

STATE OF ALABAMA )  
COLBERT COUNTY )

Minutes of a Regular Meeting  
of the  
Colbert County Commission  
09/16/2025

The Colbert County Commission met today in regular session at the Colbert County Courthouse. Chairman Bendall called the work session to order at 5:03 p.m. with the regular meeting following at 5:31 p.m., the time and place previously scheduled for such work session and regular meeting. All Commissioners answered “present” at the call of the roll. Jimmy Gardiner offered the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairperson Bendall declared that a quorum was present for the purpose of the transaction of business.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Teresa Gieschen spoke regarding Pride Landing Road R. R. Crossing. Gieschen stated how much she appreciates what the Commission does, this is national train week and today is operation clear track. Gieschen distributed a map to the Commission. She lives on pride landing, pride estates. The community has a public boat launch there. There is a double lung transplant patient that lives in that community as well as a Saint Jude patient, and a Hospice nurse who has been unable to get to dying patients because of trains. Gieschen contacted the administrator of the rail program for Alabama who provided her with the number of trains that go by each day. There are 17 in the day and 14 at night totaling 31 per day. This means, about every 1.5 hrs. one comes by. Statistics show that every three hours a vehicle and a train collide, and the train usually wins. She stated that when a train stops, they sometimes stop for hrs. leaving them without an exit, which concerns them. They have had at least 46 blockages that they have documented themselves in the last 12 months. There is no outlet, and it is a public Rd. The boat launch is used for emergency rescues and there is no plan of support. She stated that there are some procedures in place. One is to call 911 first because when they call the railroad sometimes, they do not get an answer and minutes and seconds count if it is 911. The trains are up to 2 miles long. She stated that they need signage and community education.

Gieschen says that the most logical exit for them, that won’t cost an arm and a leg, is the road that comes out next to Vulcan. Vulcan has said that they may use it in an emergency, however someone needs to coordinate it, letting them know that if it were blocked, they’d know where to go to get in. They also want to know who is liable if they need emergency services and the responders can’t get to them. Another member of the community spoke stating that they had an incident where they had to take a person needing care in the community, in their ATV and go along the railroad track to Vulcan to get her as well as get permission from Vulcan and that’s unacceptable. That’s time they do not have to wait.

Gieschen stated that there are 4 roads. The main road, the gravel road that the County put in, the one that is by the water treatment plant and the one that is on Vulcan’s property. The one by the water treatment plant and the one by Vulcan are both private properties. The other 2 are often blocked.

Commissioner Barnes is providing Mrs. Gieschen with the contact information of Elizabeth Lawler with Norfolk Southern and William Miller, the Safety director out of Atlanta and the National Railroad Association which logs every blocked crossing if called in and reported. Gieschen stated that the DOT, Tod Gerold, says that they do not have a log.

Another concern is that if air evac had to be called in, where do they land and how do they get the patient to them if the tracks are blocked? Barnes recognizes that it’s a great problem that we have and will contact Elizabeth Lawler himself. Sheriff Balentine stated that they have the same problem. It’s a Norfolk Southern problem. Balentine says that it seems that they are missing their stopping point and maybe they don’t have the correct information as to where to stop and are stopping too soon. Gieschen stated that there is a 2-hr. window that the train has and they keep track of how long the trains stop blocking the entrances via group text. But they have no idea when

it initially stops to begin tracking it. There is no documentation, and the railroad company tells them that they need data driven elements. EMA Director Jody Hitt said that they have cameras they are going to install to get some data and he will also talk to Volcan about helping with the locked gate situation.

Junior Rider, Chief of 247 Volunteer Fire department and Locust Shores back up for an emergency situation stated that if he were to get there and the train is blocking, his first instinct is to call for air evac because even if they can get across the tracks, they will be exhausted about time they get to their destination to do anything. He suggests that they find out the number of people that have an air evac membership because in an emergency situation, they will come to you. Rider will contact Ronnie Stonecipher to find some lz's (landing zones). If it's a boater that needs emergency assistance, Sheffield and Cherokee both have water rescue boats.

## **BOARD APPOINTEE REPORTS**

None

## **AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS**

None

## **PUBLIC HEARING**

None

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

Chairman Bendall announced that the business before the Commission was the approval of the consent agenda. Commissioner Gardiner made a motion to adopt and approve the matters placed on the consent agenda during the work session. The motion was duly seconded by Commissioner Bailey. Chairman Bendall stated that the adoption and approval of a consent agenda comprised of the following items of business was properly before the Commission and stated the matters as follows:

1. Approved Sept 2, 2025, meeting minutes and waived reading of same.
2. Approved Sept 16, 2025, bills as presented by County C.F.O.
3. Approved Proclamation, Deputy Briggs Wright.
4. Approved Severe Weather Tax Holiday for Feb 20, 2026.
5. Approved DYS, Long Term Detention Subsidy Contact.
6. Approved proclamation, Beef Month, Oct. 2025.
7. Approved Area Council on Aging, NACOLG, Sr. Center Contracts.
8. Approved Award Road Department Annual Bids.
9. Approved Amend 2024 Jail and Sheriff Department Budget.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None

## **REPORTS FROM STAFF**

Chairperson Bailey announced that the Commission would hear reports from staff. Upon being recognized by the Chair, the following reports were heard by the Commission:

### **County Administrator:**

Administrator Roger Creekmore made the following reports: There was a new FT Logistics IT hire in the Colbert County EMA Agency. Brice Thrasher who was hired effective Sept. 16<sup>th</sup> at \$40,838.81. Kayla Brewer quit her position in the Revenue Commissioners Department effective 11:30 AM Sept. 4<sup>th</sup>. As a result of the departure of Kayla Brewer, an opening in the Appraisal

Department was left which will be filled internally by Kaylee Frederick from Appraisal Trainee/Real Estate Real Property to Appraisal Clerk. This will result in an Appraisal Trainee/Real Estate opening that will be advertised through the Alabama Career Center. Elizah Owens was hired as FT Correction Deputy in the Sheriff's Department effective Sept. 4<sup>th</sup> at \$32,985.27. A resignation in the Sheriff's Department from Marcus Hawthnia effective Aug 14, 225. Kitty Sparks, with the Water Department, will become FT water clerk on Oct. 1 with at starting pay of \$17.19/hr. Rodney Polk was hired at the Road Department as HMT1 effective Sept 16 with a salary of \$29,827.20.

**County CFO:**

CFO April Eaton made the following reports: County Attorney: Everything went great at our exit conference for our 2024 audit. Only a few comments were made and commended the ladies in the office for doing a good job. Eaton stated that she appreciates everything that they do for us. There were a lot of open PO's on the bill sheet because This is the last meeting before the fiscal year. These PO's were listed to get closed out prior to the next meeting.

**E-911/EMA Director:**

No Report

**County Engineer:**

No Report

**NEW BUSINESS**

A motion was made by Commissioner Mansell and seconded by Commissioner Gardiner for the approval of one open 911 Board Appointment. The Chair stated that the matter before the Commission was with approval of said Appointment and called for any discussion. There were 2 applicants, Mr. Tim McMullin and Mr. Marcus Rutland Sr. There being no further discussion, Chairman Bendall asked the County Administrator to call the roll, and a roll call vote was had as follows:

|            |           |
|------------|-----------|
| District 1 | Rutland   |
| District 2 | McMullins |
| District 3 | McMullins |
| District 4 | Rutland   |
| District 5 | Rutland   |
| District 6 | Rutland   |

A motion was made by Commissioner Barnes and seconded by Commissioner Gardiner to adopt F. Y. 2026 Budget. The Chair stated that the matter before the Commission was approval of said Budget and called for any discussion. There being no further discussion, Chairman Bendall asked the County Administrator to call the roll, and a roll call vote was had as follows:

|            |      |
|------------|------|
| District 1 | Yeah |
| District 2 | Yeah |
| District 3 | Yeah |
| District 4 | Yeah |
| District 5 | Yeah |
| District 6 | Nay  |

A motion was made by Commissioner Bailey and seconded by Commissioner Barnes to approve J. Dolgencorp LLC. ABC License, 2001 Hatton School Rd. Leighton, Al. 005 Retail Beer (off premises), 07 Retail Wine (off premises). The Chair stated that the matter before the Commission was approval of said license and called for any discussion. There being no further discussion, Chairman Bendall asked the County Administrator to call the roll, and a roll call vote was had as follows:

|            |      |
|------------|------|
| District 1 | Yeah |
| District 2 | Nay  |
| District 3 | Yeah |
| District 4 | Yeah |
| District 5 | Nay  |
| District 6 | Yeah |

**DISCUSSION ITEMS BY COMMISSIONERS**

Commissioner Gardiner thanked the Commission and Department Heads for their hard work on the budget. Once again, we have a balanced budget. We can absorb premiums and health care. We have had a bad week in our country. We talked about the new detention center in which Gardiner has had several people going out and talking to them. There are usually 18 to capacity. Most are repeat offenders at 14-17 years old. It’s kind of unnerving to think about the anxiety and loss that they go through and not be able to see a way out. The one thing we can do is pray. We do not pray enough. We need to get serious about praying for our country and our people. I prayed tonight for being civil and having unity in our county and Gardiner expressed that we show a good example within the Commission. But there is more we can do and when we feel frustrated, we can just pray, and we need more of it.

Commissioner Barnes stated due to some of the county input on the solar farm. He met Urban Grid. They are going to offer another public hearing held by them to give people voices that were not given by TVA as far as any response back. There is an easement that they must have from Shoals Solid Waste which Barnes will deny because in his opinion, it is not a worthy project that we need in Colbert County.

Commissioner Bailey, Thanked Commissioner Gardiner for his comments. Bailey states that it is difficult in this day and age for us to see the positivity and is challenging sometimes when someone feels passionate about what is right and what is wrong to always express oneself in a manner that it seems like were heard, but it is important that we do that. As Gardiner has pointed out, we demonstrate this, For the most part we gel well as a team. Bailey stated that another good example that our community can come together in a positive way was demonstrated over the past week by the North Alabama State Fair. Bailey commended Commissioner Isom and Admin Creekmore for being two of the board members for putting this together. They did an excellent job. It was a time where it didn’t matter how much money they had and what color their skin was. You saw everyone come together and have a good time. Admin Creekmore added thanks to Junior Rider for being over parking for the Fair. He was present every night.

Commissioner Isom wanted to make mention of the reason for his vote of nay for the budget approval. Isom stated that he wanted the raises to be fair. You have on one hand a group of people getting 6% and another group getting 3%. I can wrap my hand around that being fair. He stated that it’s like if we can get a \_\_\_\_and he doesn’t believe in that. He never has and he never will. April has done an outstanding job but if anything else comes up like this he’s going to still have the same feeling then as he does now. He doesn’t change with the wind and it’s nothing personal. Isom stated that he values money differently than most folk and that he values his employees most of all because they are the ones to get you where you’re going and make things work.

Commissioner Bendall agrees with Isom's statement and stated that we will all look at it differently next time and it's time to stop what we're doing. Commissioner Barnes suggests we also look at the step program, so we do not leave anyone behind. Isom stated that we have a jail to build, and this is big for us and if we don't start watching our money, we're going to start coming up short and who's going to go out and get some more money? Commissioner Bailey stated that she thinks our challenge is that each department raises its own budget to this body as a separate entity when it's coming out of one big pot, so we probably need to rethink the way we're doing it. Chairman Bendall stated that we have figured out how to pay for the jail, now we have to figure out how to operate the jail when it comes to budgets.

Bendall commended Sheriff Balentine stating that his training is showing and we appreciate it. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> award we have given in a month. Sheriff Balentine stated that we have a dedicated bunch men and women, there's no doubt about it.

Bendall announced that we will be placing a suggestion box on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. This suggestion box is to make things better. We are working for 57 - 58,000 people and we have to do what we can to make it as pleasant for them when they enter this building as we possibly can. The suggestion box will also be available digitally.

Gardiner agreed with Bailey about the fair saying that it didn't matter how much money you had cause when that dart throwing man got through with me, I had no money left.

Hit addressed the commission giving his appreciation for all that they do for them and the county and mentioned that it doesn't go unnoticed.

Mrs. Jessie Bailey, from the Gnat Pond area, stood to say that she thanks the commission for the job that they are doing. She requested signage to address the deer and wildlife on Gnat Pond Rd/Co Rd 61. Also, signage for the 18 wheelers coming through from 6<sup>th</sup> street notifying them to drop their speed in the section where the houses are.

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COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 1

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COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 2

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COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 3

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COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 4

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CHAIRMAN

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COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 6