

**Jasper County Board of Commissioners**

**Joint Work Session Along with the City of Monticello and the City of Shady Dale**

**July 29, 2024**

**6:00 P.M.**

Chairman Bruce Henry called the meeting to order at 6 p.m.

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

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

Chairman Bruce Henry began the Work Session by explaining that the county would like the 911 Joint Authority Board to be reduced to a five- or seven-member board. He said the board is currently an eleven-member board, but it does not work well. Chairman Henry said that once a decision is made they will need to revise the bylaws to reflect their decision. He stated that five-member boards are easier to work with. Chairman Henry said County Manager Mike Benton would be removed from the board, leaving seven members. He said according to the board's bylaws the Sheriff and Fire Chief are appointed by position. Chairman Henry suggested five appointed board members with the county appointing three and each city appointing one.

Commissioner Ledford suggested dropping the Sheriff and the Fire chief to advisory members and not voting members.

Chairman Henry said the Sheriff and Fire Chief want to remain voting members because they are involved and directly affected by decisions made by the board.

Commissioner Gray said he feels the Sheriff should be advisory, not a voting member. He said then it could be a three-member board. He said the Sheriff did not want the responsibility of covering the 911 center but still wanted to be a voting member and still have control over it. He said if the sheriff doesn't want the 911 Authority under his department, he should be an advisory member only. Commissioner Gray asked why they needed more than three members when there were only twelve employees. He said three would work better and still allow one member from each entity.

Doug Currie said the only thing he has heard is that it's hard to get members to the meeting to get anything done. He asked what authority the board had to change things.

Commissioner Ledford said they oversee the hiring and firing of the 911 Director, set the budget, oversee 911 employees, and handle payroll, insurance, and retirement for 911 employees. He said there is a lot that goes on under their authority.

Doug Currie said a three-member board could still be tough getting everyone to a meeting together. Chairman Henry said that a three-member board might simplify some things, but he feels that a three-member board is too small.

Commissioner Ledford said that the Sheriff and Fire Chief would make a five-member board and if they would abstain from voting unless necessary, he feels that would work best.

Doug Currie said he had heard mention of the county doing payroll for the 911. Chairman Henry said it was brought up when the board asked for assistance.

Commissioner Gray said he feels the City should handle the 911 payroll. He said they have a seat at the table, but they no longer provide funding.

Mr. Currie said that it bothers him to hear the county commissioners say the city is not providing funding. He said every taxpayer in the county pays the same percentage. He said his tax bill didn't say anywhere that he isn't paying for sheriff, fire, or 911. He also stated the way the tax bill is broken down every citizen who is a property owner pays county taxes. He said he was shocked the school board gets more than the entire county.

Commissioner Ledford said most counties have higher school taxes. Mr. Currie said it wasn't right, he wants good schools, but the entire county must operate on less than what is given to run four schools. He said he has heard so many times the city doesn't contribute but every citizen contributes. Mr. Currie said he has been told the city did away with the police department, but they don't contribute to the Sheriff's Department. He said that when the Sheriff's Office has a need it should be a county-wide expense and should not fall more on city residents. He said that nobody in the city is requesting more services just the same as other county residents.

Commissioner Gray said there is a code section that the County Sheriff can require the City to provide funding to the Sheriff if he provides services. He said it is state-law but his point is the city government has a seat at the table and for whatever reason the county became fully financially responsible for the 911 Authority Board. He said he is suggesting the city assume that responsibility.

Mr. Currie said he is not against a discussion but it frustrates him when people say citizens living within the cities don't contribute for services. He said city residents pay the same ratio as anyone else and are not asking for more just the services they are paying for.

Commissioner Gray asked when the City of Monticello would run water and gas to his home because he lives in the county and wants those services offered in his area. City Manager Lathaydra Sands advised Commissioner Gray he is not in their service territory and that they cannot provide him with those services. Commissioner Gray said it was written in 1996 how the money would be allocated and that there would be funding from the cities and the county. He said for whatever reason that stopped in 1999 and his point and suggestion was that the city handle payroll for the 911 Authority.

City Manager Lathaydra Sands asked Commissioner Gray if he was suggesting the City of Monticello assume responsibility for 911 employees' wages or simply data entry. Mrs. Sands said it would be simple to add them to their data entry system and handle payroll if the information was submitted on time and funding was provided.

Chairman Henry again suggested a five-member board including the Sheriff and Fire. Chairman Henry said the board has seven members with two terms expiring in March 2025. He stated he hates to remove members who have served for so long, but changes must be made. He also stated some members have a background in public safety and those are the members he prefers to keep on the board.

Commissioner Ledford said he feels a background in public safety should be a requirement.

Commissioner Gray said all entities should hold off on any appointment for vacant and expiring terms until a decision is made regarding the number of members.

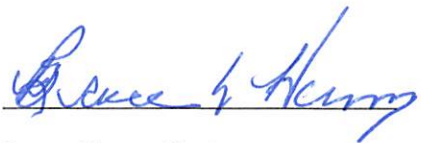
Chairman Henry recommended a seven-member board until February 28, 2025, due to terms expiring in March 2025. He said that would give them time to figure out details and agree. He said if everyone is in agreeance they can move forward on March 1, 2025, with a five-member board and any changes they have made to bylaws. He said the cities could go ahead and vote and then the county could get it added to the agenda for the Board of Commissioners meeting in September 2024.

City Manager Lathaydra Sands said the City of Monticello could put it on their August agenda.

Commissioner Gray asked if there was any updates on the issue with traffic and the City square. Mr. Currie responded the Sheriff and GDOT have gotten involved. GDOT has adjusted the lights and agreed to have engineers gather information so they can see what the issues are. The GDOT said they are willing to help with what they can without disrupting business for the local merchants. He said the GDOT doesn't move quickly but there are things in the works.

County Manager Mike Benton advised that he spoke to the GDOT constructor and they have already started testing some possible solutions.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:56.



Bruce Henry, Chairman



Sheila Jefferson, Clerk