if the Auburn Contract was still in effect. Sheriff Taylor explained the contract was not renewed due to the way the deputies were required to be paid, it cost the deputies money; therefore, they were essentially working the games for free.

Commissioner Lee asked about the Court Cost Fund had a zero amount. Administrator Horne explained that was being used for bond payment which will now come from another fund.

Administrator Horne stated a typo was discovered on the transfer out to public building, 2010 Judicial Building warrant payments and a change should be made to read 2008. Also the amounts should be changed to \$300,000 instead of \$150,000 which will make the total General Fund Budget \$12,900,325. These are funds being transferred out of General Fund to Public Building fund for warrant payments.

Administrator Horne explained the county has the choice to opt out of Retirees benefits without affecting what the employees will receive at time of retirement. If the County opts into the change, employees will be responsible for paying (2.5%) more money toward their retirement benefits.

Probate Judge Harden stated his budget is level funded. There is one note for line item 309 which is decreasing from \$32,000 to \$20,000 due to the person that was contracted to do the bookbinding had an illness in his family and was not able to complete the project this year as planned.

Revenue Commissioner Naomi Elliott stated her budget was also level funded except for an increase in office equipment which is for maintenance of office equipment and computer software.

Administrator Horne represented the Tag Office for Paulette Colbert, whose office budget was also level funded. She stated Mrs. Colbert had no problems with the proposed budget.

Mapping / Appraisal Office budget was submitted to the State and approved with no changes.

Board of Registrars Office provided in their budget extra postage due to the county redistricting, as well as mileage and training for the new Registrars.

Building and Grounds Maintenance Department had no problems with the proposed budgetary figures. However Mr. Sellers has concerns about staffing for the Judicial Center once it is reopened. Staffing will be reviewed after the courts and offices have returned to the building to see if another position will be required for custodial. A new position has not been funded in this proposed budget.

Sheriff Taylor gave an overview of his budget which came in under budget. He states there are 5 new vehicles in this budget which were also included in last years level funded budget. There was an increase in the line item because the Crown Victoria, which cost approximately \$21,000 to \$22,000, is no longer available to law enforcement. Therefore, Sheriff Taylor chose the Chevy Tahoe which will run about \$3,000 to \$4,000 more per vehicle. The other choices were a Dodge Charger, which cost more in repairs if the body should be damaged and the Ford Taurus, which is a front wheel drive. The Tahoe is offered in police package and fuel consumption should not be more than the Crown Victorias in service now. The State Law Enforcement is using the Tahoe's now.

The Juvenile Department was reviewed.

EMA Deputy Director Bob Franklin presented his budget which was mostly level funding with an increase to line item 54100 for the weather warning sirens which were approved by the Commission. The amount will be reimbursed by grant funds, leaving only the county's required match to be funded.

Coroner Sumbry stated because of Russell County's growing population due to BRAC he is requesting an increase to his budget. Currently the Coroner's Office does not have a fuel or vehicle allowance for its deputies, so he is requesting a surplus vehicle (Sheriff's Department's van) for the coroner's office use. In addition he asked for the Contract Funds be used for the paid transport services be given to the Coroner's office and allocated as salary increases, which will enable him to cease using the transport service for delivery and pick up of bodies to the Alabama Forensic Lab. Mr. Sumbry will use the same approach for Phenix City transport since each government is responsible for providing funding for their transport to the State Lab. He plans to meet with City Officials next week.

Administrator Horne stated the budget presented to the Commission only reflects a 3% COLA for salary increase for coroner and deputies. Without Commission approval she did not increase the amount of the Contract Services Line. Mr. Sumbry requested the \$8,700 placed in salary line versus the 3%, which was something I felt the Commission should approve.

Mr. Sumbry has (2) deputies and next year he will probably request the Commission to consider a full-time deputy or an additional part-time deputy for the office.

Administrator Horne will check to see what is allowable under the Ominous Bill , which will determine if Coroner Sumbry can receive the additional salary increases.

Building Inspections has submitted a level budget, however, the Inspection Enforcement Office which falls within this budget. Special Enforcement Officer Bill Friend has taken on more responsibilities and soon may have even more added. Therefore, he is requesting above the 3% salary raise due to the increase of duties. Commissioner Lee motioned to raise Mr. Friend's salary to \$35,167.85 and was seconded by Commissioner Pugh. After discussion Commissioner Lee withdrew his motion and made a new motion stating, provided funds are available the salary in question be raised by \$5,000 and the assistant under Mr. Friend, though he will still have the same work detail schedule, but his position will be transferred from the Building Inspectors Department and placed under the Sheriff's Department so he can remain a sworn officer. Seconded by Commissioner Dudley. The vote was unanimous.

Recreational Director Mike Parker stated he did not have a problem with his budget.

County Engineer Larry Kite stated each year the budget gets more difficult with funding availability and keeping the level of service stable. Mr. Kite stated he has reviewed the past years budgets as well as examined how to complete projects more efficiently. There is more work being completed with fewer resources. The budget has decreased in the last 4 years, 2007-2008 \$4.4 million to this year \$3.95 million. Contributions which the Engineering Department has received from the General Fund have increased each year from \$350 in 2009 to \$860 for the current year. It has been necessary due to revenue lost in the last 2 years of approximately \$575,000 being transferred in to 2009 and lost \$175,000 for tag fee revenue. In 2010-2011, \$230,000 was lost due to \$170,000 reduction in Public Road & Bridge Fund and \$100,000 reduction in Capital Improvement Fund. This year based on what is available in funds we are looking at \$170,000 in reductions of revenue, which will be another \$70,000 from Public Road & Bridge and another \$100,000 from Capital Improvements. \$575,000 will have to be made up if we are to keep services at the same level that we have been operating. This will cause us to seek the same revenue from the General Fund as last year. We were able to prepare the budget and submitted to the Commission keeping that amount level and that was not knowing about the \$170,000 addition, therefore it will have to be increased by this amount to makeup for that. This reflects a decrease from last year and does include a \$249,500 for Capital Improvements for dirt road paving and the 3 percent salary increase. The salary lines are lower this year because there is not an extra pay period and there have been employees who retired and were replaced with lower pay grade employees.

Mr. Kite submitted 2 budget options. The Commission decided to do a closer study of those options and discuss the Engineering Budget at another time rather than making a decision at this time..

Appropriations for area agencies were discussed:

Commissioner Lee proposed to reduce the appropriations to the Phenix City/ Russell County Public Library to \$10, 000 to prevent Russell County Residents paying a fee for their service. Chair Martin wanted the appropriation to stay at level funding of \$11,800. They did agree to leave the amount at \$11,800.

Commissioner Lee discussed Wiregrass RC&D raising their amount to \$1,000 for dues.

Commissioner Screws requested that the Hurtsboro Library appropriations be raised. After discussion it was agreed to raise the amount to \$5,000.

Commissioner Reed asked to give the Russell County High School an appropriation. It was agreed Russell County Schools have supplements, therefore, were not given funding from the County.

Chair Martin requested raising the Russell County Historical Commission amount to \$15,000.

Commissioner Dudley requested for the Administrator to see if there may be funding for an employee to assist the Recreational Director.

Don Ivey, President of the Russell County Chapter of the ARACA requested the County to grant a one-time Christmas bonus. Commissioner Lee stated the City is allowed to give a bonus, but the State does not allow the County to use public funds for bonus.

Commissioner Lee motioned to recess the meeting until September 20th, 2011 at 9:30 a.m. EST.

The meeting was recessed.