



HOUSTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 24, 2026

The Commissioners' Court of Houston County met in a regular, called meeting on March 24, 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:

Zak Bengé	Sheriff	Present
Sarah Bergman	First Assistant Auditor	Zoom
Andy Biscamp	Bailiff	Present
Kris Dyches	Insurance Coordinator	Present
Laura Goolsby	District Clerk	Present
Charlie Hooks	Assistant County Attorney	Present
Melissa Jeter	County Auditor	Present
Carl Johnson	Facilities Administrator	Zoom
Sheila Johnson	Grants Administrator	Present
Cynthia Lum	Elections Administrator	Present
Ryan Martin	Chief Deputy Sheriff	Present
Kristina Massey	County Attorney	Present
Todd McConnell	IT	Present
Mike McCreight	JP1	Present
Heath Murff	Emergency Management	Present
Jan Pigford	Assistant to County Judge	Present
Darrellyn Smith	Assistant to the County Commissioners	Present
Matthew Van Egmond	S/O	Zoom

Media: Greg Ritchie (Messenger on Zoom)

Visitors: Charlana Kelly (SpeakTruth Global Outreach), Tami Bruner (SpeakTruth Global Outreach), Whitney Burran (SART – Executive Director), Brittney Newman (SART – Crockett Office)

(1) Welcome, Invocation and Pledges:

On Tuesday, March 24, 2026, Judge Lovell called the regularly scheduled Houston County Commissioners Court meeting to order at 9:00 a.m., Commissioner Kitchen 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 February 10, 2026. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (4) Consider approving budget amendments. **Commissioner Henderson moved to approve the budget amendments as presented. Commissioner Kitchen seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (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). Commissioner Henderson seconded. The Motion carried 5 to 0.

*****Cindy Lum, Elections Administrator, announced that we had an excellent Primary Election and there will be some in the runoff on the State and National levels. She shared that the newly formed audit board met to recount the votes and that the process took them 10 hours.***

*****Judge Lovell, announced that the County Employee Appreciation Picnic scheduled for April 23rd is moved up one day to April 22nd.***

*****The County Attorney, Kristina Massey, introduced us to the new Assistant County Attorney – Charlie Hooks. She is proud to be fully staffed.***

- (6) Receive information, announcements and reports from County Departments:
 - a. County Treasurers Report
 - b. Compensatory Report
 - c. Tax Assessor/Collector Report

Commissioner Henderson moved to receive as information the County Treasurers Report, the Compensatory Report, and the Tax Assessor/Collector Report. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

- (7) Consider approving salaries for new and/or transfer employees.

Commissioner Lovell moved to approve the salary for Hailee Keaton, as Jailer at the HCSO, at annual salary of \$42,000.00 (\$39,676.00 base and \$2,324.00 supplement), in Pay Grade SO4, effective March 25, 2026. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

Commissioner Kitchen moved to approve the salary for Kirby Whittmore, as Jail Sergeant at the HCSO, at annual salary of \$47,000.00 (\$41,926.56 base and \$5,073.44 supplement), in Pay

Grade SO7, effective March 25, 2026. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

Commissioner Kitchen moved to approve the salary for Hugh Coleman, Promotion to full-time Assistant County Attorney, at bi-weekly salary of \$3,461.54 in Pay Grade 32, effective March 23, 2026.

- (8) Discuss and consider approving payment of compensatory, and vacation time for County employees and necessary budget amendments. **Commissioner Kitchen moved to approve payment of compensatory, and vacation time for County employees and necessary budget amendments for Thomas Lowery, Jailer, \$1,590.79 and Thomas Phillips, Jailer, \$3,376.06. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (9) Discuss and consider declaring received information as surplus inventory and approving transfers between departments. **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 approving order allowing retail fireworks permit holders to sell fireworks to the public in celebration of San Jacinto Day. April 16 – midnight, April 21. **Commissioner Lovell moved to approve order allowing retail fireworks permit holders to sell fireworks to the public in celebration of San Jacinto Day. April 16 – midnight, April 21. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (11) Consider adopting proclamation designating the month of April as “Sexual Assault Awareness Month”. (Whitney) **Commissioner Stokes moved to adopt a proclamation designating the month of April as “County Government Month”. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (12) Consider adopting proclamation designating the month of March as “Red Cross Month”. **Commissioner Lovell moved to adopt a proclamation designating the month of March as “Red Cross Month”. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (13) Discuss and consider approving bond and overweight permits for Precincts 1, 2, 3 & 4. **Commissioner Stokes moved to approve bond and overweight permits for Precincts 1, 2, 3 & 4. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (14) Discuss and consider action on setting the spending limits of the County Treasurer and the County Court at Law Judge, lame duck officials who will be leaving office December 31, 2026. **Commissioner Stokes moved to set the spending limits for the County Treasurer and the County Court at Law Judge, lame duck officials who will be leaving office December 31, 2026 at \$1,000 each, and that the County Court at Law Judge does not have a spending limit on approving Court Appointed Attorney Fees. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (15) Discuss and consider changing random drug screening program (CDL drivers) to:
 - a. Integrity Drug Screening
 - b. Change place of testing facility to Precinct 2 office
 - c. Administrator

Commissioner Kitchen moved to change the random drug screening program for CDL drivers to Integrity Drug Screening, and the place of testing facility to be the Precinct 2 office, and Kris Dyches be named as the Administrator for the program. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

(16) Discuss and consider accepting contract renewal with BIS consultants for 2026-2027. (BW) **Commissioner Kitchen made the motion to accept contract renewal with BIS consultants for 2026-2027 for the Tax Assessor-Collector's Office. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**

(17) Discuss and consider accepting a financial donation of \$1,000.00 from G K Berry for improvements to CR 3180 in Precinct 2. **Commissioner Kitchen moved to accept a financial donation of \$1,000.00 from G K Berry for improvements to CR 3180 in Precinct 2. Commissioner Lovell and Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**

****Judge Lovell left the Courtroom at 9:32 a.m. and returned at 9:35 a.m.**

(18) Discuss and consider moving jail booking records (eForce) to the cloud. (SO) **Commissioner Stokes moved to approve moving jail booking records (eForce) to the cloud and that \$5,000.00 come from the Jail Contingency Fund and that \$7,000.00 come from Non-Departmental Contingency. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**

(19) Discuss and consider Spectrum proposal to install 669' of fiber Optic Cable along CR 2140 Marina Rd, Marina Rd A West and Marina Rd A East via a Direction Bore through 2" HDPE Conduit. **Commissioner Kitchen moved to approve Spectrum proposal to install 669' of fiber Optic Cable along CR 2140 Marina Rd, Marina Rd A West and Marina Rd A East via a Direction Bore through 2" HDPE Conduit. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**

(20) Discuss and consider approving Houston County to participate in Youth Leadership Program by hiring two students to work summer hours and necessary budget amendments. ***Charlana Kelly with SpeakTruth Global Outreach was present to speak about the program and encourage us to participate.* Commissioner Kitchen moved to approve Houston County to participate in Youth Leadership Program by hiring two students to work summer hours and approve necessary budget amendments. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 4 to 0.**

****Commissioner Lovell left the Courtroom at 9:47 a.m. and returned at 9:50 a.m. after Item 20 was voted on**

(21) Discuss and consider action on:

- a. Awarding a contract to purchase 3 patrol trucks from received bids. **Commissioner Kitchen moved to award the contract to Bidder #1 for the purchase of 3 patrol trucks at a total cost of \$152,250.00. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- b. Authorizing a lease purchase agreement for the purchase **Commissioner Henderson moved to authorize a lease purchase agreement for the purchase of the 3 patrol trucks, and that Judge Lovell and Commissioner Stokes be the signers on the agreement. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**

(22) Discuss and consider action on the renewal application to Texas Association of Counties for building and mobile equipment insurance coverage for the period July 1, 2026 through July 1,

2027. *Melissa Jeter, County Auditor, visited with TAC about this and this is just the renewal. She mentioned that there is going to be a cyber-security section added and the limit is going to go up on the amount they will cover. A cyber-security incident is very expensive. Mrs. Jeter also mentioned that she had to contact them about the renovations that we will be performing on the 2 new buildings. She also told the Court that the Courthouse is the only building insured at a historical value and that is why it is so expensive. Mrs. Jeter also said that the appraisers will be coming in July (they come every 4 years). The last thing the Auditor asked is that the Commissioners look over value on their equipment and let her know if any adjustments need to be made.* Commissioner Kitchen moved to approve the renewal application to Texas Association of Counties for building and mobile equipment insurance coverage for the period July 1, 2026 through July 1, 2027. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

- (23) Discuss and consider action on disposing of salvage items that no bids were received for. **Commissioner Kitchen moved to dispose of salvage items that no bids were received for. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (24) Receive as information the receipt of the reauthorized Secure Rural Schools Act for FY2024 and necessary budget amendments. *County Auditor, Melissa Jeter, praised what a huge blessing this was for our county and that many state officials worked hard to get this money for us. She said that they went back to FY2024 and the next installment is in the works. She said that the schools have been paid. Judge Lovell announced that Lonnie Hunt, Executive Director of DETCOG was very instrumental in securing these funds.* Commissioner Henderson moved to receive as information the receipt of the reauthorized Secure Rural Schools Act for FY2024 and necessary budget amendments. Commissioner Stokes seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.
- (25) Discuss and consider action on the purchase of a John Deere 6110m tractor and a Diamond Boom mower mulcher for Precinct 3 under BuyBoard Co-op; authorize necessary budget amendments and payment to Bane Equipment in an amount not to exceed \$260,000. **Commissioner Stokes moved to approve the purchase of a John Deere 6110m tractor and a Diamond Boom mower mulcher for Precinct 3 under BuyBoard Co-op; authorize necessary budget amendments and payment to Bane Equipment in an amount not to exceed \$260,000. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.**
- (26) Discuss and consider action on acceptance of a credit from MetLife in the form of a one-time payment equal to (3%) of premiums, not to exceed \$30,000, for eligible Open Enrollment activities performed by Houston County on behalf of MetLife. *Kris Dyches, HR Coordinator, said that MetLife is offering a bonus for the pre-enrollment activities we provided.* Commissioner Kitchen moved to accept a credit from MetLife in the form of a one-time payment equal to (3%) of premiums, not to exceed \$30,000, for eligible Open Enrollment activities performed by Houston County on behalf of MetLife. Commissioner Lovell seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.
- (27) Discuss and consider approving a Service Fee Disclosure authorizing MetLife to pay fees to 19:21 Consultants Company for services provided to Houston County effective 10/01/2025. *Kris Dyches, HR Coordinator, said this is necessary to confirm we did buy coverage from 19:21 Consultants Company.* Commissioner Kitchen moved to approve a Service Fee Disclosure authorizing MetLife to pay fees to 19:21 Consultants Company for services provided to Houston County effective 10/01/2025. Commissioner Henderson seconded. Motion carried 5 to 0.

(28)Adjourn. **Judge Lovell made a motion for the Commissioners Court Meeting to Adjourn. The motion carried by everyone rising and leaving the meeting at 10:03 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: April 14, 2026