

MINUTES  
SEVIER COUNTY QUORUM COURT MEETING  
2:00 P.M., MONDAY DECEMBER 14, 2020

The Sevier County Quorum Court met at 2:00 P.M., Monday, December 14, 2020, in the De Queen Community Building in Herman Dierks Park with County Judge Greg Ray presiding. The meeting was opened with prayer by Judge Ray followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. The roll was called with the following Justices present: Michael Archer, Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, David Wright and Greg Wright. Absent: None. Upon a motion by Roxy Stephens and second by Greg Wright, the Quorum Court voted to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting and to approve the minutes as emailed. A roll call vote was taken. Yes – Michael Archer, Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, David Wright, and Greg Wright. No – None. Absent – None. The motion passed.

**Committee and Other Reports**

Update from Hospital Board of Governors – Chairman, Steve Cole was present to give the hospital update this month. Before updating the Quorum Court on the Hospital, Mr. Cole wanted to mention a new group that has organized in the last several months. It is called FRIENDS and is a group of citizens interested in promoting economic development in the county. It will be a 501-3(c) non-profit organization. Randy Wright is the Chair and other members are Greg Revels and Jimmy Bristow. They are working in conjunction with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission as our county is considered an “Opportunity Zone”. This helps to draw interest in our area for development projects. If anyone is interested in being a part of this they are encouraged to do so.

Update on Hospital – It has been a busy month. You can see construction as you drive by the site. The money has been received from Pilgrim’s for the walking trail project at the hospital site. This will be a concrete lighted one-mile walking trail that is open to the community. Thanks go to Eddie Halter of Pilgrim’s. Mr. Cole reminded the court that the hospital will open as an acute care hospital and then transition into a Critical Access Facility. Initially this will be a financial struggle due to the reimbursement rate so the transition will be accomplished as quickly as possible. The hospital will be a 14-bed facility. There is capability for up to 25 beds if necessary. Mr. Cole stated that all bills are currently paid and the portion paid by the county prior to the Bond Sales has been paid back. Going forward bills are paid by Bank of Ozarks. We are taking bids for different work to be done at the hospital. We are publishing notice locally so that local contractors have the opportunity to bid. There is a \$35,000 bond required so there may be some local contractors who will not meet that requirement. We are having Owner/Architect/Contractor meetings on a regular basis. The meetings are conducted by Zoom. This is how we are updated on progress. The Hospital Foundation is looking to raise money for the “Safe Haven” box. There have been discussions with AirEvac regarding the possibility of their business being re-located to the hospital campus. There are 20 acres in this campus. The architects have agreed to work with AirEvac if this happens as we would want all buildings to be designed in a similar fashion. The Group Purchasing Organization (GPO) is Vizient. This allows us to get group purchasing rates and to negotiate pricing and bids. We are currently advertising for Hospital Administrator We hope to begin interviewing in mid-January. We have contracted with Daniel Martinez who has started a local marketing firm called ARZAC. He will be designing a hospital logo.

Judge Ray brought the court’s attention to the quarterly report that was submitted by David Boone Ministries, the organization that manages our Senior Citizen Centers. There is no action required. This is for informational purposes only.

Murriel Wiley introduce herself as well as Tarrazzo Kelly, Chris Wolcott, and Esteban Ochoa. She was present on behalf of De Queen Community Planning Project Group. This is not an official name as they are currently searching for a name as well as deciding on whether they will be a nonprofit on their own or will partner with a national organization. This is not affiliated with the Chamber of Commerce, even though she is the new Director of the Chamber. She is here to talk about a grass-roots effort to fund community group action items for Sevier County. She handed out a list of goals that the group has committed to. The meetings are open to the public. The video of their first meeting had over 1500 views. This indicates interest in what they are doing. She has been talking to other groups that they may partner with. The Quorum Court can be involved by focusing on minority owned businesses who pay taxes to build roads, run our libraries, etc. She also mentioned involvement by locally elected officials, voter registration information and education. This will be to inform and empower our youth to get involved with local government. She specifically mentioned Quorum Court members as elected officials. Organized encounters by the elected Justices with the youth informing them about how they run their campaigns and how the process works with descriptions of what they do as members of the Quorum Court. Murriel stated that local government is important and the youth need to know how they can impact and help their communities. Knowledge for the next generation who will be running our county governments could be impacted by the elected members. Involvement with local organizations is something that Ms. Wiley said this group will be seeking. For instance, 4-H activities, fitness activities with AMP Fitness which is run by Erik Smith. They want to partner with local artists, possibly to paint a mural. They are not asking for money as they plan to raise money for themselves through grants, bake sales, etc. The City Clerk gave Murriel grant applications that they might utilize. The organization is interested in working on financial literacy, skills, and overall education. Angie Walker mentioned that we have the RSAT program ongoing at the jail. She asked if they might be partnering with that program in Bridges Out of Poverty and other programs like that? Ms. Wiley stated that she had talked with Jail Administrator Chris Wolcott and they definitely want to be involved in connecting the youth with these participants in order to hear their stories and possibly help in establishing some preventive measures to help educate our youth. We want to help dissipate the ideas of mistrust between youth and police communities. The law enforcement already has the awesome block parties. What can we do to help support and promote the programs that we have already established? Murriel mentioned that they would like to have a Martin Luther King Jr., Celebration to acknowledge how far we have come and what we still need to do regarding racial tensions. There is a “National Day of Healing” that is being pushed by Governor Hutchinson. The governor has stated that he



would like to see every School District, County, and City in the state participate in this event. This would fall the day after Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Angie Walker asked if they would be willing to take on the Covid-19 vaccine issue because we will need to get 75% vaccinated to have it be effective. Murriel mentioned that she would like to strategize with the medical field members about how they could be involved in the process. Esteban mentioned that the Hispanic community needs facts to help dissipate rumors and myths that they may believe. Murriel told the Court that this presentation is informational so that if our members are asked about it they can give good information to the public.

Kaylen Lewis of the Owens Law Firm was in attendance to discuss how the Court might want to address the issue of Private Club Fees in the implementation of liquor sales in the county. There was some discussion about whether the court would want to repeal the existing ordinance and replace it or how the county would want to address the issue. Angie Walker stated that she would definitely not want establishments to be charged any fee. Kaylen has provided some sample ordinances. David Wright asked what the money would be used for. Ms. Lewis said it would go into the General Fund and could be used for whatever the county allowed. Some county's do not establish any fees and some do. David Wright asked how many liquor stores would be allowed. Ms. Lewis said that there would only be two but convenience stores would be allowed to sell beer. She also stated that the city will have to make similar decisions. After brief interactions the Judge said we will be addressing this after January 1, 2021. The information given was just to inform not to make a decision on today.

### **Old Business – There is no Old Business**

#### **New Business**

The First agenda item is a request to confirm the re-appointment of Joan Moore to the Sevier County Library Board. A motion was made by Roxy Stephens and seconded by Kenneth Currence to approve the re-appointment. A roll call vote was taken. Yes – Michael Archer, Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, David Wright, and Greg Wright. No – None. Absent – None. The motion passed.

Next on the agenda is a request to confirm the appointment of Dr. Randy Walker to the Sevier County Airport Board. A motion was made by David Wright to confirm the appointment. Greg Wright seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. Yes – Michael Archer, Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, David Wright, and Greg Wright. No – None. Absent – None. The motion passed.

With no other business on the agenda, Judge Ray asked if someone would entertain a motion to here non-agenda items. These items would include passing an ordinance establishing the 2021 annual operating budget, passing an ordinance to change the allocation of a one percent sales and use tax, set the first meeting date for January of 2021, discuss giving an employee bonus to county employees. Angie Walker made a motion to suspend the rules in order to hear non-agenda items. The motion was seconded by Greg Wright. A roll call vote was taken. Yes – Michael Archer, Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, David Wright, and Greg Wright. No – None. Absent – None. The motion passed. Treasurer Heather Barnes read an ordinance to change allocation of the county's portion of a 1% County Sales and Use Tax. The change would be to allocate 47% to the County General Fund; 15% to the County General Reserve Fund; and 38% to the County Road Fund. A motion was made by Roxy Stephens and seconded by Earl Battiest to approve the change in allocation. A roll call vote was taken. Yes – Michael Archer, Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, David Wright, and Greg Wright. No – None. Absent – None. The motion passed by a 2/3 vote in one reading.

Clerk Debbie Akin read the Ordinance Establish the Annual Operating Budget for 2021. Mike Archer of the Budget Committee gave a brief summation of the budget process. He stated that the county employees would receive a 2.5% pay increase. He commended the department heads on staying within their respective budgets and for being cautious in their spending of the county's money. A motion was made by David Wright and seconded by Roger Whitmore to approve the ordinance. A roll call vote was taken. Yes – Michael Archer, Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, David Wright, and Greg Wright. No – None. Absent – None. The motion passed in one reading with a 2/3 vote.

Mike Archer proposed that the County award a bonus to all county employees. This will be paid from funds received from the CARES Act reimbursement. Full time employees with at least one year of service will receive \$500. Part time employees and employees with at least 6 months of service will receive \$250. Employees who have worked less than 6 months will receive \$125. Judge Ray stated that this should include Justices of the Peace also. A motion was made by David Wright and seconded by Greg Wright to approve the bonus payment. A roll call vote was taken. Yes – Michael Archer, Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, David Wright, and Greg Wright. No – None. Absent – None. The motion passed.

The last non-agenda item was a proposal by Clerk Akin to set the first meeting of 2021 for January 4 at 2:00 p.m. This is necessary to have all Justices of the peace sworn in by the deadline. A motion was made by Roxy Stephens to set the meeting as proposed. David Wright seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. Yes – Michael Archer, Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, David Wright, and Greg Wright. No – None. Absent – None. The motion passed.

### **Announcements**

#### **Adjournment**

With no further business to discuss, Roxy Stephens made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Roger Whitmore. The motion passed with a unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted,



Debbie Akin  
County Clerk