

Pierce County Board of Commissioners  
Regular Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, January 7, 2020 6:00PM

Commissioners in attendance

Neal Bennett, Chairman  
Harold Rozier, District 1  
Mike Streat, District 2  
Randy Dixon, District 3  
David Lowman, District 4

Staff in attendance

Franklin Rozier, County Attorney  
Jason Rubenbauer, County Manager  
Amy Hitt, County Clerk

1. Call to Order – Chairman Bennett called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM

Commissioner Mike Streat made a motion to remove items 7 & 8 from the agenda. Commissioner Harold Rozier seconded the motion, all voted aye. Motion approved.

2. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance – Rev. Morris Pate gave an invocation and Matt Carter led the pledge of allegiance.

3. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting December 3, 2019
- b. Closed session December 3, 2019
- c. Called Meeting December 16, 2019
- d. Closed session December 16, 2019

Commissioner Harold Rozier made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 3, 2019 Regular meeting, December 3, 2019 closed session, December 16, 2019 called meeting and December 16, 2019 closed session. Commissioner David Lowman seconded the motion, all voted aye. Motion approved.

4. Public Comment – Rene Allday – industrial junk on property zoned commercial. Junk cars. Mr. Allday of 3789 Pond View Lane. He was here in 2012 about New School Road property. The property adjacent on Highway 84 consisting of 6+- acres. Spent 2 years fighting, ended with the understanding that 1.9 acres would be rezoned to industrial and they would be required to get a license. Now its 2020 and I'm back with the same issues. It cleaned up for a while but now the junk is back again. The Code office (Not Jason or Chris) was put in place to protect property values. I am just pleading that the codes be enforced. I want to sell my property and when people see the junk behind it they aren't interested. Chairman Bennett stated that he looked into this situation and wanted to share what he found. This situation went to court, Jury trial in 2014 and the Jury found no violations with the business being conducted, as long as there is a business license/state license for new/used cars. I can see there may be a nuisance but we have already lost this case in a jury trial. Commissioner Harold Rozier shared that the attorney felt it was a losing battle. Chairman Bennett asked the County Attorney to look into this and see if there's anything else we can do. Chris Bond shared that he has spoken to the owner about covering the existing fence. Chairman Bennett asked the commission what they wanted to do? Commissioner Lowman asked that the County Attorney and Chris Bond look into this a little more and see if there is anything else we can do. Commissioner Streat asked that the attorney and Chris see what they can find out about where the ball got dropped and what we can do now. Chairman Bennett stated that he thinks that maybe since we lost the jury trial we assumed we were done and there was nothing for us to do.
5. County Managers Report & November Financial Report – Jason Rubenbauer. Mr Rubenbauer reported that as of November 30, 2019 the cash on hand is still up our expenditures are within 83% and we are looking good to close the year. Departmental updates include from 911 - EMS calls trending slightly up, Fire calls up partly due to 1<sup>st</sup> Responder calls and better reporting, SO calls are up as well. The Road Department is busy. Cason Rd project to start Jan 6 with the pipe installation by Southeast Pipe and the pipe portion of the project should be complete by March 26. The road work

by East Coast Asphalt should be complete by March 31. These contractors are working together closely. Ware Street construction project pipe portion to start end of January. Horseshoe Rd project has issued a notice to proceed and there is a meeting scheduled with the contractor later this week. The St. Johns Road TIA project is set to advertise in July 2020 and let by the end of the year. The Library of the year has been awarded to the Okefenokee Regional Library System, congratulations to them! We have applied for 2 grants recently; these are both for interns. One is a Verizon grant that we would use to have someone come and GPS map all the culvert pipes in the county. There is also a Trash for Turtles clean up at the river scheduled for January 20 at the Highway 121(Brantley Co line) boat ramp.

**6. Approval of 2020 Qualifying Fees**

**RESOLUTION TO FIX AND PUBLISH QUALIFICATION FEES FOR COUNTY OFFICES FOR THE 2020 ELECTIONS**

WHEREAS, pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 21-2-131(a)(1)(A) the governing authority of any county, no later than February 1st of any year in which a general primary, non-partisan election, or general election is to be held, shall fix and publish a qualifying fee for each county office to be filled in the upcoming primary election; and

WHEREAS, O.C.G.A. § 21-2-131(a)(1)(b) sets forth the formula for the governing authority to calculate the qualification fees for county offices.

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Pierce County Board of Commissioners does hereby set the qualification fees for county offices and school districts for 2020 as follows:

OFFICE	BASE PAY	QUALIFYING FEE (3%)
Commissioner District 1	\$ 6252.00	\$ 187.56
Commissioner District 3	\$ 6252.00	\$ 187.56
Clerk of Superior Court	\$ 46,408.38	\$ 1,392.25
Probate Judge	\$ 46,408.38	\$ 1,392.25
Magistrate Judge	\$ 46,408.38	\$ 1,392.25
Sheriff	\$ 53,880.12	\$ 1,616.40
Tax Commissioner	\$ 46,408.38	\$ 1,392.25
Coroner	\$ 10,975.00	\$ 329.25
Surveyor	\$ 700.00	\$ 21.00
Board of Education District 1		\$ 126.00
Board of Education District 3		\$ 126.00

BE IT FURTHERMORE RESOLVED, that this Resolution shall become effective as of the date of its adoption.

SO RESOLVED, this the 7th day of January, 2020

Pierce County, Georgia  
Board of Commissioners

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Neal Bennett, Chairman

Attest:

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Amy Hitt, County Clerk

#### QUALIFYING FEE NOTICE

Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 21-2-131(a)(1), the following qualifying fees were set by the Pierce County Commissioners.

Qualifying for the offices listed below will begin at 9:00 A.M. on Monday, March 2, 2020, and will end at noon on Friday, March 6, 2020. The General Primary/Non-Partisan/Special Election will be held on May 19, 2020, and the General Election/Special Election will be held on November 3, 2020.

Commissioner District 1	\$ 187.56
Commissioner District 3	\$ 187.56
Clerk of Superior Court	\$ 1,392.25
Probate Judge	\$ 1,392.25
Magistrate Judge	\$ 1,392.25
Sheriff	\$ 1,616.40
Tax Commissioner	\$ 1,392.25
Coroner	\$ 329.25
Surveyor	\$ 21.00
Board of Education District 1	\$ 126.00
Board of Education District 3	\$ 126.00

Qualifying will be held at the Pierce County Board of Elections, 312 Nichols Street, Blackshear, Georgia.

Pierce County  
Board of Commissioners

Commissioner Randy Dixon made a motion to approve the resolution and set the fees for the 2020 election cycle. Commissioner David Lowman seconded the motion, all voted aye. Motion approved.

7. Request to declare a portion ( 1.39 +/- acres) of the property known as map & parcel 035A-087 Session Hill Community Center on Fulmore St as surplus as shown on the attached plat to be recorded. – removed from agenda.
8. Request to seek sealed bids on the Session Hill Community Center property. Removed from agenda
9. Request to approve change order request from Roberts Engineering on the Horseshoe Project in the additional amount of \$89,180.00.

Commissioner Harold Rozier made a motion to approve the change order for Horseshoe Project in an additional amount of \$89,180.00. Commissioner David Lowman seconded the motion, all voted aye. Motion approved.

10. Request annual approval of the Inclement Weather Policy with no changes.

Pierce County Board of Commissioners

#### Inclement Weather Policy

##### Purpose:

It is the purpose of this policy to reduce the possibility of risk to the public who may visit county-owned facilities, and to promote the safety of County Government employees during periods of inclement weather.

Adverse weather conditions sometimes require a flexible approach to opening or closing County offices. County Offices may be closed at the discretion of the County Manager, after an assessment of road and/or weather conditions by the Pierce County Emergency Management Agency which determines that weather conditions have or will create hazardous conditions for the traveling public. It is the ultimate responsibility of the employee to obtain information regarding work status changes.

##### Policy:

There shall be a consistent process for the opening and closing of County offices during periods of inclement weather.

##### Procedure:

1. Office Closure

If an office closure is implemented by the County Manager, County Offices will be closed for the entire day and nonessential employees should not report to work. If a decision to close County offices is made before or after normal operating hours, the County Manager, or his/her designated agent, will notify radio stations and will update the County website <http://pc.pcgeorgia.com/psa> and the County Facebook page "Pierce County GA Government". The County Manager, or his/her designee(s) will also contact each Department Head/Constitutional Officer via telephone so they may notify their employees of the closure.

The radio stations which will be contacted are: WWUF 97.7, WKUB 105.1, and WSGT 107.1.

Nonessential employees are advised to continue monitoring the above outlets to stay informed of any changes and are responsible for ensuring that their Department Head/Constitutional Officer and Human Resources both have current contact information at all times.

Employees will be compensated at their normal rate of pay, up to eight (8) hours, for the period in which County offices were closed if they were scheduled to work. If the employee was in an unpaid status for part or all of the regularly scheduled workday prior to the inclement weather event, the employee will only be compensated proportionately to the pay received for the prior work day.

The payroll computation of these inclement weather hours will be coded as "miscellaneous" and will not be part of the calculation of time worked for overtime purposes when the employee returns to regular work activities.

## 2. Delayed Opening

If a delayed opening is implemented by the County Manager, nonessential employees should report to work at a time determined by the County Manager. The above referenced media outlets should be reviewed.

Upon implementation of a delayed opening, a nonessential employee may arrive at his/her work site on or before the designated time without penalty once the site has been deemed safe to do so. Employees arriving after the designated time will be required to charge all time lost to accrued vacation leave. If an employee does not have any accrued vacation leave, the employee may, upon written approval of their respective Department Head/Constitutional Officer, utilize accrued sick leave as a last resort. If an employee does not have any accrued vacation or sick leave, the employee will not receive compensation for the time lost.

Employees will be compensated at their normal rate of pay for the period prior to the designated time during which County offices were closed, provided however, an employee who has an unpaid absence for part or all of the regularly scheduled work day prior to an inclement weather day shall only receive compensation proportionate to the pay received for the prior work day. Lost time prior to the designated time will not count toward leave without pay hours.

The payroll computation of these inclement weather hours will be coded as "miscellaneous" and will not be part of the calculation of time worked for overtime purposes when the employee returns to regular work activities.

### Essential Personnel

Essential personnel are defined as employees who work in Public Safety, the Road Department, 911, or Maintenance, as deemed necessary by the County Manager, during the event. The designation of essential employees within these departments is at the Department Head's/Constitutional Officer's discretion and will be communicated to the County Manager and Human Resources in each event. Employees who are classified as essential personnel and who are required to report to work with the County is operating during inclement weather

conditions, or during other acts resulting in the need to modify normal operating hours, will receive additional compensation at their normal rate of pay for the period in which he/she actually performed their actual physical duties. Overtime rules will apply to essential full-time personnel who exceed 40 hours of work, excluding the 8 hours received for the inclement weather compensation.

Early Closing

In the event weather conditions become adverse during normal working hours, the County Manager may dismiss nonessential employees. The County Manager, or his/her designated agent, will advise Department Heads/Constitutional Officers of the appropriate action to take. Employees will be compensated at their normal rate of pay for the period during which County offices were closed. Lost time will not count toward leave without pay hours. Note that this is not the same as Voluntary Early Closing of offices.

Voluntary Early Closing

In the event weather conditions that may require evacuations in the area within 24-48 hours of an inclement weather event, the County Manager may authorize Voluntary Early Closing of County offices to allow employees to prepare for such evacuations. In the event of a Voluntary Early Closing, Department Heads/Constitutional Officers must have 100% participation via a signed Notice of Office Closure. Once signed the employees will be required to use accrued vacation leave in lieu of compensation for the lost time due to the Voluntary Early Closing. If an employee does not have any accrued vacation leave, the employee may, upon written approval of their respective Department Head/Constitutional Officer, utilize accrued sick leave as a last resort. If an employee does not have any accrued vacation or sick leave, the employee's pay will be adjusted to reflect all lost time after the designated time with said amount to be deducted from the employee's next scheduled payroll check.

Extenuating Circumstances

In the event of loss of power, heat, or air conditioning, or if structural problems are sustained by a specific department, it will be at the discretion of the County Manager, if and when said department will be closed. In departments where multiple sites exist, only the affected site will be closed. Employees will be compensated at their normal rate of pay for the period in which the department is closed. Lost time will not count toward leave without pay hours. Essential personnel will not receive additional compensation due to an extenuating circumstance.

Approved this 7<sup>th</sup> day of January, 2020 to enter into effect the 7<sup>th</sup> day of January, 2020.

PIERCE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Neal Bennett, Chairman

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Harold Rozier, Commissioner District 1

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Mike Streat, Commissioner District 2

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Randy Dixon, Commissioner District 3

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David Lowman, Commissioner District 4

WITNESSED BY:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Amy Hitt, County Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

NOTICE OF OFFICE CLOSURE

This document must be signed by all department employees when a significant weather or other event may warrant mandatory evacuations. This form is only valid if authorized by the County Manager or the Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners. Any early closures taking place without this form and proper authorization will result in a no pay status for all employees impacted by the office closure.

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for Office Closure:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Department Head/Constitutional Officer Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print)

Department Head/Constitutional Officer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYEES SIGNATURES

	Printed Name	Signature
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____
7.	_____	_____
8.	_____	_____
9.	_____	_____
10.	_____	_____
11.	_____	_____
12.	_____	_____
13.	_____	_____
14.	_____	_____
15.	_____	_____

County Manager: \_\_\_\_\_

County Manager's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



Commissioner Randy Dixon made a motion to approve the inclement weather policy with no changes. Commissioner David Lowman seconded the motion, all voted aye. Motion approved.

## **11. Request annual approval of the Nepotism Policy with no changes.**

Pierce County Board of Commissioners

### Nepotism Policy

#### Purpose:

This policy is to ensure effective supervision, internal discipline, safety, security, and positive morale in the workplace. This policy will also serve to avoid potential problems of favoritism, conflicts in loyalty, discrimination, and any appearance of impropriety or conflict of interest.

#### Application:

This policy shall apply to all Pierce County employees and all departments, boards, authorities, commissions, offices, and any other organized entity of Pierce County not previously mentioned. Note that constitutional officers are exempt from this policy per O.C.G.A. § 36-1-21 unless they or their predecessors have elected to be bound by the county's civil service system.

#### Definition of Terms:

- Relatives—includes spouse, child, stepchild, grandchild, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, half-brother, half-sister, niece, nephew or the spouse of any of them. These relationships shall include those arising from adoption. Persons who are common law married or who are living together without the benefit of matrimony are also considered as relatives under the intent of this rule. "Personnel actions" include, but are not limited to, promotions, pay raises, transfers, duty assignments, and disciplinary matters.
- Nepotism—Describes a work-related situation in which there is the potential for favoritism toward a relative (such as giving a job, promotion, biased performance reviews, or more favorable working conditions) on the basis of the familial relationship.
- Elected Officials—this policy is not intended to prevent any member of an employee's family from seeking public office. Should a "relative" become an elected official, that official must recuse him/herself from decisions affecting the family member(s) of the County. Refusal to recuse oneself from these decisions may have an adverse effect (termination) on the continued employment of the "relative" of the elected official.

#### Guidelines:

- Employees may not create a supervisor/subordinate relationship with a family member
- Employees may not supervise or evaluate a family member
- Employees may not audit or review, in any manner, a family members work
- A person may not be employed if a family member serves on the Board or any Committee, Authority, or Council which has authority to review or order personnel actions such as promotion or wage and salary adjustments which could affect his/her job.
- No personal employee relationship covered by this policy will be allowed to be maintained, regardless of the positions involved, if it creates a disruption in the work environment, creates a conflict of interest or is prohibited by any legal or regulatory mandate

Responsibilities:

1. The Human Resource Director shall coordinate with the employee's direct supervisor to develop appropriate plans to ensure that two family members are not in the same chain of command at any level. If the situation is not resolved, then the County Manager will be notified and a transfer notification request will be submitted to the Board of Commissioners for consideration and recommended approval. The Commission will have the final authority for transfer of existing employees under this rule.
2. The County Manager and the Human Resource Director will agree on a recommendation which will be proposed to the Board of Commissioners during Executive Session of the next Commission meeting.
3. The Human Resource Director shall investigate all reports of nepotism and take appropriate action.
4. Every employee is required to disclose changes in their personal situations which may be covered by this procedure.
5. Department heads, Elected Officials, Constitutional Officers, and any other person in a supervisory capacity may inquire about the family relationship between employees to determine the appropriateness of the working relationship under this policy.
6. The Board of Commissioners reserves the right to exercise appropriate judgment to take such actions, as may be necessary, to achieve this intent of this policy. The Board reserves the right to vary from the guidelines outlined in this policy to address unusual circumstances on a case by case basis.

Adopted this 7th day of January, 2020 to enter into effect the 7th day of January 2020.

PIERCE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Neal Bennett, Chairman

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Harold Rozier, Commissioner District 1

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Mike Streat, Commissioner District 2

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Randy Dixon, Commissioner District 3

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David Lowman, Commissioner District 4

WITNESSED BY:

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Amy Hitt, County Clerk

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Date

Commissioner Randy Dixon made a motion to approve the nepotism policy with no changes. Commissioner David Lowman seconded the motion, all voted aye. Motion approved.

## 12. Request annual approval of the Vehicle Policy with no changes.

Pierce County Board of Commissioners

### County Vehicle Policy

#### Purpose:

- A. This policy outlines the employee use of vehicles provided by, or used in connection with employment in, Pierce County (County). The primary objectives of this policy are: 1) to ensure the safety of employees and the general public; and 2) to promote the most cost-effective means of transportation in performing the required functions of Pierce County. County owned or leased motor vehicles should be used whenever possible for County business only. Private vehicles should be used only in the limited circumstance set forth in this policy. Or when a County vehicle is not available.
- B. Operators of County vehicles shall always drive safely, legally and courteously, remembering that they are directly responsible for maintaining both the County property and public trust.
- C. Employees are expected to operate vehicles safely. It is the policy of the County to provide a safe working environment that protects both our employees and our citizens from injury and property loss. The use of County vehicles is considered part of the working environment. The County is committed to safe, responsible employee driving behavior that reduces the risk of permanent injury and property loss. Where applicable, this policy also applies to all employees who operate privately owned vehicles on County business.

#### Use:

- A. County vehicles are to be used solely for County business and functions. Personal use of County vehicles, except as authorized below, is strictly prohibited. County vehicles may be taken home and used as a commuter vehicle by employees only as determined by the Pierce County Board of Commissioners (PCBOC). Elected Officials and department heads shall first submit a request for commuter vehicle for each designated driver to the County Manager who will then bring the request before the PCBOC Chairman for presentation and a decision of the Board.
- B. The County Clerk shall maintain a list of commuter vehicle approvals. The PCBOC will review the list at least annually. If any employee on the list has a change in work responsibilities, a new request must be submitted within (7) days of the change by the Elected Official or department head of the employee.
- C. Employees are not permitted to use private (non-County) vehicles while on County business without the express written consent of the supervising Elected Official, Constitutional Officer, or Department Head. Employees who receive reimbursement for use of a private vehicle use may have tax consequences associated with their reimbursements and are advised to discuss those issues with their individual tax consultants. A request for mileage reimbursement for use of a private vehicle must be accompanied by proof of insurance for the date(s) of vehicle use. The Board will use the Standard Mileage Rate established by the Internal Revenue Service which is in effect during the time of travel <https://www.irs.gov/tax-professionals/standard-mileage-rates>.
- D. Employees who operate vehicles over 26,000 gross vehicle weight, buses, and vans with over 15 passengers must have the appropriate commercial driver's license (CDL) with the proper endorsements for that vehicle and the material(s) that may be transported.
- E. Employees who drive their personal vehicles on County business are subject to the applicable requirements of this policy. In addition, the employee must maintain auto liability insurance with minimum state limits and provide proof of insurance to Human Resources which will be maintained in their personnel files with a copy of the authorization to use their personal vehicle for County business.

Employees must maintain their personal vehicle in a safe operating condition when driven on County business. The County is not responsible for repairs or upkeep of private vehicles.

- F. Employees shall refrain from answering the telephone, texting, emailing, listening to earphones, playing loud music, or any other action that may lead to distracted driving.
- G. Personal use does not include occasional stops for convenience while en-route on County business or while commuting with a County vehicle. For purposes of this rule, "while en-route" means one (1) mile or less driving from the most direct route to the destination.
- H. County vehicles may be equipped with monitoring devices that track use.

#### Vehicle Assignment to Specified Employees:

The Pierce County Board of Commissioners or the Sheriff, for employees of the Office of the Sheriff, have the ultimate authority to assign a County owned vehicle to an employee of the County. The following conditions must be met in order for a County employee to qualify for the assignment of a vehicle:

- A. Law Enforcement: Employees whose positions require them to perform duties of a sworn POST-certified/registered law enforcement officer and having a vehicle specifically equipped for law enforcement purposes and the vehicle is essential for the employee to carry out their job functions.
- B. EMA Director/Fire Coordinator: Employees whose position requires immediate response and supervision of the scene during a fire or natural disaster and who has received the proper training and maintains certification as the County EMA Director and the vehicle is essential for immediate response when paged.
- C. Road Department Supervisor: Employees whose position requires them to respond to issues dealing with the Supervision and integrity of roads, rights-of-way, highways, or other public means of traveling to ensure public safety and which use is essential for immediate response when called upon by law enforcement, public utilities, or other officials related to the emergency at hand.

#### Assigned or Permissive Drivers:

- A. Each employee who drives a County or a private vehicle on County business is required to have a valid driver's license. Should an employee's driver's license expire, be revoked or suspended, the employee shall immediately notify his or her supervisor. At the time of the suspension, the employee's County vehicle use privileges will be suspended until the employee's driver's license has been fully restored and validated.
- B. Only assigned and authorized County personnel may operate any County vehicle. Spouses, family members, friends or others who are not assigned or authorized County employees are strictly prohibited from operating a County vehicle.

#### Authorized Passengers:

- 7. County vehicles may not be used to transport family, friends or other passengers including personal pets, unless it is for official business and authorized pursuant to County policy or regulation, or unless the employee is officially on-call and is expected to respond without delay in the event of an emergency. An exception to the rule prohibiting transport of family members will be made for employees who drop off and pick up immediate family from daycare/work on the employee's way to/from work, only if the employee first obtains approval in writing from his/her applicable Elected Official or department head, and signs a waiver releasing the County from any liability should injury or harm come to the passenger(s) while riding in a County vehicle. For purposes of this rule, "the employee's way to/from work" means one (1) mile or less from the most direct route to destination. On call employees who respond to an emergency shall discharge passengers before responding if practical.
- 8. Persons who are not County employees may be passengers in County vehicles when traveling to meetings and conferences related to County business only if approved by the applicable Elected Official or department head.

9. Emergency vehicle "ride-a longs" conducted by the Office of the Sheriff foster positive community relations. Therefore, Pierce County does allow this Office to conduct "ride-a longs" according to the Office policy when there is a positive purpose and employees and/or public safety are not compromised.

#### Driver Evaluation:

Employees may be evaluated and approved for County vehicle use based upon their driving ability. The following may be used to evaluate employees as drivers:

- A. Past driving performance and work experience through reference checks with previous employers
- B. The employee's Motor Vehicle Record
- C. Possession of a valid driver's license
- D. The employee's ability to operate the type of vehicle he/she will drive
- E. The employee's compliance with requested or required training.

#### Seatbelt Use:

All drivers and passengers are required to utilize seatbelts as mandated by law. The employee is responsible for ensuring all occupants, including non-employees, are in compliance with this policy. This does not apply to sworn law enforcement officers who are following procedure set for by their respective Office or as specified under the Official Code of Georgia (O.C.G.A.) §40-8-76.1(9).

#### Mobile Communication Device, Cell Phone and Computer Use

The driver of a County vehicle, or any other vehicle being used for County business, is prohibited from using a mobile communication device, cell phone or computer of any type while the vehicle is in motion. Drivers must be safely parked before using phone or mobile computer equipment. A mobile communication device is defined as "a text messaging device or wireless, two-way communication device designated to receive and transmit voice or text communication." This does not apply to County work-related two-way radios or to sworn law enforcement officers who are following procedures established by the Office of the Sheriff.

#### Smoking Prohibited in Vehicles

Smoking in County vehicles is prohibited at all times.

#### Impaired Driving

At no time shall a driver operate a vehicle when his/her ability to do so is impaired or influenced by alcohol, illegal drugs or other illegal substances, prescribed or over-the-counter medication, or by illness, fatigue or injury.

The employee driver is obligated to report to his/her supervisor any reason that may affect his/her ability to drive safely.

#### Proof of Insurance

Employee drivers must make sure that the current insurance card is kept in the vehicle at all times.

#### Accident Reporting

- A. In the event of an accident while driving a County vehicle or when driving a privately-owned vehicle while on County business, the driver shall, when possible, first check on the safety and welfare of all persons involved in the accident and seek immediate medical attention should it be required for themselves or others. If possible, the driver shall move the vehicle to a safe location out of the way of traffic.
- B. Drivers shall always have a police officer investigate any accident that involves a County vehicle or privately-owned vehicle being used on County business. This will ensure that the County vehicle is

protected from unwarranted claims. Do not discuss fault with, or sign anything from, anyone except for a police officer or an authorized representative of the County.

- C. Drivers shall notify their supervisor as soon as possible of the accident and report the extent of the injuries and property damage involved.
- D. Drivers shall fully cooperate with the Human Resource Director or his/her designee by completing all forms and providing all information necessary.

#### Traffic Violations

All fines and other criminal penalties due to violations of the law by the driver are the personal responsibility of the driver of any County vehicle. These costs are not reimbursable by the County and must be paid promptly by the driver.

#### Vehicle Maintenance & Repair

If the County vehicle is in need of repairs or maintenance (i.e. oil change, etc.), the employee must inform the County Maintenance Supervisor via a formal work order.

Approved this 7th day of January, 2020 to enter into effect the 7<sup>th</sup> day of January, 2020.

PIERCE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

\_\_\_\_\_  
Neal Bennett, Chairman

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Harold Rozier, Commissioner District 1

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mike Streat, Commissioner District 2

\_\_\_\_\_  
Randy Dixon, Commissioner District 3

\_\_\_\_\_  
David Lowman, Commissioner District 4

WITNESSED BY:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Amy Hitt, County Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Commissioner Randy Dixon made a motion to approve the vehicle policy with no changes. Commissioner David Lowman seconded the motion, all voted aye. Motion approved.**

**13.** Request adoption of a new Travel Policy that will repeal any other local travel policy and be effective immediately. Mr. Rubenbauer shared that this policy mirrors the State of Georgia travel policy. Commissioner Harold Rozier asked who will supervise the controls. Mr. Rubenbauer states that the department heads and the County Manager are the control supervisor.

## Travel Policy & Procedures

### General Provisions

Pierce County allows for the purchase on the County Purchasing Card or reimburses travelers for reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in connection with approved travel on its behalf. The County encourages travelers to take advantage of County and State of Georgia arranged discounts wherever possible.

A necessary travel expense is one for which there exists a clear business purpose and is within the County's expense policy limitations. A clear business purpose contains all information necessary to substantiate the expenditure including a list of attendees, if appropriate, and their purpose for attending, business topics discussed, or how the expenditure benefited the County.

Establishing policies and procedures for travel expenses enables the County to effectively comply with federal, state, and county regulations.

These policies are intended to be guidelines for the planning and reimbursement of all County approved travel expenses. There are several key points to remember when incurring expenses on behalf of the County:

- Under no circumstances should an individual approve his/her own expense report. In most cases, he/she should not approve the expense reports of a person to whom he/she functionally or administratively reports (see exceptions, paragraph A., below).
- All expense reports must be submitted using the approved travel forms of the County to the Finance Department by the individual who incurred the expense.
- A large number of exceptions or Policy violations will increase the likelihood of expense report audits.
- The County will not reimburse employees for personal expenses.

### Policies Applying to All Travel Expenses

#### A. Approval and Authorization

A traveler's immediate supervisor or higher administrative authority must pre-approve the necessity and duration of all travel, which must be supported by an agenda, in order to utilize the County Purchasing Card or receive reimbursement for travel expenses. Some departments may require multiple approvals for certain expense reports; in these instances, all approvers in the submission process are held accountable. The approver should be in a higher-level position of authority that is able to determine the appropriateness and reasonableness of expenses.

#### Commissioner & Chairman Approval

Commissioner and Chairman travel/expense reimbursements in any form are required to be reviewed and, for the efficiency of government, shall be approved by the County Manager. This approval ensure that all expenses are justified and there is no potential misappropriation of travel fund outside of the guidelines of this policy.

#### Department Head Approval

Department head travel/expense reimbursements in any form are required to have final approval from the County Manager. Travel/expense reimbursements for the County Manager or the County Clerk must be approved by the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners.

Exceptions – Constitutional Officers and Statutory employees are excluded from the requirement that their expense report must be approved by their immediate supervisor or higher administrative authority. However, processes should still be in place for their expense reports to be reviewed and approved for appropriateness and reasonableness. The Pierce County Board of Commissioners strongly encourages all Constitutional Officers and Statutory Officials to adopt this policy for both consistency of County Operations and to comply with O.C.G.A. § 36-80-24 *“Limitation on elected official’s or constitutional officer’s use of government issued purchasing or credit cards; policy development”*.

#### B. Role of the Approver

By approving travel expenses, the approver is attesting that he/she has thoroughly reviewed each transaction and the supporting documentation, and has verified that all transactions are allowable expenses. The approver is the “check” in the expense reporting process to identify potential or actual errors in expense reporting and is equally accountable for all expenditures. The approver role should be assigned to an individual who can judge the business appropriateness of each expenditure. It is recommended, but not required, that approvers have the responsibility of approving expenses for no more than 25 expense submitters.

Each transaction must be consistent with departmental budgetary and project/grant guidelines. The approver may be required to ensure the correct funding sources are charged according to departmental procedure and keeping with proper fiscal stewardship.

Should expenses not meet approval guidelines, the expense approver may deny the expense. Denied expenses will be considered a personal expense to the employee and will be processed in accordance with the policies, herein. The appropriate department approvers will deny the expense by written comment and return the expense report to the employee for correction. A reduction may be created by the approver in the traveler’s reimbursement due, create an amount due the County, or create a future payroll deduction.

Upon granting approval of expense submissions, approvers are certifying:

- Appropriateness of the expenditure and reasonableness of the amount;
- Compliance with funding regulations and County reimbursement policies;
- Completeness and accuracy of documentation.

#### C. Business Purpose Justification and Explanation Standards

In cases where a submitted expense does not conform to County Policy, or if a receipt is lost or missing, an explanation is required when submitting the expense. The individual’s immediate supervisor or higher administrative authority must approve the submitted request.

#### D. Internal Revenue Service Requirements

In order for travel reimbursements to be excluded from a traveler’s taxable income, the County’s travel policies must meet the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) requirements for and “Accountable Plan”. In general, the *County Travel Policies & Procedures* has been developed with the IRS Regulations as its primary payment framework. Accordingly:

- Reimbursements must be reasonable in amount, must be made for travel only, must be in line with actual costs incurred and must be within Policy limitations. Expenses that do not comply with Policy guidelines will be the obligation of the individual that incurred the expense.



County policy requires that travelers submit expenses substantiating the amount, date, use and business purpose of expenses, ideally within 10 days, but no later than 45 calendar days after completion of the trip or event. Expenses submitted in excess of 60 calendar days may not be reimbursed. (See Section 7.2 for further guidance.) Expenses submitted more than 60 calendar days after completion of the trip or event, if reimbursed should be included in the traveler's IRS Form W-2 as taxable income.

#### E. Documentation and Receipt Requirements

IRS requirements are met with the submission of approved expenses on manual expense forms approved by the County. The overall, specific business purpose of the trip should be clearly stated on expense submissions. Business purpose should include information such as:

- People involved
- Business topics covered
- Brief explanation of duties performed

Required receipts must be attached electronically to the expense submission.

Receipts must contain appropriate detail, including starting and ending destinations, hotel charges, and detailed item charges. A specific business purpose for the expenditure must be noted on every expense submitted. Imaged receipts are required for the following:

- Air, lodging, rental cars and rail (such as Amtrak, etc.)
- Visa/Passport fees
- Conference registration fees
- All single expenditures of \$5 or greater

### Section One: Ground Transportation and Car Rental

#### 1.1 Ground Transportation

The most cost-effective method of transportation that will accomplish the purpose of the travel should be selected. Departments should use their own discretion when determining the most cost-effective ground transportation. Among the factors to be considered should be length of travel time, employee's salary, cost of operation of a vehicle, cost and availability of common carrier services, etc. Common carrier shall be used for out-of-state travel unless it is documented that utilization of another method of travel is more cost-efficient or practical and approved in accordance with these regulations.

Travelers are responsible for knowing which type of ground transportation is the least expensive in the area. In some areas, public transportation (e.g., taxis, shuttles, or mass transit) may be the more economical alternative. In other areas, it may be more cost effective to rent a car. When renting a car, the traveler should also consider the costs of parking fees and fuel.

When traveling by air or train, travelers should use shuttle services or public transportation when such options are available and less expensive than other means of ground transportation.

#### 1.2 Car Rental

Employees travelling on County business should use a fleet vehicle, if available, unless the employee's supervisor determines and provides in writing, in advance of travel, that use of a fleet vehicle is clearly not the most efficient method of travel.

If a fleet vehicle is not available, county employees may choose between a rental vehicle or mileage reimbursement for use of their personal vehicle.

The County has mandatory statewide contracts, as negotiated by ACCG, with specified car rental vendors which must be utilized by county employees. Travelers are responsible for contacting the Finance Department for all bookings and reservations.

Approved car rental sizes are Compact, Intermediate, or Full Size. Other vehicle sizes require a business-related justification. Vans may be rented when there are more than 4 travelers.

Reimbursement will be made for reasonable fuel charges. Travelers must decline optional fuel offerings offered by the car rental vendor. Maintenance and oil changes are the responsibility of the rental company and will not be reimbursed by the County.

Rental cars should be returned with the same amount of gas that it had when it was picked up. Travelers should pay close attention to the fuel amount when they pick up the vehicle to ensure there are no overcharges for gas upon return of the rental car.

Employees traveling on County business inside the Continental U.S. in any rented motor vehicle are covered by the County's liability policy; therefore, liability coverage should be declined when renting a motor vehicle. Loss Damage and Collision Damage are also covered for vehicles rented for County business.

**NOTE:** The County liability policy is only in effect while the employee is using the rented vehicle for official County business. For this reason, personal use of the vehicle, including allowing friends or family members to ride in a County rented vehicle, is prohibited.

In the event of an accident while driving a rental vehicle, contact the Human Resources Office at (912) 449-2022, as well as the appropriate car rental vendor, for claims handling.

### 1.3 Personal Automobile

Reimbursement for business use of a personally-owned vehicle is calculated per mile, from point of departure after deduction for normal commuting mileage, based on the current reimbursement rate, which can be found on <https://www.gsa.gov/travel-resources>. The employee and supervisor must determine if mileage reimbursement should be made using Tier 1 or Tier 2 rates, as described below. Any reimbursement of mileage claims paid to an employee in excess of rates stipulated in the Policy (e.g., Tier 2 versus Tier 1 rates) must be refunded to the County or characterized as taxable compensation to the employee.

By law, the State mileage reimbursement rates follow the published General Services Administration (GSA) rates and are as follows:

- **Tier 1 Rate:** When a fleet (government owned) vehicle is not available, the employee will be reimbursed for business miles traveled based on the applicable GSA Tier 1 rates.
- **Tier 2 Rate:** If a fleet (government owned) vehicle is available, BUT a personal motor vehicle is used, the employee will be reimbursed for business miles based on the applicable GSA Tier 2 Rate.

The standard per-mile reimbursement rate includes gas, oil, repairs and maintenance, tires, insurance, registration fees, licenses, and depreciation attributable to the business miles driven. If you request reimbursement for mileage, you will not be reimbursed separately for those costs.

In addition, normal commuting miles must be deducted when calculating total mileage reimbursement. Mileage travelled by County travelers between their Residence and Primary Work Station (see Appendix C for definitions) is considered "commuting miles". Commuting costs are not reimbursable.

Exceptions:

- If travel occurs on a weekend or holiday outside of the normal work schedule, mileage is calculated from the point of departure with no reduction for normal commuting miles.
- If an employee's Primary Work Station is his/her Residence, the requirement to deduct normal commuting miles does not apply since, by definition, there are none.

Tolls and reasonable parking charges incurred while on official County business will be reimbursed, in addition to the mileage allowance. While there are no maximum limits for parking, employees are encouraged to utilize low-cost, long-term parking to minimize the cost.

While driving your personal vehicle on County business, the County provides full liability coverage and personal immunity for the employee for damages and injuries the employee may cause to others. The exception to this exists when an employee is found guilty of driving while impaired, or under the influence of prescription medications when directed to refrain from driving, or alcohol/illegal substances. The County does not provide coverage for damages to your personal vehicle. Cost of repairs to a personal vehicle, whether or not they result from the traveler's acts, are not reimbursable.

Under no circumstances will the County reimburse parking fines or moving violations.

See Appendix A for mileage reimbursement examples.

1.4 Other Transportation

The most reasonable and customary means of transportation should be used when traveling. The County will reimburse for shuttle or taxi fares (including Uber, Lyft, etc.) to and from airports and railroad stations when such service is not included in air and rail fares, and where public transportation is not practical. Taxi fares between business meetings while on travel status are reimbursable.

Section Two: Lodging

2.1 Lodging Expense

The traveler should select the least expensive option available taking into consideration proximity to the business destination and personal safety. The traveler or the travel arranger must inquire about the government rate availability, or the conference lodging rate, and select the lowest available rate. When the hotel or motel is the conference site, reimbursement will be limited to the conference rate, if available.

Lodging will only be authorized for trips out of the area that, by evidence of an agenda, will require the traveler to be away from their primary work location for a specified period of time longer than 12 hours (e.g. 7:00 AM—7:00 PM). Lodging will also be authorized for conferences, trainings, or seminars, when supported by an agenda, that will be beneficial for the performance of the traveler's primary job duties. Written pre-approval for lodging outside of these guidelines shall be obtained from the County Manager or Chairman.

Example #1: Employee A works Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM until 5:00 PM and is scheduled to be in Tifton for a training session that begins at 10:00 AM and ends at 4:00 PM. The employee will not be authorized lodging expenses since the travel time will commence during normal working hours and will not exceed 12 hours.

Example #2: Employee B is scheduled to be at a two-day conference in Jekyll Island at 9:00 AM. The employee's work schedule is 8:00 AM until 5:00 PM Monday through Friday. The employee would be

authorized one night of lodging the evening of the first conference day to attend networking opportunities, but additional lodging would not be at the traveler's personal expense.

Reasonable lodging expenses are reimbursed at actual costs. All lodging claims must be documented with receipts and must be at a business that offers lodging to the general public, such as a hotel or motel, and not a private residence.

When lodging is shared, the traveler paying for the lodging seeks reimbursement for the full expense.

Upgraded room accommodations that incur an additional charge are not allowed. A complimentary upgrade should be noted on the expense report. Mandatory resort fees are reimbursable as lodging expenses.

## 2.2 Special Discount Rates and Tax Exemptions

County government officials and employees traveling within the state on official business are *exempt* from paying the *county or municipal excise tax* on lodging ("hotel/motel" or "occupancy" tax). [OCGA 48-13-51 (H) (3)], regardless of the payment method being used. (*This exemption does not apply to travelers staying at an out-of-state hotel/motel.*) Travelers must be able to provide proper identification to document their employment as a County employee.

Additionally, as an employee traveling on official County business, the lodging is eligible for exemption from State of Georgia Sales Tax when the payment method being used is either direct bill to the agency, or a County issued credit card. Travelers should make every effort to avoid payment of sales tax when payment method is other than a personal payment method.

Travelers are required to submit a copy of the Hotel Occupancy Tax Exempt Form, which can be obtained from the County Clerk or his/her designee, upon registration at the hotel/motel. If the hotel refuses to accept the form at check-in, the traveler should attempt to resolve the issue with hotel management before checking out at the end of their stay. If the matter is not resolved by check-out time, the traveler should pay the tax. Failure of the employee to submit the Hotel Occupancy Tax Exemption Form to the hotel/motel may result in non-reimbursement of the tax to the employee.

Per the Transportation Funding Act of 2015, effective July 1, 2015 hotels in the state of Georgia will charge \$5.00 per room per night hotel tax to travelers. This tax is not exempted for County Employees.

## 2.3 Cancellation

Travelers should not book nonrefundable rates or rates that require a deposit unless required by conference lodging.

It is the traveler's or arranger's responsibility to understand the cancellation rules of the room confirmed. No-show charges and penalties will not be reimbursed when the traveler does not cancel reservations within the allotted time. Nonrefundable rates cannot be changed or cancelled; therefore, the traveler is accepting the risk of a non-reimbursable cancellation fee.

In a case where all efforts have been taken, and a fee is still charged, an explanation must be provided when submitting the traveler's expense report in order for the fee to be reimbursed.

## 2.4 Conference Lodging

Employees who stay at a hotel/motel that is holding a scheduled meeting or seminar may incur lodging expenses that exceed the rate generally considered reasonable. The higher cost may be justified to avoid excessive transportation costs between a lower cost hotel/motel and the location of the meeting.

When the conference does not have an official hotel, the traveler is required to obtain property within reasonable proximity to the conference.

### Section Three: Meals and Incidental Travel Expenses

#### 3.1 General

Generally, meals are reimbursable on a per diem basis (not actual expenses) for overnight travel outside the traveler's Primary Work Station. Per Diem expenses do not require receipts to be provided unless the County's Purchasing Card has been used to make the purchases.

Reasonable incidental travel expenses, also known as incidentals, are reimbursed separately from Per Diem Rates for In State or Out of State travel; incidental travel expenses are included in International Per Diem Rates and are not separately reimbursed. (see Appendix C).

- (A) In-state travel per diem rates includes the cost of meals, taxes and tips on meals. (Incidentals are not included.)
- (B) Out-of-state travel per diem rates include the cost of meals, taxes and tips on meals and follows the appropriate GSA per diem rates for a given geographical area. These rates, as well as a breakdown by meal, can be found on <https://www.gsa.gov/travel-resources>. (Incidentals are not included)
- (C) International per diem rates include the cost of meals, taxes, tips on meals and other travel incidental expenses (see Appendix B.) and follows the appropriate GSA per diem rates for a given geographical area. (Incidentals are included in the per diem rates.) These rates, as well as breakdown by meal, can be found on <https://www.gsa.gov/travel-resources>.

#### 3.2 Reimbursement Amount when Traveling

Employees traveling within the State of Georgia or Out of State (United States and Canada) are paid a per diem amount designed to cover the cost of meals (including taxes and tips), based on the number of meals per day for which the traveler is eligible. Employees traveling internationally are paid a per diem amount designed to cover the cost of meals (including taxes and tips) and specific non-meal travel incidentals. (Please see Appendix B for more information regarding international travel links to current per diem rates).

Employees who are provided meals during the course of travel as part of a conference fee, or when hosting or are hosted by another party while on travel status, must deduct the corresponding, applicable meal rate from their per diem reimbursement claim for each meal provided.

Meal adjustments include those provided by hotels, meetings, conferences, or any other source. If a continental breakfast, lunch, dinner, or reception is offered as part of the travel and the food/timing is sufficient to serve as a meal, the traveler must reduce the per diem by the appropriate allowance amount. If a traveler has medical restrictions and cannot eat a meal provided by any source while traveling, the traveler should make every effort to have the source facilitate his/her needs. If the source does not or cannot honor the request, the traveler is not required to deduct the applicable meal allowance from the per diem. However, the traveler must include a note or other documentation with the Travel Expense Reimbursement form documenting this information.

#### 3.3 In-State High Cost Area

Increased per diem allowances are available in certain locations designated as “high-cost areas”. The high cost areas in Georgia and the current rates for those areas are located on <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates>.

### 3.4 Meal Per Diem During OVERNIGHT Travel

#### Overnight Travel

Employees traveling overnight are generally eligible for per diem amounts designed to cover the cost of three (3) meals per day for all days on travel status other than the day of departure and the day of return.

Travelers are eligible for seventy-five percent (75%) of the total per diem rate on the first and last day of travel. For example, if the per diem rate allows a \$54 total reimbursement, \$41.00 would be allowable on a travel departure or return day ( $\$54 \times .75 = \$41$ .) As a result, the time of departure and time of return are not considerations for calculating the Meal Per Diem when associated with overnight travel.

When meals are provided to an employee in conjunction with travel events on a travel departure or return day, the full meals per diem reimbursement rate is reduced by the amount of the provided meal(s) after the 75% proration. For example, if the per diem allows a \$54 total reimbursement, and lunch was provided at no cost on a travel departure or return day, the total allowable reimbursement for that day would be \$26 [ $\$54 \times .75 = \$41$  less \$15 lunch = \$26.00]

For trips involving multiple travel destinations, base the reduction on the per diem rate in effect where the night was spent, as follows:

- Departure Day: Where you spend the night.
- Return Day: Where you spent the night before returning to your Residence or Primary Work Station.

As a reminder, the time of departure and time of return are not considerations for calculating the Meal Per Diem when associated with overnight travel.

### 3.5 Meal Per Diem During NON-OVERNIGHT Travel

Employees on County business who travel more than 50 miles from their Residence and Primary Work Station on a work assignment, AND are away for more than twelve (12) hours, may receive the total eligible per diem allowance for that day, even when there is no overnight lodging. The per diem allowance must, however, be adjusted for any meal provided to the traveler, as stated in Sec. 3.2 above.

For travel without an associated overnight stay, the per diem rate will be determined by the location of the last business stop of the date of travel.

Each Department Head (or the County Manager for Department Heads) is to determine the reasonableness of when an overnight stay is justified. Generally, travel that requires the employee to depart prior to 6:00 am to arrive at the scheduled meeting or travel that prevents the employee from returning to their home until after 8:00 pm may be authorized. For full consideration, an agenda of the training must be provided a minimum of two weeks in advance of the requested travel date(s).

## Section Four: Miscellaneous Travel Expenses

Reimbursable expenses while on official travel status include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Baggage handling services only, this does not include tips
- Business office expenses (copy services, postage, and supplies)

- Business related phone calls, faxes, and internet usage charges and fees
- Conference/Registration fees
- Costs related to passports and travel visas when necessary to accomplish the official business purpose of the trip
- Costs related to vaccinations required and/or recommended for international business travel
- Currency conversion fees
- Laundry or cleaning expenses on trips lasting seven (7) calendar days or more
- Reasonable incidental travel expenses, also known as incidentals, are reimbursed separately from Per Diem Rates for In State and Out of State travel
- Transportation costs from lodging or businesses to restaurants (domestic travel only; see Appendix B for international travel guidance.)

Non-reimbursable expenses include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Airline, car, and card membership dues and club fees
- Airline reserved/priority seating fees
- Travel upgrade fees (air, rail, car)
- Alcoholic beverages
- Bank charges for ATM withdrawals, except on international travel
- Childcare costs
- Clothing or toiletry items
- Commuting between Residence and Primary Work Station
- Country Club dues
- Expenses related to vacation or personal days taken before, during or after a business trip
- Haircuts and personal grooming
- Incidental travel expenses are included in International Per Diem Rates and are not separately reimbursed
- Laundry, cleaning, pressing costs for trips of less than seven days
- Loss damage Insurance when County contract rate vehicle is available and another rental car agency is utilized
- Loss or theft of cash advance money or airline tickets
- Loss or theft of personal funds or property
- Lost baggage
- Luggage or briefcases
- Medical expenses while traveling (*Exceptions may be made to accommodate ADA compliance; see Sec. 7.10*)
- Mini-bar charges
- Movies
- No-show/Cancellation fees or fees related to hotel late check-out (unless business or weather related)
- Personal reading materials (magazines, newspapers, etc.)
- Personal vehicle maintenance (including car washes)
- Personal entertainment
- Personal pet care
- Recreational expenses
- Rental vehicle maintenance (including car washes)
- Saunas, massages
- Shoe shines
- Souvenirs or personal gifts
- Tips covered by per diem allowances

- Traffic citations (moving violations), parking tickets, court fees and other fines
- Traffic accident insurance premiums
- TSA PreCheck application fee for airport pre-screening convenience service
- Valet services for parking, when self-parking options are available, unless there are valid security reasons

## Section Five: Reimbursement for Travel Expenses

### 5.1 General

Employees are expected to exercise good stewardship of funds when traveling on official business. Any expenditure disallowed by the County is the responsibility of the employee.

### 5.2 Expense Reimbursement Timing

Travelers should submit all expenses for reimbursement and reconciliation within 10 business days of the completion of the event or trip, but no later than 45 calendar days. However, a reimbursement request will preferably be held until an amount of at least \$10 is due.

IRS regulations state the traveler must adequately account to the employer and submit travel expense reimbursement requests within 60 days of the end of the trip. Such expenses, if submitted after 60 days, become taxable income to the traveler.

All expense reimbursement requests must be submitted as soon as possible, in conjunction with an employee's last day of employment, when applicable, but no later than 45 calendar days after the last day of employment. Outstanding requests submitted after this time-period will not be reimbursed.

### 5.3 Expense Reimbursement Submission

Employees are responsible for ensuring that expenses claimed in the travel expense report are proper, accurate, and incurred for official business. A traveler who knowingly presents a false or fraudulent claim may be subject to penalties under criminal statutes.

All employee expense reimbursements will be processed via check once all required and complete documentation has been submitted to the Finance Department. Reimbursement checks will be processed in the next check run cycle following the receipt and review of all complete documentation for validity.

### 5.4 Receipts

Travelers must always obtain receipts, except when per diem travel allowance are claimed. Not all receipts must be submitted with a travel expense report, but may be requested for verification or audit. Itemized receipts should include:

- Name and address of vendor
- Date of service
- Description of goods/service
- Amount paid for each individual item

In the absence of actual receipts, credit card slips and statements may be acceptable in lieu of actual receipts.

Travel expense reports may be selected for audit at any time and all travel receipts must be retained by the traveler for three years after the travel date, if not attached to the expense report.

Receipts are required with the travel expense report for the following expenses, regardless of the dollar amount:



- Airline fares
- Hotel expenses
- Rental car expenses
- Breakfast, lunch, or dinner meetings unless claiming a per diem
- Rail fares (Amtrak or similar rail transportation)
- Registration fees
- Visa/passport fees

No expense should be approved if a receipt is missing, unless a lost/stolen receipt form has been submitted.

#### 5.5 Personal Expenses

Reimbursement of personal expenses shall not be authorized for payment at any time. See Section 5 for a list of non-reimbursable expenses.

#### 5.6 Combining Personal Travel with County Business Travel

Employees should check with County Manager or Chairman before combining personal and business travel.

For in-state and out-of-state trips that combine personal travel with County Business travel, reimbursement may not exceed the amount it would have cost the County if the traveler did not combine personal travel with business travel. Combining County travel with personal travel does not, in and of itself, provide justification for using a private vehicle rather than a county-owned vehicle.

For out-of-state trips between points where scheduled airline service is available and where travelers are combining official County travel with a holiday, weekend trip, vacation or other personal travel, reimbursement will be based on the cost of round-trip coach airfare, lodging, and the meal per diems to which the traveler would have been entitled while traveling by air, or by the least expensive reasonable means of travel.

When combining business and personal travel that includes air travel, the air travel costs cannot exceed the cost for the business air travel cost and requires documentation and written approval by the County Manager or Chairman prior to booking the travel.

When combining personal travel and County business travel, baggage and luggage fees should be allocated, accordingly, and be reasonable under the circumstances.

Note: The employee is responsible for any additional costs incurred in booking personal travel combined with business travel. This includes additional baggage fees incurred for personal items that would not otherwise have been required for the business travel.

#### 5.7 Travelers with Physical and/or Medical Conditions

The impact of travelers with physical and/or medical conditions, while on County travel, should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Human Resources has the authority, with the County Manager and/or Chairman to provide reasonable accommodations during County travel for travelers with disabilities.

All County employees are to be afforded equal opportunity to perform travel for official County business even if the travel costs for disabled travelers will exceed what would normally be most economical to the County. For example:

- When a traveler uses a wheelchair, it may be necessary to pay for an airline ticket so the traveler can fly on a larger plane that accommodates the wheelchair
- When a traveler with a physical and/or medical condition rents a vehicle while on travel, a non-standard vehicle size may be required. When a traveler has hearing or vision impairments, there may be a cost of providing auxiliary aids and services to enable the traveler to successfully accomplish the purpose of travel.

The extra costs required to comply with ADA shall be documented and kept on file by Human Resources.

## Section Six: Policy Exceptions

### 6.1 Overview

Requests for exceptions to the Pierce County Travel Policy should be infrequent and requested in advance. The County will generally not grant exceptions to the Travel Policy when it appears that, with proper planning and reasonable effort, the additional costs could have been avoided. Repetitive requests for similar exceptions, particularly after-the-fact requests, will be carefully reviewed and, when circumstances warrant, denied.

Employees should not consider approved exceptions to be a blanket waiver of the travel regulations. Exceptions are only granted for an individual or individuals participating in a scheduled event, and are only allowable for the specified dates of the event. Employees are encouraged to request exceptions for unusual travel circumstances, as needed. Employees that deviate from the travel regulations, without receiving written authorization, may be subject to the County's Disciplinary Action Policy.

### 6.2 Procedures for Requesting Travel Exceptions

Employees requesting travel exceptions should submit their request in writing to the County Manager with as much advance notice as possible. All written requests must come from the employee's supervisor and must be submitted prior to the travel date. All written requests should include the following:

- The name(s) of the person(s) for which the exception is requested,
- An explanation of the purpose of the trip,
- An explanation of the types of expenses to be incurred, and
- The anticipated travel dates.

Note: Exceptions granted under these provisions apply only in circumstances in which an employee will incur expenses.

### 6.3 Approval/Denial of Travel Exceptions

The County Manager and/or Chairman are responsible for approving or denying all requests for travel exceptions. Written documentation will be returned to the requesting employee's supervisor indicating whether the request was approved or denied.

## Section Seven: Air Travel

### 7.1 Booking

Travelers who are combining personal travel with business travel may only do so when the personal portion does not add to any cost to the County. Travel arrangements must be made to accommodate the business duties of the traveler and not the personal preference (see Section 7 regarding reimbursement for personal travel). All travel arrangements shall be made by the Finance Department to ensure consistency and best pricing practices.

The County will pay for the airfare and/or penalty incurred for a change or cancellation of travel plans when the change or cancellation is required by the County, or is the result of other unavoidable situations approved by the Department head or designee. Travelers must state the business reason for the need to alter the flight reservation, and the total cost of the flight should be evaluated and approved as reasonable by the approver when completing the final expense report submission.

## 7.2 Lowest Logical Airfare

Travelers on County business should always select the lowest priced airfare that meets their approved, most logical itinerary and County Policy. Travelers are expected to use their best judgement to save on airfare cost, considering points of departure and destination, flight times and schedules, etc.

Travelers should use penalty or nonrefundable fares whenever feasible. These fares are typically much lower in cost. If the travel plan is subsequently cancelled, the traveler will still have an opportunity to reuse the ticket. If a refundable fare must be used, the difference in the cost of the flight should not exceed \$150.

Lower cost flights should be chosen within two hours before or after the preferred flight time. Lower cost fares that are declined should be related to the job functions of the traveler and justified with a written explanation attached to the expense reimbursement forms.

Travelers on County business may open and maintain frequent flyer/guests accounts with airline, hotels, car rental companies, and other travel suppliers. The cost of these memberships is the responsibility of the traveler and will not be reimbursed by the County. Travelers may retain promotional items, including frequent flyer miles, earned on official County travel. However, if an employee makes travel arrangements that favor a preferred airline/supplier to receive promotional items/points and this circumvents the most economical means of travel, they are in violation of this Policy.

## 7.3 Business and First-Class Tickets

Business and first-class tickets are not reimbursable for domestic flights with the exception of travel to Alaska and Hawaii. Business class is allowable for international travel when approved in advance by the County Manager or Chairman (see Appendix B).

It is not permissible to confirm a higher fare for upgrade eligibility or for personal reasons. Upgrades at the County's expense are not permitted. Upgrades may be purchased after the travel is booked, at the traveler's expense, only.

## 7.4 International Travel

Federal regulations require that U.S. carriers be used for foreign travel for trips funded by federally sponsored programs, unless a U.S. carrier is not available.

The traveler is responsible for knowing which visas and passports are needed. Associated costs and fees are reimbursable if the travel is required and the traveler does not currently possess the valid documents. Receipts must be included for reimbursement.

See Appendix B for additional guidelines and details regarding International Travel.

## 7.5 Advance Booking

Once travel dates have been confirmed, all flights should be booked at least 14 days, but no more than 30 days in advance, when practical. Flights booked within 30 days of travel help manage county cash flow and reduce the risk of potential change fees and administrative costs related to any subsequent change in travel plans.

Flights booked with less than 14 days advanced purchase are more expensive and require that a written explanation for the booking delay be provided to the County Manager.

## 7.6 Connecting Flights

Connecting flights should be chosen over nonstop flights when the connection does not add more than two hours to travel time and the connection saves \$200.00 or more. Travelers are not required to take a lower fare if a change of airline at the connection point is required.

## 7.7 Cancellations

It is the traveler's responsibility to closely examine the cancellation/exchange rules and fees before purchasing a ticket. If a trip is cancelled after a ticket has been issued, the airline reservation must be cancelled at least one hour prior to the scheduled flight.

If the ticket is refundable, the traveler should notify the responsible booking agency or airline for a refund. Any refunds received shall be provided to the County if the tickets were paid by the County or through a County maintained credit card.

## 7.8 Voids

If your trip is cancelled within 24 hours of being ticketed, most airlines will allow traveler's or agents to "void" the ticket, which will reverse the airfare charged and avoid additional airline change fees. This is not applicable to Instant Purchase Fares.

Travelers will be responsible for submitting proof of the void with their travel claim.

## 7.9 Exchanges

Unused tickets that are not used prior to their expiration lose their value. It is the traveler's responsibility to use airline credits prior to expiration. Credits for cancelled tickets should be used as soon as possible. Most airlines require tickets to be exchanged and used within one year from the original purchase date. Credits shall be used for the traveler's next trip if the airline services the destination.

## 7.10 Baggage Charges

Most airlines are now charging for checked luggage and for curbside check-in. In the event there is a charge for checking the traveler's first piece of luggage, the County will reimburse for that charge. If there is no charge for the first piece of luggage, the County will not reimburse for additional pieces of checked luggage unless an appropriate business purpose explanation is provided.

Baggage charges incurred for excess weight will not be reimbursed, unless an appropriate business purpose explanation is provided.

## 7.11 Other Expenses

Expenses for memberships in travel/airline clubs and/or daily club use are not reimbursable.

Some airlines are now charging for priority (reserved) seating. The County will not reimburse for this additional expense.

## 7.12 Private Aircraft

The use of aircraft owned, rented, or operated by a traveler on County business is strongly discouraged. If it is determined that the use of this type of aircraft is advantageous (cost-efficient and practical) to the County, written pre-approval should be obtained and an explanation must be noted in the comments section of the Expense Report. The approval should be submitted with the traveler's Expense Report. In

the comments section of the Expense Report the employee should add the following comment: "traveled by private aircraft; registration number NXXXX; mileage (as calculated from U.S. DOT website)'.

Reimbursement for the use of private aircraft is calculated per mile based on the current reimbursement rate which can be found at <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/transportation-airfare-rates-pov-rates/privately-owned-vehicle-pov-mileage-reimbursement-rates>. For calculating the mileage between airports, please visit <https://www.transtats.bts.gov/distance.asp>. For trips using airports not listed on this website, a reasonable alternative should be used, e.g., and official highway map. Airplane nautical miles (NMs) should be converted into statute miles (SMs) or regular miles when submitting a voucher using the formula (1 NM equals 1.15077945 SMs).

Lodging and meal expenses on route will not be reimbursed if the expenses are a direct result of the decision to take a personal aircraft, rather than commercial aircraft.

If a traveler opts to use a personal aircraft when use of commercial aircraft would be the most economical and advantageous for the County, the traveler will be reimbursed up to the value of the commercial airfare (lowest coach fare).

### Appendix A: Mileage Reimbursement Examples

The following are examples that depict situations in which a traveler's personal vehicle mileage as a business expense and the transportation expenses are reimbursable, versus personal commuting and the transportation expenses are not reimbursable.

#### Business Miles versus Commuting Miles

Round-trip mileage between your Residence and your Primary Work Station is a personal commuting expense and is not eligible for travel reimbursement.

Residence: The primary location (tax home base) where you personally reside.

Primary Work Station: The location a County employee regularly reports to for work. The employee's supervisor shall confer with the Human Resources Manager to determine an employee's Primary Work Station (PWS) if it cannot be easily determined. This shall be used for all applicable mileage calculations.

### Appendix B: International Travel

#### Approval; Authority

In addition to all other policies set forth in this *Pierce County Travel Policy*, the following policies must be adhered to when traveling internationally. The following approvals must be made in advance, dated and submitted with the traveler's expense report.

If the traveler is...	The, approval must be made in advance by...
A Regular County Employee	County Manager and/or Chairman on recommendation from the department head
A department head	County Manager and/or Chairman

#### Air Travel

Business and first-class tickets are not reimbursable for domestic flights with the exception of travel to Alaska and Hawaii. Business class travel is allowed for international flights.

The Fly America Act was enacted to mandate the use of U.S. flag air carriers for federally funded international travel. The Federal Travel Regulation requires international flights to be on U.S. flag air carriers whenever possible, which is accomplished when code sharing is present. Code sharing occurs when two or more airlines “code” the same flight as if it was their own. In other words, the international flight may be on a foreign air carrier’s plane, but is considered the same as one operated by an U. S. flag carrier. Compliance with the Fly America Act is satisfied when the U.S. flag air carrier’s designator code is present in the area next to the electronic ticket (passenger receipt).

*What does this mean to you?* If you are scheduling international travel that is federally funded, you must ensure that all flights, where possible, are scheduled on U.S. flag air carriers or on foreign air carriers that code share with a U.S. flag air carrier.

#### Meals & Incidental Reimbursement

For employees travelling internationally, meals, taxes, tips on meals, and other travel incidentals are included in the Per Diem Rate and are based upon GSA tables.

Incidental travel expenses included in the per diem rate for international travel include: fees and tips given to porters, bell hops, hotel housekeeping, stewards/stewardesses, and hotel staff.

Ground transportation costs (e.g. taxi, shuttle) to and from airports and railroad stations, and between meetings, as well as the Reimbursable Miscellaneous Expenses references in Section 5, are not included in the per diem, and are reimbursed separately.

Travelers are eligible for 75 percent of the total per diem rate on the first and last day of international travel. For a complete listing of the GSA per diem tables, visit the GSA per diem website.

#### Other International Travel Expenses

With proper documentation, justification, and approval, the County will reimburse:

- Commission for currency conversion or traveler checks, when deemed necessary;
- Bank charges for business related international ATM withdrawals;
- Service of guides, interpreters, packers, or drivers, when deemed necessary and reasonable;
- Fees for the issuance of passport, visas, and/or affidavits, when required for business international travel;
- Costs related to vaccinations and inoculations required and/or recommended for international business travel.

#### Foreign Currency Conversion

When a traveler incurs expenses in a foreign currency each expense should be converted to United States dollars (USD). The following methods are acceptable:

- A. Credit card statement: If the expenses are charged, the credit card company will convert them to USD.
- B. Conversion of charges via the internet for *dates of travel*. An acceptable site is: [Oanda Converter](#) – this site allows for built in exchange fees and specific travel dates.
- C. Currency rate conversion based on actual cash exchange. Use the following formula:

$$F \times C = U$$

F = amount of charges in foreign currency

C = conversion factor (USD’s per unit of foreign currency)

U = equivalent expenses in US dollars

Example:

F = \$100 of charges in Canadian Dollars

C = \$.68 USD's per Canadian Dollar

U = \$100 CD x \$.68 USD/CD = \$68 USD

### Appendix C: Definitions

ACCOUNTABILITY -- employees are responsible for accounting for their travel expenses accurately. All staff will ensure travel is conducted in the most efficient and cost-effective manner and will only occur when necessary.

AGENCY -- any department, board, commission, or other organizational unit of government that is subject to these countywide travel policies.

COMMON CARRIER—private-sector supplier of air, rail or bus transportation.

COMMERCIAL TRANSPORTATION -- any entity that offers transportation of people or goods to the public for pay.

COMMUTING MILES -- the miles travelled on a regular (usually daily) basis from an employee's residence to the location most frequently associated with work performed outside that residence (Primary Work Station). This should be a standard distance that does not change from one reimbursement request to the next.

CONTINUOUS TRAVEL -- a traveler is required to be away from his/her Residence and Primary Work Station for any four or more days per week.

COUNTY OR MUNICIPAL EXCISE TAX -- the local taxes charges by hotel/motels for lodging, also referred to as "hotel/motel" or "occupancy" tax. This tax is separate from the state sales tax.

EMPLOYEE TRAVEL EXPENSE STATEMENT -- the accounting document used as the basis to reimburse a County employee for travel expenses incurred while on official business.

FLEET (GOVERNMENT OWNED) VEHICLES -- a county owned vehicle.

GUEST TRAVELER – travelers who are not employed by Pierce County.

HIGH COST AREA – any area within Georgia within which meals expenses may be reimbursed at a higher amount than the limits that otherwise apply to travel within Georgia. High cost areas are those counties which are assigned higher than standard "CONUS" rates for meals by the U.S. General Services Administration, and are identified in a separate Meal Allowance Schedule document issued by SAO and OPB.

INCIDENTAL TRAVEL EXPENSES or INCIDENTALS – actual incidental expenses such as fees and tips given to porters, baggage carriers, bellhops, hotel housekeeping, stewards and stewardesses, and hotel staff. See IRS Publication 453 for further definition and guidance.

LODGING – a hotel, motel, inn, apartment, or similar entity that furnishes lodging to the public for pay.

MISCELLANEOUS TRAVEL EXPENSE – a necessary and reasonable expense incurred by a County employee while traveling on official business. The term does not apply to meals, lodging, mileage, or transportation costs.

OUT OF STATE TRAVEL – an employee travels overnight from a point of origin within Georgia to a point of destination within another state and then returns, Out-of-state travel rates are used for all travel with a destination outside the state of Georgia.

PERSONAL MOTOR VEHICLE – a motor vehicle that is owned or leased for personal use by an employee. Personal motor vehicles include automobiles, aircraft, and motorcycles.

PER DIEM ALLOWANCE -- the maximum food allowance for which employees can be reimbursed per day. The amount is not a reimbursement of actual expenses incurred. Receipts are not required for meal per diem amounts.

POINT OF DEPARTURE – the beginning location used to calculate county-use miles traveled in a motor vehicle. Start time is defined as the point of direct departure (from Residence or Primary Work Station) to the alternate work site, and ending time is the point of direct return to his/her Residence or Primary Work Station.

PRIMARY WORK STATION—the location a County employee regularly reports to for work.

COUNTY FUND SOURCES – all revenue types for Pierce County.

TRAVEL ADVANCE – any payment to an employee for travel expenses made prior to the time that expenses will be incurred for a scheduled, future trip.

TRAVEL ADVANCE AUTHORIZATION FORM – the form used to document approval of cash advances by a department head or his designee and to document receipt of cash advance, via check, by the employee.

TRAVEL EXCEPTION – written authorization for travel reimbursement of expenses generally not allowable under the Pierce County Travel Regulations.

TRAVEL EXPENSES – reimbursable meal, lodging, mileage, transportation, parking, and miscellaneous expenses related to official County business travel.

TRAVEL STATUS – an individual is working away from his/her Primary Work Station on official County business. Start time is defined as the point of direct departure (from Residence or Primary Work Station) to the alternate work site, and ending time is the point of direct return to his/her Residence or Primary Work Station.

**Commissioner Randy Dixon made a motion to approve the above travel policy to be effective January 7, 2020. Commissioner Harold Rozier seconded the motion, all voted aye. Motion approved.**

**14. Reschedule April 7, 2020 meeting to April 14, 2020 due to schedule conflicts.**



Commissioner Harold Rozier made a motion to reschedule the April 7, 2020 meeting to April 14, 2020. Commissioner David Lowman seconded the motion, all voted aye. Motion approved.

An audience member asked for an update on the city/county project in the Session Hill Community. Mr. Rubenbauer stated that the Cherry St/ Marshall Dr and other streets in the community are scheduled in Band 1 of the TIA projects that was being delayed while the city was completing some sewer work in the area. Mr. Rubenbauer stated that the project has to be completed in a specific time frame because it is part of the TIA projects. Commissioner Dixon asked that an update on this project status be shared with the Commission.

Chairman Bennett adjourned the meeting at 6:51 PM.