

Jasper County Board of Commissioners
June 14, 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 Pounds District 1

Agenda Approval: Commissioner Ledford motioned to approve. Commissioner Pounds seconded the motion passed unanimously.

Consent Agenda: None

Public Hearings: None

Presentation/Delegations: None

Citizen Comments:

Randy Parker spoke against taking funds from the hospital. He said he had an LDL heart attack in 2020 and the hospital staff saved his life. Mr. Parker said he would be very disappointed if the commissioner decided to remove funding from the hospital.

Susan Holmes spoke against taking funds from the hospital. She said the hospital saved her life. She said that the hospital is vital to our community.

Sheila Collins spoke against taking funds from the hospital. She said that it is important that we have a local hospital.

Mark Logan said the commissioner needs to change how the prioritize budget spending. He said the hospital should be self-sufficient and the county should not be funding it unless there is money left over in the budget. He said the commissioners should be considering a fourth ambulance not a third. He asked if they were going to wait for someone to die before they did something to fix the situation. He said we don't have a money problem we have a spending problem.

Mary Lou Jordan spoke against taking funds from the hospital. She said that taking funds would have a domino effect on the retreat the doctor's office and the therapist. She said that the staff is always professional and helpful and provides needed services. She asked that the commissioners please continue to support the hospital.

James Belcher spoke against taking funds from the hospital. He said losing the hospital could cause an increase in calls for an ambulance. He asked the commissioner to find another way to fund a third ambulance.

Mary Patrick said the commissioners should have given more information about their intentions. She said providing all the facts could have helped avoid some of the upset in the community. Mrs. Patrick said that what the county gives to the hospital will not defund them. She said that it is important for the county to have a third ambulance for the north side of the. She suggested adding a part-time EMS and splitting the funds between EMS and the hospital.

County Commissioner Items & Updates:

Commissioner Pounds: Commissioner Pounds said she is against taking funds from the hospital. She said they saved her father's life. She said there are other ways to get funding for a third ambulance.

Chairman Henry: Chairman Henry said the Board of Commissioners never discussed closing the hospital just possibly using those funds for EMS. He said he was glad people were showing up but hated that it was due to misinformation.

Commissioner Jernigan: None

Commissioner Gray: Commissioner Gray said there was a large crowd for this meeting and he is always saying citizens need to get more involved and attend meetings. He said that there was a lot of miscommunication with the funding for the hospital. He said all non-profits were asked to show what funding was used for. He said that he does not believe the County should be giving money to non-profit organizations at all. He said we need to be proactive, not reactive. He said there are essential and non-essential organizations and the focus needs to be the essential first.

Commissioner Ledford: None

Business Items:

Item 1: Jasper Memorial Hospital Ad Valorem Tax Millage Rate Justification

Robert Cumbie presented statistics and the number of visits. He said they have 165 employees most live and spend money in our community. He said they provide care for the jail at a discounted rate. He said they give the county a good rate for drug screening. They have provided free physicals for students. Mr. Cumbie said most of the money from the county is used for ER services but all is used for the hospital. He said the improvements to the hospital were possible because of COVID funds. Commissioner Jernigan asked if more patients were transported to Jasper Memorial would that help provide funding. Robert said it was possible. Commissioner Jernigan said more patients should be transported to Jasper Memorial. Commissioner Ledford said a work session needs to be scheduled for discussion with Chief Finch and Robert Cumbie. Commissioner Jernigan Motioned to collect a .571 millage rate for Jasper Memorial Hospital. Commissioner Ledford seconded, motion passed unanimously.

Item 2: Adopt Countywide M&O Millage Rate for 2024 Tax Billing: Commissioner Ledford motioned to accept rollback millage rate of 9.999 Commissioner Pounds seconded, motion passed unanimously.

Item 3: Adopt General Fund Expenditures Budget for FY 2025: Commissioner Ledford motioned to adopt the Budget for FY 2025 of \$14,789,706. Commissioner Gray seconded, motion passed unanimously.

Item 4: Adopt Solid Waste Curbside Fee for 2024 Tax Billing: Waste Management has increased its prices by 5.3% raising them from \$195 to \$205.33 per cart per year. Commissioner Ledford said he would like to have a cost study done for convenience centers throughout the county. Commissioner

Gray said that he would like to leave it up to the citizens to choose their trash service. The county has a three-year contract and is going into the second year of that contract.

Commissioner Gray motioned to approve a curbside fee of \$205.33. Commissioner Ledford seconded, motion passed unanimously.

Item 5: Adopt Special District Fire Protection Fee for 2024 Tax Billing: County Manager Mike Benton explained.

Commissioner Ledford motioned to table the item until we have more information. Commissioner Gray seconded the motion, passed unanimously.

Item 6: Countywide Special District Fire and EMS Tax: Chairman Henry stated that the operating cost for a third fire station would be \$535,355 and a capital outlay total of \$401,069.

Commissioner Gray stated that he would like to see us be proactive instead of reactive. He would like a discussion of a fourth staffed station.

Chief Chris Finch stated that one thing that many people forget is that all of his staff is cross-trained. They serve as firefighters and EMT. He stated that if a fourth station is added it would need to be placed further out in the county.

Mr. Benton stated that the millage rate would need to stay separate from the rollback.

Chairman Henry stated that he's not sure how he feels about jumping from two to four stations at once.

Chief Finch gave some statistics on the call history of his department. He gave his reasoning for not taking patients to Jasper Memorial.

Commissioner Ledford motioned to advertise a .700 millage rate for the Countywide Special District Fire and EMS. Commissioner Gray seconded the motion, passed unanimously.


County Attorney Items: None

County Manager Update:

Executive Session: None

Adjourn: Commissioner Gray motioned to adjourn the meeting at 11:10 a.m.


Bruce Henry, Chairman


Sheila Jefferson, Clerk