

MINUTES OF THE LEE COUNTY COMMISSION, SPECIAL MEETING, JUNE 21, 2021

The Lee County Commission convened in special meeting at the Courthouse in Opelika, Alabama, Monday, June 21, 2021, at 5:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited, followed by an invocation by Commissioner Cannon.

Judge English started with an explanatory statement about this being a special meeting and limited to discussion of what is on the agenda. He said that we would begin with a discussion by Mr. Hardee of the issues and proposed solutions, then open the floor to public comments. The Chairman declared a quorum and officially opened the meeting with the following members recorded as being present: Judge Bill English, Chairman, and Commissioners Doug Cannon, Sarah Brown, Gary Long, Robert Ham and Richard LaGrand. Elected Officials were in attendance: Loachapoka City Council member Patricia Conover. News media in attendance: Opelika Observer reporter Hannah Lester and Opelika-Auburn News reporter Mike Eads.

County Engineer Justin Hardee discussed possible changes to the county solid waste collection system. Mr. Hardee stated the system currently has 15 drop-off sites county-wide, all but two of which are open 24/7 365 days/year. The County owns about half of those sites, and the other half are used with permission of the private property owners. Mr. Hardee stated the system has slowly outpaced itself from its inception in the 1980's. The department was originally led by Herschel Rowland, followed by Jack Marshall, then Chris Bozeman, and today John McDonald is the department head.

He added that, unfortunately, the way the local legislation is written, enforcement of unauthorized disposal is difficult. He said our average per household tonnage is approximately 30-40% over the national average, and that is primarily due to unauthorized disposal by persons/entities that are not eligible to use the county system, including Auburn-Opelika citizens, out-of-county and out-of-state residents as well as commercial entities. Mr. Hardee stated the increase in volume has caused difficulties for the department due to system abuse and staffing issues. Mr. Hardee stated it has been so long he cannot remember when the Environmental Services Department was fully staffed. He also said it is difficult to hire and keep solid waste employees, especially those with CDLs, because all are required to work weekends and holidays as part of the normal schedule rotation.

Mr. Rendleman stated, for a system that was supposed to sustain itself financially, the county's general fund is having to supplement the department with about \$350,000 to \$400,000 per year. Mr. Hardee stated the litter issue is another problem with trucks hauling trash, citizens hauling trash, and stated recently he had to pull employees from the Highway Department to help the Solid Waste Department handle the litter issue. Additionally, Mr. Hardee noted that the recycling program had to be shut down twice in the last year just to keep the Environmental Services Department fully staffed. Mr. Hardee stated Lee County is the last county in the State running a system like it, other counties are either using curbside carts with in-house personnel or curbside carts managed by an outside vendor.

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Mr. Hardee stated three options for consideration are: Option 1) weekly curbside cart pickup by a contractor with weekly curbside bulk waste pickup by the contractor as well, and no drop-off sites; Option 2) weekly curbside cart pickup by a contractor with a county run on-demand bulk disposal service and use of a few county-owned drop-off sites on a couple of “amnesty” days per month; or Option 3) county operated weekly curbside cart pickup with a county run on-demand bulk disposal service and use of a few county-owned drop-off sites on a couple of “amnesty” days per month. Mr. Hardee recommended Option 2 whereby a contractor provides weekly curbside pickup with the county responsible for an on-demand bulk disposal service and a few county-owned drop-off sites open and manned a couple of days a month. Mr. Hardee stated there will be a few months during which both systems will be in operation until citizens get adjusted to the new system.

Judge English opened the floor at 5:40 p.m. for public comments on the potential changes to the current solid waste collection system. Approximately 40 citizens were in attendance and the following 13 spoke before the Commission, they are: Judy Lockhart, John Sophocleus, Irene Dowdell, Rita Harmon, Ed Gullatte, Marie Maples, Kimbonita Wilson, Morris Jones, Rose Luke, Jerry Rudd, Austin Coon, Jo Brightwell, and Dana Watkins. Several individuals voiced concern of illegal dumpers throwing their household trash and other larger items along county roads or on people’s private property, especially property owners with many acres who have no way of monitoring it. Mr. Hardee sympathized with them stating he is sure it will happen and will be addressed at that time. Others mentioned that some will need extra carts but not be able to afford the additional fee. One asked about places where the county right-of-way was not level or wide enough. Mr. Hardee said the vendor will identify where the carts should be placed when they make the initial deliveries of them. Several individuals expressed concerns about the elderly and/or disabled individuals that cannot push heavy carts to the road. Mr. Hardee stated the bid contained a provision for the contractor to provide back-door pickup service if the individual meets certain qualifications. Other individuals expressed concern about narrow county roads and how the automated trash trucks will access the carts. Mr. Hardee stated the bid addressed the concern and stated smaller trucks will be utilized for narrow roads. Further, many individuals were concerned about people who will burn their trash and the hazards in doing so.

At approximately 6:35 p.m., Judge English closed the Public Hearing. Commissioner Ham stated he had received lots of calls since Monday and he was surprised that there was about a 50/50 split in those who were in favor of the proposed curbside collection system and those against it. Commissioner Ham said most warmed to the idea after taking the time to address their concerns and to provide more information about it. Commissioner Long questioned the litter issue since there is a problem now. Judge English shared information received from the Sheriff’s Office on the number of citations issued for littering. Judge English reported that in 2020 the Sheriff’s Office issued 11 warnings and 4 citations for littering. In

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2021 26 warnings and 2 citations have been issued so far. Commissioner Ham questioned the cost of the citation. Judge English stated he believes the fine for littering is about \$500.

Commissioner Brown thanked everyone for their comments stating she is excited to move forward and vote on the matter. Commissioner Ham questioned if there is any need to carry the item forward. Commissioner LaGrand again questioned if the location in Loachapoka could be one that remains open. Mr. Hardee stated due to its proximity to the road, it is just not a feasible location. After more discussion, Commissioner Long made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Cannon to move forward with Option 2 for weekly curbside cart pickup and award the bid to Arrow Disposal Service Inc., with a county run on-demand bulk disposal service and use of a few county-owned drop-off sites on a couple of “amnesty” days per month. The motion carried on a vote of 4-1 with Commissioner LaGrand voting “No”.