



HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

JANUARY 13, 2026

The Commissioners' Court of Houston County met in a regular, called meeting on January 13, 2026 in **person and via zoom**, with the following members present, to wit:

The Court

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

County Officials/Employees in person:

Sarah Bergman	First Assistant Auditor	Zoom
Hugh Coleman	Assistant County Attorney	Zoom
Kris Dyches	Insurance Coordinator	Present
Meagan Frizzell	9-1-1 Addressing	Zoom
Laura Goolsby	District Clerk	Present
Melissa Jeter	County Auditor	Present
Carl Johnson	Facilities Administrator	Zoom
Sheila Johnson	Grants Administrator	Present
Cynthia Lum	Elections Administrator	Present
Donavan Mahan	Jail Administrator	Present
Ryan Martin	Chief Deputy Sheriff	Present
Kristina Massey	County Attorney	Present
Todd McConnell	IT	Present
Mike McCreight	JP 1	Present
Heath Murff	Emergency Management	Present
Jan Pigford	Assistant to County Judge	Present
Darrellyn Smith	Assistant to the County Commissioners	Present
Red Smith	Constable Precinct 2	Present
Brittani Womack	Tax Assessor-Collector	Present

Media: Greg Ritchie (Messenger on Zoom)

Visitors: Kelly R. Albin (Partner at DNRBS*Z)

(1) Welcome, Invocation and Pledges:

Judge Lovell called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m., Commissioner Henderson voiced the opening prayer followed by Judge Lovell 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 23, 2025. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 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 Henderson 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 5 to 0.

- (6) Receive information, announcements and reports from County Departments:
 - a. Community Service / Environmental Report
 - b. District Clerk Report
 - c. County Clerk Report
 - d. Tax Assessor Report
 - e. Auditor's Report

Terri Meadows, County Clerk, advised the Court that a notebook that includes the Petition for Groundwater Conservation District along with maps is available in the County Judge's Office, County Clerk's Office, and on the website, as advised by our counsel Adam Friedman.

Melissa Jeter, County Auditor, advised the Court that the IRS mileage rate has increased to 72.5
Judge Lovell, County Judge, let everyone know that the architect has delivered the plans for the new Commissioners Courtroom.

Commissioner Stokes moved to approve the Community Service/Environmental Report, District Clerk Report, County Clerk Report, Tax Assessor Report, and Auditor's Report as presented. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

- (7) Consider approving salaries for new and/or transfer employees.
Commissioner Kitchen moved to approve the 6 month raise of Alicia Bittner, Chief Deputy Treasurer, at requested pay of \$1,620.19 in Pay Grade 18 effective December 30, 2025. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

Commissioner Henderson moved to approve the salary of new hire Anthony Harris as part-time temporary jailer, at hourly pay of \$18.78 (County Base \$17.74 and Supplement \$1.04) in Pay Grade SO4 effective December 29, 2025. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

Commissioner Lovell moved to approve the bi-weekly salary of new hire Noemi Palma Nava in the Tax Office, at \$1,426.40 in pay grade 16 effective January 13, 2026. Commissioner Kitchen seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

Commissioner Stokes moved to approve the bi-weekly salary of Maria Horn, promoted to JP 1 Court Coordinator, at \$1,593.24 in pay grade 20 effective January 13, 2026. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

Commissioner Lovell moved to approve the bi-weekly salary of new hire, Debbie McLaughlin, as JP 1 Court Clerk, at \$1,432.32 in pay grade 16 effective January 13, 2026. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

Commissioner Kitchen moved to approve the salary of new hire Lincoln Smith as Jailer at annual pay of \$42,000.00 (County Base \$39,676.00 and Supplement \$2,324.00) in pay grade SO4 effective January 14, 2026. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

Commissioner Kitchen moved to approve the salary of new hire Nicholas Pustka as Jailer at annual pay of \$42,000.00 (County Base \$39,676.00 and Supplement \$2,324.00) in pay grade SO4 effective January 14, 2026. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

Commissioner Lovell moved to approve the salary of new hire Brittney Duval as Dispatcher at annual pay of \$39,000.00 in pay grade SO2 effective January 14, 2026. Commissioner Kitchen seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

Commissioner Kitchen moved to approve salary for the promotion of Brooke Fritz as Jail Sergeant at annual pay of \$47,000.00 (County Base \$39,676.00 and Supplement \$4,324.00) in pay grade SO7 effective January 14, 2026. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

- (8) Discuss and consider approving payment of compensatory, and vacation time for County employees and necessary budget amendments. (Treasurer) **Commissioner Lovell moved to approve payment of compensatory, and vacation time for County employees and necessary budget amendments to: Twyla Musick, Tax Office, the amount of \$640.99. Commissioner Kitchen seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (9) Discuss and consider declaring received information as surplus inventory and approving transfers between departments. (Auditor) **Commissioner Stokes moved to declare received information as surplus inventory and approving transfers between departments. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (10) Discuss and consider action on a budget amendment for additional part time salary line item in the Tax Assessor/Collector's office due to employee absences. (Tax Assessor) **Commissioner Lovell moved to approve budget amendment for additional part time salary line item in the Tax Assessor/Collector's office due to employee absences. Commissioner Kitchen seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (11) Ratify Disaster Declaration and Order Prohibiting Outdoor Burning issued by County Judge on January 07, 2026 and consider adopting Order for Burn Ban. (FM) **Commissioner Kitchen moved to ratify and extend Disaster Declaration and Order Prohibiting Outdoor Burning issued by**

County Judge on January 07, 2026 and adopt Order for Burn Ban to extending the ban for 30 days. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

(12)Receive as information Certificate of Completion for Advanced Peace Officer License for Michael H. Murff. (FM) **Commissioner Henderson moved to receive as information Certificate of Completion for Advanced Peace Officer License for Michael H. Murff. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**

(13)Discuss and consider action on adding the role of Audit Board to the election role titles and setting the minimum number of hours as 3, and maximum number of work hours to 10, in reference to the compensation of the Early Voting Ballot Board (TEC 87.005) as the EVBB is now Required by law (SB 827) to perform the Post-Election Hand Count Audit for each election per TEC 127.201(b-1) and in future perform a Risk Limiting Audit (RLA) per TEC 127.302. ***Cindy Lum, Elections Administrator, advised that this is something that we are required to do and the pay will be set at \$14 per hour.*** **Commissioner Kitchen moved to add the role of Audit Board to the election role titles and setting the minimum number of hours as 3, and maximum number of work hours to 10, in reference to the compensation of the Early Voting Ballot Board (TEC 87.005) as the EVBB is now Required by law (SB 827) to perform the Post-Election Hand Count Audit for each election per TEC 127.201(b-1) and in future perform a Risk Limiting Audit (RLA) per TEC 127.302. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**

(14)Receive as information the following Primary Election matters:

- a. The new US Congressional Redistricting Map has Houston County as being redistricted from US Congressional District 17 -Pete Sessions, to U.S. Congressional District 10 Michael McCaul. This redistricting will go into effect January 2027.
- b. A Joint Primary Election will be held in Houston County, by the Republican and Democratic Parties. Candidates for the redistricting will be on this election ballot.
- c. The list of designated deputy early Voting clerks by the Early Voting Clerk/EA.

Commissioner Kitchen moved to receive as information the following Primary Election matters: (a) The new US Congressional Redistricting Map has Houston County as being redistricted from US Congressional District 17 – Pete Sessions, to US Congressional District 10 – Michael McCaul. This redistricting will go into effect January 2027. (b) A Joint Primary Election will be held in Houston County, by the Republican and Democratic Parties. Candidates for the redistricting will be on this election ballot and (c) The list of designated deputy early Voting clerks by the Early Voting Clerk/EA (in packet). Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

(15)Discuss and approve the purchase of a Poll Print for ballot on demand from Knowink LLC, using the reimbursable 2025 Help American Vote Act (HAVA) Grant from Texas Secretary of State, with the 20% match coming from the Election Services fund, and all necessary budget amendments. **Commissioner Lovell moved to approve the purchase of a Poll Print for ballot on demand from Knowink LLC, using the reimbursable 2025 Help American Vote Act (HAVA) Grant from Texas Secretary of State, with the 20% match coming from the Election Services fund, and all necessary budget amendments. Commissioner Kitchen seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**

(16)Discuss and consider proposed pipeline crossing CR 2270 in two different places, Jeff Franze, Innovative Land Solutions, LLC. (Pct. 2) **Commissioner Kitchen moved to approve proposed**

pipeline crossing CR 2270 in two different places, Jeff Franze, Innovative Land Solutions, LLC. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

(17) Discuss and consider action on an application and interlocal agreement to the Hotel Occupancy Tax Fund for the following:

- a. Piney Woods Fine Arts I Am He Said, Celebrating Neil Diamond January 23, 2026 @ Ritz Theatre 7:30 PM.
- b. Piney Woods Fine Arts Concert with Josh Abbott, February 20, 2026 @ Ritz Theatre Crockett 7:30 PM.

Commissioner Henderson moved to approve Interlocal Agreement to the Hotel Occupancy Tax Fund for: Piney Woods Fine Arts for I Am He Said, Celebrating Neil Diamond on January 23, 2026 at the Ritz Theatre at 7:30 p.m. in the amount of \$1,000.00 and Concert with Josh Abbott on February 20, 2026 at the Ritz Theatre at 7:30 p.m. in the amount of \$1,000.00. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

(18) Discuss and consider action on Processing a payment for the purchase of 25 Soft Body Armor Vests for the Sheriff's Department. (SO) *The issue is that the company wants payment up front and that goes against our policy. After some discussion it was decided to not take action on this item and for the Sheriff's Office to see if the company will accept a requisition.*

(19) Discuss and consider approval for a budget amendment to purchase and install audio interface to Sheriff's Department 911 Dispatching system. (SO) *After much discussion on this item, and reminding the Sheriff's Office that we have to be cautious and prioritize what comes out of Contingency because Contingency is not forever,* Commissioner Stokes moved to approve a budget amendment from Contingency to purchase and install audio interface to Sheriff's Department 911 Dispatching system. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

(20) Discuss and consider the creation of a new position and drafting a job description for deputy constable for Precinct 2. *There was discussion on why this position is needed. The Court asked Constable Smith if he could check with some other counties on a job description.* Commissioner Kitchen moved to consider a new position and drafting a job description for deputy constable for Precinct 2. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

****Judge Lovell stepped out of the Courtroom at 10:16 a.m.**

(21) Discuss and consider accepting surplus materials of RAP from Texas Department of Transportation and distribution between precincts. Commissioner Lovell made a motion to accept all surplus materials of RAP from Texas Department of Transportation and distribute equally between the 4 precincts. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 4 to 0.

(22) Discuss and consider action on the Sick Pool Policy. **No Action**

****Judge Lovell returned to the Courtroom at 10:20 a.m.**

(23) **Executive Closed Session:** Discuss litigation with Lincoln Lumber. **The Court entered into the Executive Closed Session at 10:17 a.m. and returned into Open Session at 10:30 a.m.**

(24) Discuss and consider action on litigation of Lincoln Lumber Tax Abatement. **Commissioner Kitchen moved to enter into a contract with Denton Navarro Rodriguez Bernal Santee & Zech, P. C. to represent Houston County on litigation with Lincoln Lumber on Tax Abatement and authorize the attorney to negotiate and to accept payment of 50% of taxes if that is offered. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**

(25) Adjourn. **Judge Lovell made a motion for the Commissioners Court Meeting to Adjourn. The motion carried by everyone rising and leaving the meeting at 10:32 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 27, 2026