

**July 17, 2023**

At a scheduled meeting of the Walker County Commission held in their offices in the Walker County Courthouse Annex, Jasper, Alabama, at 9:30 a.m. on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of July 2023, Chairman Miller gave the welcome and called the meeting to order.

After Chairman Miller gave the invitation for comment from citizens and other elected officials, the County Administrator called the roll and Commissioners present were Keith Davis, Jeff Burrough, Jim Borden and Steven Aderholt.

Mr. Al Blanton gave the invocation and County Attorney Richard Fikes led the pledge of allegiance.

**AWARDS AND PRESENTATION:**

Commissioner Burrough introduced Mr. David Knight with the Development Board who presented information on the Project Helios. Mr. Knight stated that Project Helios represents a global investor in the green energy sector; that this would be a major solar installation here in rural Walker County; that Project Helios is proposing between three and five different solar farm installations with each having a capital investment averaging around \$175,000,000.

Attorney Tom Brinkley who is representing the investment company gave further explanation of the project and explained that hopefully the Commission will consider a 20-year Property Tax Abatement and the Sales and Use Tax Abatement.

Veronica Frogg from the State Department of Commerce stated that it is a great project that David, Carrie and Tom have been working on for quite some time and that she's glad to be here to express their support for the project. She thanked the Commission for considering the tax abatement on behalf of the Governor and the State of Alabama.

David Knight added, this is a unique opportunity, that it literally allows Walker County to build on its past; that the property that is being looked at for these solar installations is all previous strip-mine properties.

**CONSENT AGENDA:**

Motion was made by Commissioner Davis and seconded by Commissioner Burrough to Approve the Agenda, to Approve the Meeting Minutes of July 20, 2023, to approve the New Vendor List for June 2023 and to approve the Claims Against the County for June.

With no discussion, the vote taken resulted as follows: District One: Aye; District Two: Aye; District Three: Aye; District Four: Aye.

With no opposition, the Chairman declared the motion carried.

#### **REPORTS FROM STAFF:**

County Administrator Robbie Dickerson stated, "We are doing our final staging on prepping for the fiscal year 2021 audit to begin. Tammy is working with the Sheriff and his staff and the jail working on inmate reimbursements so we can get those filed before the end of the fiscal year. Chief Deputy Anthony Leach is implementing procedures for a notification system for emergency situations regarding the county staff, obviously, we're not going into detail about that because of security risk. Also, to let you know that we have contracted someone to start work in the courthouse, his company will be cleaning each floor, hard floors and carpets. They will be cleaned, buffed appropriately with the hard floors and everything will also be sanitized and this building will be done then. And we will coordinate that with the judges."

County Engineer Glenn Peek stated, "We currently have two paving jobs in progress. Brown's Bridge is still not completed yet, we still have striping and signage to be placed and ALDOT will have an inspection before it's cleared to be open. Smith Chapel Bridge, they're currently driving piles and working on roadway dirt work. Also, I'd like to announce that during the August 21<sup>st</sup> meeting we will have a public hearing and vote on a request to vacate a portion of 21<sup>st</sup> Street in the Townley area. That's all I have."

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

Motion was made by Commissioner Burrough and seconded by Commissioner Aderholt to open discussion of Discussion and Approval of the Project Helios Abatement Request.

Commissioner Burrough asked of Attorney Brinkley if there is anything on the abatements or other discussions that they need to go over and asked Superintendent Dennis Willingham if there is anything he wishes to say. Mr. Willingham stated that he appreciated the work of David Knight and his team bringing this forward and the work of the County Commission to make this possible, that this will benefit the school system for many years to come and that they are very excited about the future.

Commissioner Davis mentioned that the pure scope of this project, like David mentioned, is the largest category investment in Walker County history. He said it was a great job by the Industrial Board and a great day for Walker County.

Mr. Knight thanked Commissioner Davis for his comments and added that the construction work force will be a big component and he should have mentioned that earlier.

Commissioner Aderholt gave a brief comment and stated that this is certainly a tremendous project and maybe Walker County can be in the forefront of this type of

energy moving forward.

Chairman Miller stated, "This Commission was very excited about what was coming for Walker County and looking forward for our children for this county to be a solvent county, not a county that is struggling like we are today. So, in the future is what this Commission has looked for and looked at and today we recognize that this is obtainable. And we appreciate you gentlemen."

Motion was made by Commissioner Burrough and seconded by Commissioner Borden to end the discussion and Approve the 20-year abatement.

With no further discussion, the vote taken resulted as follows: District One: Aye; District Two: Aye; District Three: Aye; District Four: Aye.

With no opposition, the Chairman declared the motion carried.

County Attorney Richard Fikes asked if they could make an additional motion that gives the Chairman the authority to sign any and all agreements necessary to implement the project.

Motion was made by Commissioner Davis and seconded by Commissioner Aderholt to give the Chairman the authority to sign all necessary paperwork to implement the project.

With no discussion, the vote taken resulted as follows: District One: Aye; District Two: Aye; District Three: Aye; District Four: Aye.

With no opposition, the Chairman declared the motion carried.

Motion was made by Commissioner Burrough and seconded by Commissioner Borden to open discussion of Discussion and Approval for Simple Grants-DOT application.

After explanation by County Engineer Glenn Peek and a brief discussion, motion was made by Commissioner Burrough and seconded by Commissioner Borden to Approve Simple Grants-DOT Application.

With no further discussion, the vote taken resulted as follows: District One: Aye; District Two: Aye; District Three: Aye; District Four: Aye.

With no opposition, the Chairman declared the motion carried.

Motion was made by Commissioner Davis and seconded by Commissioner Borden to open discussion of Discussion and Approval of Bid 784 (Duncan Road) and 785 (Redmill-Saragossa Road).

After explanation and recommendation by County Engineer Glenn Peek and a brief discussion, motion was made by Commissioner Davis and seconded by Commissioner Burrough to award Bid 784 (Duncan Road) and 785 (Redmill-Saragossa Road) to Wiregrass, who was the low bidder.

With no further discussion, the vote taken resulted as follows: District One: Aye; District Two: Aye; District Three: Aye; District Four: Aye.

With no opposition, the Chairman declared the motion carried.

Motion was made by Commissioner Aderholt and seconded by Commissioner Davis to open discussion of Discussion and Approval for in service promotion for Keith Duncan as R&B Supervisor.

After explanation by County Administrator Robbie Dickerson, motion was made by Commissioner Davis and seconded by Commissioner Aderholt to Approve the in service promotion for Keith Duncan as R&B Supervisor.

With no discussion, the vote taken resulted as follows: District One; Aye; District Two: Aye; District Three: Aye; District Four: Aye.

With no opposition, the Chairman declared the motion carried.

Motion was made by Commissioner Burrough and seconded by Commissioner Borden to open discussion of Discussion and Approval to liquidate two Dodge Chargers.

After explanation by County Administrator Robbie Dickerson, input by Sheriff Nick Smith and a brief discussion, motion was made by Commissioner Burrough and seconded by Commissioner Borden to approve to liquidate two Dodge Chargers.

With no further discussion, the vote taken resulted as follows: District One: Aye; District Two: Aye; District Three: Aye; District Four: Aye.

With no opposition, the Chairman declared the motion carried.

Motion was made by Commissioner Burrough and seconded by Commissioner Davis to open discussion of Discussion and Approval of the Central Station Monitoring/Testing Agreements.

County Attorney Richard Fikes stated: "I would just like to table that and carry it over to the next meeting so I can have an opportunity to review the contract. I may have some issues with some language in the contract. I think it's best that we carry it over so we can study it a little more and see where we are.

Motion was made by Commissioner Aderholt and seconded by Commissioner Borden to postpone item 6 – Discussion and Approval of the Central Station Monitoring/Testing Agreement, until the next meeting.

With no further discussion, the vote taken resulted as follows: District One: Aye; District Two: Aye; District Three: Aye; District Four: Aye.

With no opposition, the Chairman declared the motion carried.

Motion was made by Commissioner Borden and seconded by Commissioner Burrough, to open discussion for Discussion and Approval to purchase John Deere Grader/Packer.

After explanation by Chairman Miller, input by each of the Commissioners, input by County Administrator Robbie Dickerson and much discussion, motion was made by Commissioner Borden and seconded by Commissioner Davis to Approve to Purchase

John Deere Grader/Packer pending ARPA funding.

With no further discussion, the vote taken resulted as follows: District One: Aye; District Two: Aye; District Three: Aye; District Four: Aye.

With no opposition, the Chairman declared the motion carried.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

None.

**DISCUSSION ITEMS BY COMMISSIONERS:**

Commissioner Davis stated, "Again, thank everybody for their attendance this morning. I try to say every commission meeting that this Commission works for you. We take these jobs serious, that we work for you, we try to do our best every day with the resources that we have. The staff and employees do a fantastic job. I appreciate them for their hard work. A great day for Walker County, again, a tremendous project announcement today. The future isn't always bright. I like to focus on all the positive things that are going on in the county. Again, I say this about every meeting, but sometimes we focus on just the negative, the positive in this county so far outweighs the negative that's going on. We need to focus our minds and attention on the positive and continue on that positive route. And I like to always remind each and every one of you to continue to pray for this Commission as we continue to make decisions that's best for the citizens of this County. So, we covet your prayers. We need your prayers. Again, a great day for the County."

Commissioner Burrough stated, "Well, it's been what, about a month, I guess, since we met last time. It's always good to have a full audience here. It's very encouraging when people show up and are very interested in our county government. I know we have people in the audience that are out here that work for us and help other public officials that are attending. Dennis, Lee, thank y'all for all y'all do in your respective jobs. We've even got a Civil Service Member back there and I want to thank you for y'all's hard work that y'all have been doing, helping on our listing of jobs and creating them faster and a better approach getting people into our turn-over positions. And, again, I guess for the last two months, David, Tom, it's been real eye opening, had a lot of questions, still got a lot of questions. I guess, mainly about the culture and things that go on in the big segments. It's just a huge opportunity and I'm certainly thankful for you. I hope that this Commission will keep investing in our Development Board. Dennis, maybe the Board of Education can start, since they're getting benefits from some of this because we really need to keep David going and trying to find these opportunities for Walker County. Also, Glenn, thank you for your hard work. You've took over and just done a magnificent job. I appreciate you."

County Engineer Glenn Peek said, "Thank you."

Commissioner Burrough continued, "I know we've got road projects going on in every district. I know Holly Grove and Moon Road are getting paved today as we speak. I know in District Two we've paved forty or fifty miles in the last two or three years. I mean, you know, we've had an influx of some revenue where we could do that, and pothole fillings and maintenance on some of my roads in District Two are getting less and less and it's just a steadfast change and we're making a difference in Walker County. Again, I just want to thank each of you."

Commissioner Borden stated, "Again, it's hard to follow the first two, you're kind of getting redundant, but again thank everyone for being here. Again, our Development Board and the companies that we are trying to attract to this County, this is good for education, our tax base will expand. This project will be a major shot in the arm for the southern part of the county. It will actually affect part of my district because we're close on that borderline there. A lot of times, over the years, people get to feeling down in there that they're overlooked. Most everyone here realizes we've lost Alabama Power, the Gorgas Steam Plant. This probably will not be close to that many jobs, but it will be good jobs in the future and help the economy and the neighborhoods in the southern part of the county. Again, I've got a few paving projects. We just paved a little over a mile on Brunner Hill. A lot of that we will go and we will continue to patch and what we will patch will be a lot better than what we have now. We're paving the Narrows and also Day Hill, just outside of Oakman. I'm going to have other projects that I'm working on with Glenn. We're just so far behind that it's hard to catch it all up in a short amount of time. I've had some people inquire about the grass mowing. As we stand today in the last month, we for the first time and as far back as I can remember, a minimum of twenty years, District Three finally was able to purchase two brand new John Deere tractors and two brand new bushhogs. When I came into office, the best I could do was load them up and auction them off because they would not run all day long. We're making great strides on our equipment replacement and equipment updating. I just ask the people out there to bear with us because we are working and we are making progress. Thank y'all."

Commissioner Aderholt stated; "Again, I can echo the comments of these previous commissioners. Again, thank everybody for coming today, certainly for the Development Authority project coming to Walker County. I'll one up you, Mr. Borden, it's not just a shot in the arm and good for the people of your district, this is really an impact for the state. This has potential for much bigger implications, I can't expand on right now. What this is going to do for Walker County and the State of Alabama in the future, it's substantial. And again, I'm thankful for everyone that's been involved in this project and we're certainly thankful for the investment, not only for children of the future but the children right now, the Board of Education and everybody who is benefiting from it. Again, thanks to everyone. There are a lot of good projects going on in District Four, working hard trying to identify some new paving needs. I've got several



projects that I'm working on now, so just be patient and if you see workers out on the roads, see those flags out, please be attentive. That means we have people in harms way trying to work hard for our county. That's all, I leave with Psalms 37, trust God and do good."

Chairman Miller stated, "I, too, would like to say that this is history making in Walker County. In this Commission I've talked about history making in times past, but this truly today moves Walker County into the history books for the largest, I believe Mr. Knight said, project that we've had in this county. We would like to see larger, certainly, but we certainly want this one to proceed and to become the best thing that this part of the county has seen, this state, our great State of Alabama. You know, that's something that I have always enjoyed is living in this state. You can visit other places, but Alabama is home. So, we've got to push home and that's what we're doing today. I appreciate all of the employees of the county. We have a great staff here. Great elected officials in other departments. They really work hard for this county. They want the best for this county. I think of these county employees as a family and we work for the county. The Board of Education, we appreciate what y'all do and know that you struggle just like we do, but we appreciate that desire you have to better the children of Walker County just as we do. We appreciate, again, the Civil Service, they're working hard with us and we appreciate what they do. And all you citizens that are here today, we appreciate y'all being interested in this county. With that I would entertain a motion to adjourn."

**ADJOURN:**

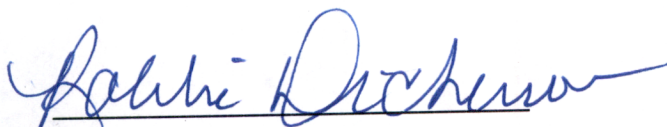
Motion was made by Commissioner Burrough and seconded by Commissioner Aderholt that this meeting be adjourned to reconvene at the next regularly scheduled meeting or at the call of the Chairman.

With no discussion, the vote taken resulted as follows: District One: Aye; District Two: Aye; District Three: Aye; District Four: Aye.

With no opposition the Chairman declared the motion carried.

Read and Approved:

  
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Chairman

  
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Attest