

**Jasper County Board of Commissioners**  
**July 12, 2024**  
**Called Meeting Minutes**  
**9:00 a.m.**

Chairman Bruce Henry called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.

Commissioners Present: Bruce Henry, Chairman; Steven Ledford, Vice Chair; Don Jernigan by phone; Sheila Pounds and Asher Gray

Staff: Mike Benton, County Manager, Sheila Belcher, Clerk- Administrative Services Director, Larissa Ruark, Chief Accounting Officer, Doug Attaway- Planning and Zoning Director,

**Pledge of Allegiance:**

**Invocation:** Commissioner Ledford, district 5

**Agenda Approval:** Commissioner Ledford motioned to approve the agenda. Commissioner Gray seconded, motion passed unanimously.

**Consent Agenda:** None

**Public Hearings:** None

**Presentation/Delegations:** None

**Citizen Comments:**

**Rob Alexander** asked why public meetings are being held at 9 a.m. on a Friday when most working-class people can't attend the meetings. Chairman Henry said that called meetings and work sessions are typically held on Monday mornings because all the commissioners are usually available, and those meetings tend to run long. Mr. Alexander said that makes it hard for the working class to make it to the meetings and he feels that the meetings should be held when citizens are available especially if the commissioners continue to raise taxes. Mr. Alexander then asked if setting up a SPLOST to fund the hospital and ambulance services was possible. Commissioner Ledford said it would be difficult to set up a SPLOST because they just renewed the SPLOST and it runs for six years before it can be renewed again.

**County Commissioner Items & Updates:**

Commissioner Pounds: None

Chairman Henry: None

Commissioner Jernigan: None

Commissioner Gray: None

Commissioner Ledford: None

1. **Adopt Board of Education Millage Rate for 2024 Tax Billing**: Chairman Henry said the Board of Education recommended levying a millage rate of 13.250 taking a partial rollback. This would be an increased tax amount of 2.78% over 2023. Commissioner Ledford motioned to adopt resolution # 2024.07.12A. Commissioner Gray seconded, motion passed unanimously.
  
2. **Adopt Countywide M&O Millage Rate for 2024 Tax Billing**: Chairman Henry said the final rollback for 2024 for the Board of Commissioner County Wide is 9.999. Commissioner Jernigan said he feels the flat rate fees are a disservice to the citizens of Jasper County. He said essentially what has been done is two-thirds of the citizens have had their taxes increased while a third received a tax cut. Commissioner Jernigan said he feels the commissioners should just this one time use money from the fund balance to pay for the ambulance and the hospital and add it back into the millage rate next year. He said the flat rate is an added burden for lower-income citizens and it's wrong. He said some businesses had carried some of that burden and now benefit from the flat rate while some citizens will struggle to pay the extra fees. Commissioner Gray said Commissioner Jernigan voted yes for the hospital and no for the ambulance and now he wants to change both. Commissioner Jernigan admitted that he did vote yes for the hospital but said he was upset about adding additional burdens on citizens and wasn't thinking clearly when he voted. Commissioner Gray said it was a forty to fifty-dollar increase not hundreds or thousands. Chairman Henry said the total increase for both was approximately two dollars a week. Commissioner Gray said some of the same lower-income citizens Commissioner Jernigan is referring to have televisions in their homes and \$1000 cell phones in their pockets. He said he could get behind finding funds for the ambulance but not the hospital because it is not a new item. Commissioner Gray said he stated previously that he wanted the flat rate for the Fire/EMS to be added to the millage rate next year. He said the county needed the third ambulance and something had to be done this year to make that happen. Commissioner Ledford said to Commissioner Jernigan you voted yes for the hospital flat rate fees. He said the hospital funding started in the 90s and was supposed to be temporary. Commissioner Ledford said he is not sure why the county continues to support the hospital. Commissioner Jernigan said all he is asking is to use the fund balance this one time to pay the fees and add items into the millage rate next year. He said right now there is plenty of money in the fund balance to cover the fees this one time. County Manager Mike Benton said the county does have money in

the fund balance if they choose to use those funds. He said the county's goal is to have fifty percent of its yearly budget in the account and not less than forty-five percent unless major issues occur. Mr. Benton said it would not be a good idea to dip into the fund balance too far or too many times. He said using too much could result in needing to cut the budget the following year or possibly needing to take out a loan to cover expenses. He agreed with Commissioner Gray that the hospital tax is not new so maybe just use the fund balance for the ambulance to keep from using so much when there are other expenses to consider. Commissioner Gray said he would only be in favor of covering the ambulance because it is a new item. Commissioner Gray asked how to add a citizen survey or vote to the ballot for the November election. Chairman Henry said a citizen vote is a much longer process and they would not have time to get that ready for the ballot. Mr. Benton said he believes they still have time to add a citizen survey question if they start the process immediately. Commissioner Gray would like to add a survey and base the hospital tax on what the majority of citizens say. He said that if the majority doesn't want to fund the hospital then the funding should stop and the citizens who wish to continue can make a personal donation each year. Chairman Henry said they would need to add two questions. He said the first being Should the county continue to fund the hospital. The second question should be how should the hospital fees be collected millage rate or flat rate? Commissioner Gray motioned to adopt resolution 2024.07.12B authorizing the Jasper County Tax Commissioner to levy a county-wide M&O rate of 9.999 for the 2024 tax billing. Commissioner Ledford seconded, motion passed unanimously. Commissioner Ledford motioned to add hospital tax survey questions to the 2024 election ballot. Commissioner Gray seconded, motion passed unanimously. Chairman Henry recommended completing the expenditure request before deciding on Commissioner Jernigan's request to cover the fees for the ambulance and hospital.

3. **Capital Expenditures Request – Human Resources**: HR Director Sheila Jefferson presented a request for seven time clocks and one hundred time cards. She said that three timeclocks would be for Fire/EMS, one for the Senior Center, one for the Recreation Department, one for Public Works, and one for Animal Control. Ms. Jefferson said employees at the courthouse would not need a time clock because they all have computers they can use to clock in. Ms. Jefferson said the total cost would be \$5375. Commissioner Jernigan asked if employees could use their cell phones to clock in and out. Ms. Jefferson said that is an option but not all employees have a county phone and that would mean asking them to download the app to their personal phone. She said it also opens the door for other issues she would prefer to avoid. She said this is a new process and she cannot give a definite time frame of when it will be up and running but she is just waiting for the commissioner's approval to get it started. Commissioner Ledford motioned to approve the request for seven time clocks and one hundred time cards in the amount of \$5375 using the fund balance. Commissioner Gray seconded, motion passed unanimously.
4. **Capital Expenditures Request – Recreation Park**: Assistant Recreation Director Adrian Campbell presented a request for six new soccer goals. He said what they are currently using is not regulation size and the total cost for the new goals would be

\$9712. Commissioner Gray asked how many children are presently signed up for soccer or signed up last year. Mr. Campbell said he did not have those numbers but more played soccer than football last year. Commissioner Gray motioned to approve the purchase request for six new soccer goals for \$9712 using the fund balance. Commissioner Ledford seconded, motion passed unanimously. Mr. Campbell said his second request is for a new truck for the Recreation department. He said their current truck has several issues and only seats two people. Mr. Campbell said there are certain things they need a truck to do. He said there are times when they must travel for games or training and someone has to use their personal vehicle or not attend those events. He said there are times when they might also be required to be in different locations for games or meetings. County Manager Mike Benton suggested an additional county vehicle as a compromise for the commissioners if they were against additional departmental vehicles at this time. He said it could be for all county employees who might need to travel out of town for county business. He said he is not in favor of employees using personal vehicles if it is for work-related travel. Chairman Henry said a better compromise would be to share a vehicle the county already owns. Commissioner Ledford motioned to table the purchase of a new truck until the August meeting. Commissioner Gray seconded, motion passed unanimously.

5. **Capital Expenditures Request – Sheriff’s Office:** Sheriff Donnie Pope was unable to attend the meeting, but he sent a detailed email explaining the need for four new fully equipped patrol units. Each unit costs \$70,800 for a total of \$283,200. Chairman Henry said the county has been purchasing four new units a year for the past ten years. He asked Officer Cain Bentley how many deputies were on duty per shift. Officer Bentley said on average four deputies and they have four shifts. Commissioner Gray said due to the nature of the job patrol cars are driven a lot harder than regular county vehicles. He said normally if a patrol unit reaches 140,000 miles it is ragged out. Chairman Henry agreed that officers need safe vehicles to do their jobs. He said safety takes priority over wants because what they have is old or beat up. Commissioner Gray motioned to approve the purchase of four new fully equipped patrol units. Commissioner Jernigan seconded. Chairman Henry said he agreed but would like to have a discussion. He said he would like an updated inventory list of vehicles for the Sheriff’s Department. He also wants an update on a vehicle is involved in an accident. Commissioner Gray said every accident isn’t necessary just total losses. Chairman Henry and Commissioner Ledford agreed it should be all accidents because it affects the county’s insurance pricing. Commissioner Pounds said she had to excuse herself from the meeting because she was heading to a conference, but her vote was in favor of the purchase. Chairman Henry called for a vote motion passed unanimously.
  
6. **Capital Expenditures Request – Public Works:** Public Works Director Michael Walsh presented a request for a new 2024 F150 SuperCab XL 4X4. Mr. Walsh had a quote for \$43,146 but pricing has possibly changed. Chairman Henry said if the

purchase is approved he would like an updated vehicle inventory list. Commissioner Ledford motioned to approve the purchase of a new 2024 F150 SuperCab XL 4X4 not to exceed \$45,000. Commissioner Jernigan seconded, motion passed unanimously. Mr. Walsh requested a 2025 Mack Tandem Axle Dump Truck. He said this would be to replace the 2006 Mack Truck they are currently using. Mr. Walsh said the 2006 Mack is costing between \$15,000 and \$20,000 a year in repairs. He said they have replaced just about everything except the transmission. He said the trucks are a year out so getting a guaranteed bid is not an option because prices may change by the time the truck is ready for pick up. He said this is the case with each manufacturer he checked with. Chairman Henry said he feels like it is a necessity, but he is unsure of how much to approve. Commissioner Ledford motioned to approve the order of a 2025 Mack Tandem Axle Dump Truck in the amount of \$208,000. Commissioner Jernigan seconded, motion passed unanimously. Mr. Walsh requested a 7'X20' Flatbed Skid Steer Trailer for \$5600. He said the trailers they have are too big and require the use of bigger trucks which is an extra fuel cost. Chairman Henry said he liked that Mr. Walsh used local trailer manufacturers to get bids. Commissioner Ledford said he believes this is a need but is concerned about the size of the axel. He asked Mr. Walsh to verify the Gross Vehicle weight is correct for the equipment. Commissioner Ledford motioned to approve the purchase of a 7'x20' Flatbed Skid Steer trailer in the amount of \$5600. Commissioner Jernigan seconded, motion passed unanimously.

7. **Capital Expenditures Request – Fire Rescue:** Fire Chief Chris Finch presented a request for the Med Unit to total \$ 398,369. The unit would include a new ambulance for \$330,000, a new stretcher and loading system for \$50,000, a new Demo Lucas Chest Compression System for \$10,225, a new stair chair for \$4844, and a video laryngoscope for \$3510. Chief Finch said he would like motions for ambulance and equipment to be separate. He said the lead time for a new unit is December 2025. He said he plans to put the new unit in the area with the most calls and move the older unit with high mileage to a slower area. Commissioner Jernigan motioned to approve to put a new ambulance out for bid. Commissioner Gray seconded the motion. Chief Finch asked if they were looking for a formal bid or an open quote. Chairman Henry said both to see where they get the best price. Chairman Henry called for a vote motion passed unanimously. Chief Finch gave a breakdown of the equipment needed and explained what each item is used for. Chairman Henry asked if it would be possible to use equipment from a backup unit. Chief Finch said the new units required new equipment and it's not possible to pull equipment from an older unit. He said keeping extra is essential because if equipment required to be on the ambulance breaks the unit cannot be operated as an ambulance until it is replaced. He said it is also used during special county events. Commissioner Gray motioned to approve the purchase of equipment needed for the new ambulance. Commissioner Jernigan seconded, motion passed unanimously. Chief Finch requested a new 3000-gallon Super Tanker. He said he had two 1994 tanker trucks that were old Coca-Cola trucks repurposed. He said they were worn out when the county got them. He said they are unreliable and expensive to maintain, due to their age it is difficult to find parts so there is always a long turnaround time for repairs. Chief Finch said the pump on one of the tankers is most likely shot. He gave an estimated cost for the tank truck of


\$443,717. Commissioner Gray said that the commissioners approved the new fire station so now they must outfit it with the necessary trucks and equipment. He said that with proper maintenance and care hopefully, this truck will last for 30 years as well. Commissioner Gray motioned to approve the purchase of a new 3000 Gallon Tanker Truck in the amount of \$443,717. Commissioner Ledford seconded, motion passed unanimously. Chief Finch requested new extrication equipment. He said eight years ago Newton County donated extrication equipment when they purchased new. The donated equipment was already twenty years old at that time. Chief Finch explained what each piece of equipment was and why it is necessary. Commissioner Gray motioned to approve the purchase of extrication equipment. Commissioner Ledford seconded, motion passed unanimously. Chief Finch requested new Turn Out Gear. He said the turn out gear has a ten-year warranty and needs to be replaced for safety reasons. He said he dates all his gear, so he knows exactly when it is time to replace it. He said he is requesting what must be replaced or purchased for a new fire station and one extra set for replacement needs or an additional volunteer. Chief Finch requested eighteen complete sets, thirteen sets of boots, eleven new helmets, seventeen new pairs of gloves, and twenty new hoods for an estimated \$62,916. Chairman Henry said he would like a breakdown of items for the new fire station and the cost for just those items. Commissioner Gray motioned to approve the purchase of new Turn Out Gear as listed by Chief Finch. Commissioner Ledford seconded, motion passed unanimously. Chief Finch discussed the building for the new fire station he said that the new trucks will not fit as the building is. He said he knows the building will need a new roll-up door, extended pad, and the parking lot paved. Commissioners discussed the possible cost of renovations or possibly a new building. Mr. Benton asked Chief Finance Director Larissa Ruark for a fund balance estimate after approved or possible approved purchases. Ms. Ruark said the estimated total after everything discussed including covering the Fire/EMS fee for 2024 would be \$6.7 million. Commissioner Jernigan motioned to approve the use of fund balance for a one-time payment to cover the cost of Fire/EMS fees for 2024. Commissioner Ledford seconded, motion passed three to one Chairman Henry opposed.

**County Attorney Items:** None

**County Manager Update:** None

**Executive Session:** None

**Adjourn:** Commissioner Gray motioned to adjourn at 12:07 p.m. Commissioner Ledford seconded, motion passed unanimously.

  
Bruce Henry, Chairman

  
Sheila Belcher, Clerk