

**Emergency Meeting for  
Hancock County Board of Commissioners and  
Hancock County Council  
March 19, 2020**

Commissioners and Council met in an Emergency session. Board of Commissioner's President John Jessup, Vice President Brad Armstrong and Marc Huber were present. Also present were Scott Benkie (County Attorney) and Debra Carnes (Auditor). Commissioner's President Jessup called to order the March 19, 2020 Hancock County Commissioners Board meeting at 9:01 AM.

Councilmembers President William Bolander, James Shelby, Kent Fisk, Vice President Jeannine Gray and Mary Noe were present. Councilmember Martha Vail participated by phone.

Councilmember Bledsoe was not present. Mary Bowmer (Financial Administrator), Trish George (Secretary to Commissioners & Council) and Mary McCoy (Payroll) participated by phone. Councilmember's President Bolander called the council meeting to order at 9:01 AM.

- Councilmember Bolander said this an Emergency Meeting addressing the Coronavirus.
- Commissioner Jessup thanked Commissioner Armstrong and Commissioner Huber for handling things while he was on vacation. Commissioner Jessup said he wanted to meet to share updates and discuss contingencies. Commissioner Armstrong said he would clarify what was done with Council on Tuesday to clear up confusion. Department heads came to Commissioners with varying request on how to deal with the situation. We interviewed each Department Head and went over who was essential and non-essential. Who could work at home and who couldn't and how to ramp down staffing? We have the County Offices open by appointment only. We have given Department Heads the discretion to allow employees to stay at home and have reduced staff. Everybody is getting paid, you have some people showing up to work, some working from home, there are probably some at home not working getting paid. We left it up to Department Heads to work this out. Commissioner Huber said County Offices are open by appointment only, not closed, but you have to call and make an appointment.
- Commissioner Armstrong said we, the Commissioners, critically feel our business is essential. We feel commerce needs to continue to take place. Along with that if County offices are closed; our Ordinance says if you are working and county offices are closed, you get paid time and half. Councilmember Bolander asked if that was time and half for their regular shifts or after overtime. Commissioner Armstrong said he would like to be ahead of things. If everyone stays home, we budgeted to pay them anyway, just the work won't get done. The other side of this is there is still a lot of people still working if we shut down Sheriff's Department, Jailors, EMA and 911. Councilmember Shelby asked to clarify time and half. Commissioner Armstrong said if government shuts down, if employees are required to work they are to be paid time and half for hours worked.
- Councilmember Shelby asked Commissioner Armstrong if he recalled several years ago Misty in the Health Department created a Pandemic Procedure? Have we implemented that? Debra Carnes (Auditor) said she contacted Misty Moore (Emergency Management) and Crystal Baker (Health Department) both yesterday and have not heard back.

Councilmember Shelby said that was for 911/Emergency Management, she had triage set-up, agreements with high schools, gymnasiums, etc. Commissioners said the Hospital is using the Kroger Plaza.

- Commissioner Armstrong said they contracted with their normal cleaner and started cleaning door knobs, lights switches and flat surfaces. Debra Carnes (Auditor) said we can track these charges.
- The hospital has extra staff helping in tandem with the Health Department and EMA. We will be meeting weekly and taking the lead. The hospital is making a list for triage areas. Councilmember Noe asked about available test kits. Commissioner Armstrong said that is what makes this hard to manage. We have no confirmed cases in the hospital, which is good; but also means we may have cases in the hospital but haven't tested yet. There are people in the hospital undetermined, but meet criteria. I would be surprised if we got an adequate number of test in the next couple of weeks to make good decisions. We will have to look through the numbers as a group in the next couple of weeks. The whole thing driving this is hospital capacity, if things ramp up and blow through the 200 bed capacity with those at risk, we will have problems. The hospital has 35-38 ventilators. Councilmember Fisk said as test kits become available, numbers will go up.
- Councilmember Fisk asked about meetings with groups of 10 or more people for Budget meetings, Planning Commission and Drainage Board. Debra Carnes (Auditor) said it is recommended to conference call in for meetings. Councilmember Shelby said the Budget meeting could be cancelled. Commissioner Armstrong said we want Council to be aware and not have surprise expenses. Councilmember Shelby said we need to start thinking budget for 2021 (possibly no pay increases, no new hires).
- Commissioner Armstrong said we will have a lot of things happen quickly and out of the norm. Commissioner Jessup said we need to stay up on any requirements from Federal Government for reimbursement. He said we won't know for weeks if we did too little or too much.
- Councilmember Bolander said hotels are concerned; their businesses are collapsing. A concerned hotel phone participant said their business is basically collapsing. He requested a suspension of the hotel tax as of April 1<sup>st</sup> and possible consideration of disbursement of funds held in the CBD and other tourism accounts as emergency relief. Councilmember Bolander said legally I'm not sure we can do that. Commissioner Armstrong said stopping the tax would be done at a County level and we don't have the power to do that quickly. Commissioner Armstrong said maybe we can talk to Tourism for assistance; that seems appropriate. The hotel owner inquired about eliminating the tax. Councilmember Bolander said no one is currently paying the tax so it is eliminated. Councilmember Bolander said that would be too cumbersome to undertake at this time, taking off and putting on the tax. Another hotel owner expressed concerns and ask if there was any other type of relief the County was looking at. Councilmember Bolander we are not in the position to do this, but the Federal government is looking at this and will address this. The hotel owner was concerned help would take 2-3 months. Councilmember Gray said the Small Business Association (SBA) has issued an Economic Injury Disaster Loan per Governor Holcomb to help small businesses with low interest loans to help with revenue loss. The hotel asked for a better conference call system next time, he could not hear well. Councilmember Bolander said we will work on a better conference call system.

Councilmember Fisk made a motion to adjourn the Hancock County Council at 9:51 AM.  
Councilmember Noe seconded. **Motion carried 6-0.**

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William Bolander

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Martha Vail

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James Shelby

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Jeannine Gray

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Absent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Debbie Bledsoe

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Mary Noe

\_\_\_\_\_  
Kent Fisk

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Debra Carnes, Hancock County Auditor

Hancock County Commissioners continued to meet for a work session. Commissioners released the following letter to the Citizens of Hancock County.

*To the Citizens of Hancock County:*

*The Hancock County Commissioners acknowledge and recognize the current crisis predicated on stemming the spread of the coronavirus, and have put the County on Orange Travel Advisor. Orange status is a recognition of the threat the coronavirus presents to the public and recommends essential travel only. Essential travel is defined as work, food, and other necessary business.*

*The Hancock County Commissioners have conferred with infectious disease physicians and other experts and will continue to meet weekly to receive updates. The Commissioners are requesting that all persons with any underlying health conditions or infirmities including advanced age, consider restricting their interactions with other persons, as it is clear this segment of the population is especially vulnerable to becoming seriously ill with the coronavirus.*

*The Hancock County Commissioners request the public take all precautions to avoid the coronavirus including but not limited to; washing hands, especially after touching any frequently used item or surface, avoid touching your face, sneezing or coughing into tissue and disinfecting items and services, and avoiding social gatherings in groups of more than*

*ten people. The citizens of the county have responded in a vigilant and responsible manner, and the Commissioners thank everyone for their continued efforts.*

*Commissioner John Jessup, President  
Commissioner Brad Armstrong, Vice-President  
Commissioner Marc Huber*

**The Hancock County Board of Commissioners meeting adjourned at 10:30 AM.**

### **Hancock County Commissioners**

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Commissioner John Jessup, President

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Commissioner Brad Armstrong, Vice-President

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Commissioner Marc Huber

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Debra Carnes, Hancock County Auditor