



HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT MINUTES REGULAR MEETING DECEMBER 23, 2025

The Commissioners' Court of Houston County met in a regular, called meeting on December 23, 2025 **in person and via zoom**, with the following members present, to wit:

The Court

Jim Lovell	County Judge	ABSENT
Gary Lovell	Commissioner, Precinct #1	PRESENT
Willie Kitchen	Commissioner, Precinct #2	ABSENT
Gene Stokes	Commissioner, Precinct #3	PRESENT
Jimmy Henderson	Commissioner, Precinct #4	PRESENT
Terri Meadows	County Clerk	PRESENT

County Officials/Employees in person:

Zak Bengé	Sheriff	Present
Sarah Bergman	First Assistant Auditor	Zoom
Hugh Coleman	Assistant County Attorney	Zoom
Walter Denman	Bailiff	Present
Kris Dyches	Insurance Coordinator	Present
Laura Goolsby	District Clerk	Present
Melissa Jeter	County Auditor	Present
Sheila Johnson	Grants Administrator	Present
Cynthia Lum	Elections Administrator	Zoom
Ryan Martin	Chief Deputy Sheriff	Present
Kristina Massey	County Attorney	Present
Todd McConnell	IT	Present
Heath Murff	Emergency Management	Zoom
Jan Pigford	Assistant to County Judge	Present
Darrellyn Smith	Assistant to the County Commissioners	Present
Brittani Womack	Tax Assessor-Collector	Present

Media:

Visitors: Whitney Burran (SART ED Family Crisis), Brittney Hiser (SART Crockett Director Family Crisis), Jose Frias (Representative – Fiber Lite LLC)

(1) Welcome, Invocation and Pledges:

Commissioner Henderson called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m., Commissioner Stokes voiced the opening prayer followed by Commissioner Henderson leading the Pledge to the American Flag and the Texas Flag.

- (2) Recognition and comments from guests. (For informational purposes only, with no deliberation and no action taken, except that the Court may discuss whether to include any matter on a future agenda for deliberation and/or action.) **None**
- (3) Consider approval of prior Commissioners Court minutes. **Commissioner Lovell made a motion to approve the Commissioners Court minutes for December 9, 2025 and December 15, 2025. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.**
- (4) Consider approving budget amendments. **NONE**
- (5) Consider payment of bills and expenses:
- a. Accounts payable
 - b. Fund transfers
 - c. Ratify Salary expenses
- Commissioner Lovell made a motion to pay all the bills and expenses for a. (Accounts payable), b. (Fund transfers), and c. (Ratify Salary expenses). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Stokes. The Motion carried 3 to 0.**
- (6) Receive information, announcements and reports from County Departments:
- a. County Treasurers Report
 - b. Compensatory Report
- Cynthia Lum, Elections Administrator, announced that no one filed for County Surveyor. She also advised the Court that the Secretary of State did an upgrade back in the summer, and everything is still "messed up". Cindy said that her office has gotten all of their system updated and on track.***
- Commissioner Stokes moved to approve the County Treasurers Report and the Compensatory Report as presented. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.**
- (7) Consider approving salaries for new and/or transfer employees.
- Commissioner Stokes made a motion to approve the salaries for new and/or transfer employees:**
- Hunter Ballard, moving from Sgt Jailer to Jailer at requested pay of \$44,000 annually (county base rate \$39,676 and supplement \$4,324) in Pay Grade SO5 effective 12/23/2025.**
- Alex Long, moving from Cadet to Patrol Deputy at requested pay of \$50,000 annually (county base rate \$41,878.20 and supplement \$8,121.88) in Pay Grade SO9 effective 12/23/2025.**
- Anthony Harris, new hire as Fulltime Jailer at requested pay of \$42,000 annually (county base rate \$39,676.00 and supplement \$2,234) in Pay Grade SO4 effective 1/1/2026.**
- Commissioner Lovell seconded the motion. Motion carried 3 to 0.**
- (8) Discuss and consider approving payment of compensatory, and vacation time for County employees and necessary budget amendments. **Commissioner Stokes moved to approve payment of compensatory, and vacation time for County employees and necessary budget amendments to: Tresea Land, JP1 Clerk at \$945.60 and Gordon Henderson Pct 4 RH at \$1,882.12. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.**
- (9) Discuss and consider declaring received information as surplus inventory and approving transfers between departments. **NONE**

- (10) Hear Biennial report from Houston County Sexual Assault Response Team. (SART) **Whitney Burran, Executive Director for Family Crisis Center was present to give the 2025 Biennial Report. She told us that Sexual Assault is one of the most unreported violence crimes because victims are fearful to talk about their experience. She thanked Houston County for the support that they receive here.**
- (11) Discuss and consider Resolutions for Acquisition of easements for Houston County at Hurricane Bayou, Texas. (CA) **Hugh Coleman, Assistant County Attorney, spoke about the easement situation and advised the Commissioners Court that they should create the permanent easement as recommended by TXDot. Walter Stewart, a citizen that the easement affects was present to speak on the issue. After some discussion Commissioner Stokes made a motion to approve Resolutions for Acquisition of easements for Houston County at Hurricane Bayou, effective today, December 23, 2025. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.**
- (12) Discuss and consider action for inventory items on attached list as surplus and authorizing a contract with Auctioneer Express for disposal. (PC2 PC4 SO) **Commissioner Lovell moved to approve action for inventory items on attached list (in packet) as surplus and authorizing a contract with Auctioneer Express for disposal. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.**
- (13) Discuss and consider accepting donation of 4 laptop computers to sheriff department from NCIC. (SO) **Commissioner Stokes moved to accept donation of 4 laptop computers to sheriff department from NCIC in an amount of \$8,009.24. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.**
- (14) Discuss and consider approval to make application for \$1000.00 reimbursement for educational use from DETCOG for the Cadet Program and necessary Budget amendments. (SO) **Commissioner Lovell moved to approve to make application for \$1000.00 reimbursement for educational use from DETCOG for the Cadet Program and necessary Budget amendments. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.**
- (15) Discuss and consider action on interlocal agreement and Hotel Occupancy Tax Application for Robin Ogg/Nitty Gritty Productions to host “Nitty Gritty Chopper City” concerts, chopper rodeo, games and scavenger hunt at Salmon Lake Park on March 19th through March 21st, 2026. (AUD) **Commissioner Lovell moved to approve \$3,000 for interlocal agreement and Hotel Occupancy Tax Application for Robin Ogg/Nitty Gritty Productions to host “Nitty Gritty Chopper City” concerts, chopper rodeo, games and scavenger hunt at Salmon Lake Park on March 19th through March 21st, 2026. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.**
- (16) Discuss and consider selecting the contract from received quotes for repairs to the bridge located on County Road 1560, funded by the US Forest Service, Title II projects program. (PC1). **Commissioner Lovell moved to select the contract from 6J Farm & Ranch Construction, LLC in the amount of \$69,580.00, from received quotes for repairs to the bridge located on County Road 1560, funded by the US Forest Service, Title II projects program. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.**
- (17) Discuss and consider accepting proposal from Goodwin Lasiter Strong to perform topographic surveying services for a total area of approximately 1.95 acres which encompasses county property between 4th & 5th streets and approve payment upon completion. (FA) **Melissa Jeter,**

County Auditor, explained that this is the first step in remodeling the newly acquired buildings and parking lot. Commissioner Stokes moved to accept proposal of \$18,500 from Goodwin Lasiter Strong to perform topographic surveying services for a total area of approximately 1.95 acres which encompasses county property between 4th & 5th streets and approve payment upon completion. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.

(18) Discuss and consider action on getting quotes for supplemental benefits as required under HB 4144 for retiring peace officers with serious health challenges due to their service. (SO) ***Melissa Jeter, County Auditor, stated this goes into effect 1/1/2026, but we already provide this insurance so no action is necessary.***

(19) Discuss and consider action on the Sick Leave Pool Policy. (CA). ***Kristina Massey, County Attorney, went over some of the changes to the policy. Commissioner Stokes suggested that this go to the HR Committee for approval. No action was taken.***

(20) Discuss and consider action on adjusting the Law Enforcement 2026 Pay Scale for Probationary Sheriff Cadet/Deputy positions. (SO) ***The County Auditor suggested that this pay scale needs to be adjusted because of SB22 and due to the restructuring of the SO pay scale this year. Commissioner Lovell made a motion to adjust the Law Enforcement 2026 Pay Scale for Probationary Sheriff Cadet/Deputy positions. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.***

(21) Discuss and consider action on a budget Amendment for the costs of two Probationary Sheriff Cadets Academy tuition at East Texas Police Academy in Palestine beginning February 2026. (SO) ***Commissioner Stokes made a motion to approve a Budget Amendment from Salary for the costs of two Probationary Sheriff Cadets Academy tuition at East Texas Police Academy in Palestine beginning February 2026. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.***

(22) Discuss and consider approving Just Right Engineering proposed fiber-optic installation within the Houston County public right-of-way CR 1820 (Old Latexo Rd). (PC1) ***Commissioner Lovell moved to approve Just Right Engineering proposed fiber-optic installation within the Houston County public right-of way CR 1820 with the stipulation that he (Gary Lovell) be contacted before a start day and that they stay in contact with him throughout the project. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 3 to 0.***

(23)Adjourn. **Commissioner Henderson made a motion for the Commissioners Court Meeting to Adjourn. The motion carried by everyone rising and leaving the meeting at 9:40 a.m.**

Jim Lovell, County Judge

Gary Lovell, Commissioner, Precinct #1

Willie Kitchen, Commissioner, Precinct #2

Gene Stokes, Commissioner, Precinct #3

Jimmy Henderson, Commissioner, Precinct #4

Attest:

Terri Meadows, County Clerk

Date Approved: January 13, 2026