

### **Citizen Comments:**

**James Belcher** thanked the Commissioners for the shelters built by the County at Sands Drive Park. Mr. Belcher requested that the county provide picnic tables at Sands Drive Park. He said we do not have a county park but the city parks are in the county. Mr. Belcher said it is a lot cheaper to help build up city parks versus building a county park.

**Andrea Gray** is the attorney for the JDA, she said that she would be standing in for Steve Jordan because he was on vacation. She said she was asked by the JDA to convey the message that they appreciate their long-standing partnership with Jasper County. She said the JDA is very excited about the investment return the county has received. Mrs. Gray said that the JDA started in 1999 with a ten-million-dollar investment purchasing 1600 acres which is now Stanton Springs. That investment has a year-to-date return of forty million dollars. Mrs. Gray said that the JDA expects many more millions in the future.

**Mary Patrick** said she was glad to have Mrs. Gray at the meeting because she has questions she is hoping that she might be able to answer. She asked why the JDA is withholding 9.7 million dollars and planning to increase that amount by 6 million dollars according to their profit in their new budget proposal. She also asked why they needed \$25,000 for a memorial garden. Mrs. Patrick said that the JDA shows they expect to get 4.5 million dollars in Pilot payments but she believes they have received 6 million this year. She said she would like to know why the counties will only receive 2 million dollars of that money. Mrs. Patrick said she is hoping the JDA does not intend to continue to expand. She said the original plan was to develop just the 1600 acres. She said that the Rivian deal was a mess and in essence, the JDA withheld 23 million dollars from the counties to purchase that land. Mrs. Patrick said that the city is once again asking for money from the county. She said that she would like to know what the city contributes to the Chamber of Commerce. She has a copy of the city budget and she doesn't see where they contribute anything to them. She said the city increased their park budget by \$30,000 but the county paid for improvements to Sands Drive Park. She said the county can't afford a new code enforcement officer because we are paying for things that are not our responsibility.

**Dan Born** spoke about the backlog for Public Works. He said that he appreciates all that Public Works does with the employees and equipment they have. He said that he has seen several improvements in the past few years. He asked the Commissioners to look at the county backlog and keep it in mind when they go over the next county budget. He said there are things that we are behind on that require different equipment and more employees for Public Works. Mr. Born also said there is often discussion about improvements being made in heavily populated areas of the county. He said while he understands the decision to fix those areas first and that it takes time to get the project done he doesn't want the Commissioners to forget the less populated areas. He said citizens in those areas are taxpayers as well and they need roads and other improvements also.

### **County Commissioner Items & Updates:**

**Commissioner Ledford:** None

**Commissioner Gray:** None

**Commissioner Jernigan:** None

**Commissioner Pounds:** None

**Chairman Henry:** Chairman Henry encouraged citizens to attend the Shady Dale Rodeo. He said that it was one of the top five outdoor rodeos in the state. He said he was sure those who attended would have a good time.

### **Business Items:**

**Item 1: Memorandum of Understanding – Monticello-Jasper County Chamber of Commerce:**

Jackie Garland was in attendance to represent the Monticello-Jasper County Chamber of Commerce. Chairman Henry said this has been in the works for a while. County Manager Mike Benton said that he did have the County attorney review it and everything looks good legally. Commissioner Gray

asked if they have a MOU with the City of Monticello and if Mrs. Garland had a funding amount that the city contributes. Mrs. Garland said they do have a center as well as utilities. Commissioner Gray asked if she had an idea of what it would cost to lease that location. Mrs. Garland said she did not but could get that information. Commissioner Gray said that things just seem to keep coming up between the city and the county where the county seems to be providing the bulk of the funding. He said he was just trying to make sure everyone was on the same page.

Commissioner Jernigan motioned for Chairman Henry to sign the Memorandum of Understanding. Commissioner Ledford seconded the motion, passed unanimously.

**Item 2: FY 2025 Employee Health Insurance Program:** County Employee Health Benefits presentation was given by Kelly Fox. The county currently has Assured Benefits Administrators (ABA) but due to high rate increases Mr. Fox suggested going with Anthem. He said they are offering a 2.25% discount on medical for a bundle package that would include medical, dental, vision, and basic life. There is a total annual increase of \$844 for the basic life insurance that the county pays for each full-time employee. Mr. Fox said he has also approved to reduce the monthly commission rates from \$40 to \$35 which will also save the county an estimated \$6000 a year.

Chairman Henry said before they make a motion on approving this insurance program he wanted to be very clear that the Commissioners had already gone over all the information Mr. Fox was presenting in detail during a previous work session.

Commissioner Ledford motioned to approve and move forward with Anthem. Commissioner Pounds seconded, motion passed unanimously.

**Item 3: Board of Elections and Registrations Formation – Senate Bill 212:** The board of Commissioners is required by the state to assemble a board of 3-5 members to hire an elections supervisor. Commissioner Gray recommended starting with three members. He said it is hard enough to get citizens to apply for boards as it is he believes it best to start with the minimum and increase the number if needed.

Commissioner Ledford agreed with Commissioner Gray saying if we could get three members in place by the November election they would know by January if additional members are needed.

Probate Judge Andrea Brown came forward to say she wants the Commissioner to work very hard to have equal representation on the board. She said she understands they can't force people to apply but equal party representation is very important. She said they must ensure that the election process in Jasper County continues to operate as equally and fair as possible. She said that our county has never had an issue and she would like to see the election process continue to be transparent and never be questioned. Judge Brown said she will be available to help through the transition process, but she wants to encourage them to have a board in place before the November elections as it is important for members to see the entire process. She said that she feels this election will be very contentious and she is expecting to have many poll workers. Judge Brown suggested starting with three members and adding more if needed. She said three opinions are easier to deal with than five.

Commissioner Ledford agreed saying he wants representation from both sides and transparency. Commissioner Ledford then told Mr. Belcher and Mrs. Patrick he did not want them on the board. He said he wants their opinions and someone to represent their political parties but as leaders for their party, he doesn't feel like they should be on the Board of Elections and Registrations Formation.

Commissioner Ledford motioned to advertise to and three-member board. Commissioner Gray seconded the motion passed unanimously.

**Item 4: Senior Center Grading and Drainage Project Proposal:** Commissioner Jernigan motioned to table due to insufficient information. Commissioner Ledford seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

**Item 5: Joint Development Authority FY 2025 Budget Review:** Attorney Andrea Gray represented the JDA. County Manager Mike Benton said that the county missed the objection timeline by two days and asked if the JDA would still consider the objections the county had. Mrs. Gray said she would have to defer to the board, but she would relay the concerns the county had with the JDA.

Commissioner Gray asked why the report shows a total income of 4.8 million dollars but only 2 million dollars is going back to the counties. Mrs. Gray responded by saying that the 2 million is a conservative estimate, so they can amend their budget as they go along. She said there are a lot of unknowns right now so they are keeping more reserve funds than they expect to in the future. She said that the JDA has also taken ownership of the four-lane frontage road that GDOT just built so they now have financial responsibilities for road maintenance, insurance, and future paving responsibilities. She said they are gathering cost information and in the future, the reserve fund would be less because they will know what to expect.

Commissioner Gray said the million dollars in litigation expenses is outrageous and he wants to know why they expect litigation fees to be so high. Mrs. Gray said the JDA spent 1.4 million dollars on litigation for 2022 and 2023. The Anti-Rivian group filed nine different lawsuits against the JDA. Outside counsel was needed including two law firms and lawyers hired by the state of Georgia. She said they hope to never have a situation like that again but there is no way to know so they must be prepared.

Commissioner Gray said that he thinks the next litigation will be against Rivian for not upholding their end of the deal. Mrs. Gray said they have until September 23<sup>rd</sup> to make good on their commitment to Georgia. Commissioner Gray said that withholding a million dollars from the counties is outrageous. He said he understands the need to prepare in case of another lawsuit but if deals were not made being shady they would not need to sock away a million dollars. Mrs. Gray responded by saying that if frivolous lawsuits had not been filed they would not need to sock away a million dollars. Commissioner Gray said he did not feel like the lawsuits were frivolous. Mrs. Gray said Judges have thought otherwise. Commissioner Gray said he would too if he was trying to get appointed to something. Commissioner Gray then asked why they needed \$60,000 for public relations. Mrs. Gray stated the JDA has no employees or staff, so they need help with public relations because of the magnitude of the project and the misinformation being spread on various anti-Rivian, other Facebook groups, and local communities including Jasper County.

Commissioner Gray asked why they needed \$200,000 for maintenance. Mrs. Gray said that is to cover the future cost of repaving the four-lane road she mentioned previously. They intend to withhold \$200,000 a year until they have enough to cover that expense. Commissioner Ledford asked why the JDA would take responsibility for the road. Mrs. Gray said GDOT was not willing to take the road they spent tens of millions of dollars building if for the JDA using GDOT funds. Revenue sharing also was a factor. The JDA assumed responsibility for keeping Social Circle and Morgan County from absorbing 100% of the cost. Mrs. Gray explained the \$20,000 for training is for board members as some training is normally required. Two separate utilities are for street lights and security lights. They have \$25,000 set aside for a memorial garden to honor the original members such as Commissioner Carl Penniman who passed away. She said she doesn't believe it will cost \$25,000 but it was set aside as a gesture to honor those people.

Commissioner Gray said that there is \$5000 unaccounted for but when the JDA is withholding two million dollars \$5000 seems like pennies. He said overall, he thinks there is more money that could be coming to the counties. Mrs. Gray said the goal is to have more money for the counties.

Chairman Henry said the county got involved in this project in 1999 and they have caught grief every time they check into the budget. He said people would say we are never going to see any returns for it now the county is seeing a return and it's not enough he said they will never please everyone. He said you can buy stock in a company, but you can't tell them how to run their business.

Commissioner Gray said that he finds it frustrating that the JDA is projecting \$4.8 million but only distributing two million for a board that has no employees that's a lot of money to withhold.

**Item 6: Sands Drive Park Pavilion Picnic Tables and Benches:** County Manager Mike Benton said that the Pavilion is complete and even with a higher cost for the construction the picnic tables and benches can be purchased and still be within the approved amount. Mr. Benton said that normally cost increases over time but in this case, the cost has decreased. Chairman Henry asked Mr. Benton to ask the city if they would be responsible for assembly and installation if the county purchases picnic tables and benches.

Commissioner Jernigan motioned to approve the purchase of the picnic tables and benches for Sand Drive Park if the City of Monticello agrees to provide assembly and installation. Commissioner Pounds seconded to motion for discussion. She asked what would happen if the city refused. She said this was a county project and it has already been delayed, if it is put off any longer they are possibly looking at an increased cost. Commissioner Gray said the county should abandon the project if the city refuses. He said there have been too many times when the county has had to pay for things that should have been funded by the city. Commissioner Pounds asked who he was referring to when he said city. Is he talking about the Mayor and City Counsel or the citizens? Commissioner Gray said the Mayor, City Council, and the citizens. Commissioner Pounds stated that is District 1, and the city sits in the county not the county in the city. Commissioner Gray said it was a city park. Commissioner Pounds said no it's a public park. She said it's not the commissioner's money, they are just overseeing it. After discussion, the motion passed four to one with Commissioner Gray opposed.

**Item 7: Human Resources and County Boards Report:** Sheila Jefferson gave an update on the number of employees and job openings as well as board openings.

**Item 8: Ocmulgee Circuit Public Defender's Office - Georgia Indigent Defense Services Agreement:** Clerk of Superior Court, LeAnn Airington, presented. Mrs. Airington said that the amount has increased by \$2813.30 since last year. The county is required by law to provide a public defender for criminal cases if the defendant qualifies. The fees are not negotiable but unused funds are returned to the county at the end of the year.

Commissioner Jernigan motioned to approve as written. Commissioner Ledford seconded, motion passed unanimously.

**Item 9: FY 2025 Proposed Budget, 2024 Millage Rates, and 2024 Digest- Consensus to Advertise:** The County Manager said the total budget is \$14,789,706 with the county taking the rollback. It does not include additional staffing to EMS and a new ambulance. Fire chief Chris Finch was asked how many EMS calls they responded to year to date. Chief Finch said just over 3000. He was asked to give the cost to staff a third ambulance. He said \$473000 for staff only.

Commissioner Ledford wants to drop funding for the hospital and use those funds for EMS or add a special tax for Fire/ EMS. Chief Finch was asked how many times patients are transported to our hospital. Chief Finch said very few due to lack of resources and staff. Chief Finch said on average there are 120 times per month where no ambulance is available in the county.

Commissioner Gray suggested looking at for-profit organizations to cut funding to. He said that he had mentioned the Family Connections and the \$8500 given to them. He asked what it was for. Chief Finance Director Larissa gave a breakdown of where those funds were spent (backpack buddies & bookbags for students). Commissioner Pounds said that Commissioner Gray was borderline discriminating against her constituents as he continued to make comments against the city and programs that benefit those citizens. Commissioner Gray said there are three districts in the city including his own. He said he mentioned before that the Family Connection website is discriminating but he was ignored. Chairman Henry said the conversation was getting them nowhere.

Commissioner Ledford motioned to advertise the FY 2025 proposed budget of \$14,789,706. Commissioner Pounds seconded, motion passed unanimously.

**Item 10: Schedule Work Sessions and Called Meetings as Needed:** Work Session Scheduled for June 14 at 10 a.m.

**Addendum: 911 Authority Board Restructuring:** Commissioner Ledford stated the 911 Authority Board has been an ongoing issue. Members of that board have talked about dissolving it. We cannot dissolve the board right now because the County could not assume those positions without making a lot of changes. He feels a 5-member board would be better than an 11-member board. He would like to make the board a five-member Jasper County 911 Authority Board. He would like to have a public hearing regarding restructuring the board.

After much discussion and a need for clarity, Commissioner Ledford motioned to table until June 14<sup>th</sup> Called Meeting. Commissioner Gray seconded, motion passed unanimously.

**County Attorney Items:** None

**County Manager Update:** None

**Executive Session:** None

**Adjourn:** Commissioner Jernigan motioned to adjourn at 7:53 p.m. Commissioner Pounds seconded, motion passed unanimously.

  
Bruce Henry, Chairman

  
Sheila Jefferson, Clerk