

MINUTES
SEVIER COUNTY QUORUM COURT MEETING
2:00 P.M., MONDAY JULY 12, 2021

The Sevier County Quorum Court met at 2:00 P.M., Monday, July 12, 2021, in the Sevier County Courthouse Courtroom with County Judge Greg Ray presiding. The meeting was opened with prayer by Judge Greg Ray followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. The roll was called with the following Justices present: Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Evelyn Keels, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, and David Wright. Absent: Roxy Stephens (Arrived later) and Greg Wright. Upon a motion by Earl Battiest and second by David 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 – Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Evelyn Keels, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, and David Wright. No – None. Absent – Roxy Stephens and Greg Wright. The motion passed.

Committee and Other Reports - Lori House, CEO of Sever County Medical Center was present to report on the progress of the new hospital construction. Ms. House stated that she was happy to see sales tax figures after this past month. The total is 2.1 million. She has been meeting with the Horn Group and she expects to have a budget ready in the next week for the remainder of 2021. The Horn Group also analyzed the floor plan of the hospital to see if any minor changes needed to be made to help with the profitability of the hospital. A request has been submitted to make the suggested changes. The steel construction is complete and the roof is in progress. Senator Boozman came by the construction site. He was impressed with the progress and has pledged to help with CMS and Arkansas Medicaid. Lori reported on the search for a CNO for the hospital. They have a number of applicants. They hope to get a few more before they begin the interview process. Ms. House stated that she has been communicating with Baptist Hospital regarding ER coverage for the hospital as opposed to contracting with an ER company for this service. She said she prefers using local doctors in Arkansas who are already in ER rotation with other hospitals. On July 25th there is a Community Meeting by invitation to discuss the Community Health Needs Assessment results. The hospital Facebook page is up and the Hospital Website should be up tomorrow. Earl Battiest asked about the sewer project for the hospital. Judge Ray stated that the bidding process will start tomorrow. He also stated that we would need to start getting easements for the sewer lines. The plan is to start breaking ground in September with completion in December. Cost is projected to be 1.5 million. This will be covered by Rescue Plan Money.

Old Business – There is no Old Business.

New Business –

1. The first agenda item is a proposed resolution declaring a vacancy in the office of Justice of the Peace, District 7. Judge Ray read the proposed resolution. A motion was made by David Wright and seconded by Earl Battiest to approve the resolution. Judge Ray stated that he has reached out to Marilyn Archer regarding this appointment. A Roll Call vote was taken. Yes – Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Evelyn Keels, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, and David Wright. No – None. Absent – Greg Wright. The motion passed.
2. Item two on the agenda is a proposed resolution authorizing the Sevier County Judge to enter into Contracts of Obligation relevant to the Sevier County Landfill and Sevier County Transfer Station with the Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment, Division of Environmental Quality. Judge Ray read the resolution. A motion was made by Roxy Stephens to approve the resolution. Roger Whitmore seconded the motion. A Roll Call vote was taken. Yes – Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Evelyn Keels, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, and David Wright. No – None. Absent – Greg Wright. The motion passed.
3. The third agenda item is a request to discuss pay equity to retain jailers/meet compliance requirements. Sheriff Gentry presented his request to give all full-time jailers and dispatchers a pay increase of one dollar per hour. He stated that he is struggling to keep jailers because they are leaving for better pay somewhere else. Earl Battiest who is on the budget committee stated that there are also compliance issues regarding the number of jailers required as well as how many must be male or female. David Wright asked if a dollar raise was going to be enough to keep employees from leaving. Basically, it is just a show of “good will” toward the employees. The general consensus is that we are hopeful that it will help in retention. Sheriff Gentry explained that the total of the increase with retirement, Social Security, etc. would be \$24,632 for the remainder of this year. Circuit Clerk Kathy Smith interjected that she felt that all county employees should get the same increase because we are all struggling to keep quality employees as well as hire good qualified employees. Earl Battiest asked if we could hold discussing other county employees increase till later in the meeting. A motion was made by David Wright and seconded by Kenneth Currence to approve the increase for jailers and dispatchers. A Roll Call vote was taken. Yes – Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Evelyn Keels, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, and David Wright. No – None. Absent – Greg Wright. The motion passed.
4. The last item on the agenda is a request to transfer within the Road Dept. budget, \$8000 from line 3001, Other Miscellaneous Services to line 2002, Small Equipment. This will be used to purchase warning barriers to put on roads as necessary in emergency situations. David Wright made a motion to approve the transfer. Angie Walker seconded the motion. A Roll Call vote was taken. Yes – Earl Battiest, Kenneth Currence, Evelyn Keels, Roxy Stephens, Angie Walker, Roger Whitmore, and David Wright. No – None. Absent – Greg Wright. The motion passed.

Discussion regarding pay increase for all employees continued....

Earl Battiest mentioned that CARES Act money is available for hazard pay or other pay if allocated. He said he was sure counties all over the state and country were probably having similar discussions. He stated that in the budget meetings they discuss cost now as well as impact on the county 5 or 10 years down the road. Giving the raise now might be feasible but maintaining that 5 or 10 years may not be. He also mentioned that the Rescue Plan money is for specific purposes and a big portion of it will be used for the

sewer system at the new hospital. He stated that this is not a slight on any employees. Everybody wants a raise and they may well deserve one. Clerk Akin asked if in light of higher sales tax revenues this year if the Budget Committee would entertain giving a better raise this year. Justice Battiest said they would consider it. He also emphasized the county benefits. David Wright suggested that the Circuit Clerk bring figures to present to the Quorum Court next month. Renea Bailey asked how do you know they will stay here for the pay. People aren't interested in the long term, only what they can make on their check now. David Wright said "How do we know they would stay if we gave them a raise? We don't". Earl just emphasized that we can't be sure about the future. We do have reserves but we have to maintain the jail and we will have to be sure that we can help maintain the hospital. Roxy Stephens said the Budget Committee is in a No-Win situation. They have to do what is best for the County and the employees.

Announcements - Tiffany Maurer with U of A, Economic Development, gave an update. She is currently applying for the Community Navigator Pilot Program Grant. She is applying for \$1,000,000. FRIENDS has selected to have Arkansas Economic Development Institute complete a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Assessment to serve as our strategic plan. They will also complete our Hotel Feasibility Plan study.

Judge Ray announced that the Budget Committee will meet on October 5, 6, 7 from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. to work on 2022 budgets. Angie Walker stated that budgets turned in with an increase of \$1000 or less will not be required to meet with the committee unless they so desire. This increase would not include salary line items nor capital outlay items. If JP's not on the committee want to sit in, they are welcome to do so.

Clerk Debbie Akin announced that she had handed out a copy of the proposed personnel policy for the County. She asked that everyone look it over before the next Quorum Court meeting as it will be on the agenda for passage.

Adjournment -

With no further business to discuss, David Wright made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Angie Walker. The motion passed with a unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted,



Debbie Akin
County Clerk