

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Regular Session Agenda

Wednesday, November 21st, 2024

6 PM

The Board met on this date in Regular Session. Chairman JT Surles, Commissioners Chris Tuten, Ben White, Austin Hosford, Gene Hall, and Jessica Gramling were present. Clerk Trey Hightower, County Manager Shannon Metty, County Attorney Heather Encinosa, Assistant County Attorney Evan Rosenthal, HR Director Renee Long, and County Budget Officer Gus Rojas were also present.

The meeting on November 21, 2024, discussed several key points. After swearing in new commissioners and passing the gavel to Chairman Hosford, a presentation was made to honor Major John Haynes with a dedicated road sign. The Board approved several items, including changes to the consent agenda, proposed recreational park fees, a cap increase for debris monitoring, and the acceptance of a school board conveyance. Commissioners also discussed the holiday schedule, updates on road projects, and the need for a potential audit of county expenditures.

1. 6PM Call to Order, Invocation, Pledge of Allegiance

2. Public Announcements

- Commissioner Tuten reveals the new seal.
- Swearing in of Commissioners
 - Judge Robert Plains swears in Jessica Gramling, JT Surles, and Ben White.
- Passing of the Gavel
- Motion by JT Surles to step down and appoint Austin Hosford as Chair and Ben White as Co-chair.
- **Commissioner Hosford motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously passed by the board.**
- Presentation, Major Hayes- Mac McNeil
 - Full road from Hwy 27 to Hwy 90 will be dedicated in honor of Major John Haynes. He was born and raised in Madison, joined the military at age 15, and was a Veteran of WWII, Chinese Civil War, Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Major Haynes was awarded the Silver Star. Four total road signs will go up in his honor.
- Bob Estas – Deputy Executive Director of the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs
 - Expressed his knowledge of Major Haynes.
- Commissioner Surles asks for a photograph with the sign and all the veterans.

3. Citizens Request & Input on Non-Agenda Items

- BJ Nelson
 - Thank you to the Board and county staff.

4. Consent Agenda

a. Vouchers

- Changes by the Clerk for late additions. CTC Disaster Response, two invoices, one for \$922,909.66, one for \$342,866.87 for debris removal. DebrisTech, a

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check for \$142,259.40 for debris monitoring. Coro Medical, \$11,600 and Zoll Medical, \$21,500 for the opioid settlement purchases.

- **Commissioner Hall motions to approve the Consent Agenda with the changes, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously passed by the board.**

5. General Business

a. Proposed Recreational Park and Facilities Fees and Sponsorship

- Shannon Metty proposes park fees. Commissioner Hosford asks if we are charging for pavilion use. County Manager Metty responded that there is no fees for pavilion use at this time and they are trying to open a sponsorship program for the fields maintenance.
- Commissioner Surles asks for county staff to find people to sponsor.
- Commissioner Gramling inquires whether individuals and/or elected officials may make contributions.
- Citizens to be Heard: Stephanie Stiles, Beth Frisby, Joy Frisby, BJ Nelson
- **Commissioner Surles motions to approve the proposed recreational park fees, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously passed by the board.**

b. Debris Tech Cap Increase

- Shannon Metty explains that debris monitor asks to increase their cap fee to \$2 million. Received \$2.5 million back from the state.
- **Commissioner Surles motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously passed by the board.**

c. Acceptance of School Board Conveyance

- Commissioner Surles thanks the School Board for their participation.
- Citizens to be Heard: Brenda Wirick, Beth Frisby
- Commissioner Gramling asks about the grant and the extension.
- Commissioner Hall asks about the water damage and stormwater from potential flooding.
- **Commissioner Surles motions to approve the quit claim deed including parcels that the county manager acquired back in 2023 to approve the lease and purchase option termination agreement so that the board is no longer renting these parcels from the school board, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously passed by the board.**

6. Clerk of Court

- Update on the animal control ordinance fines. Thanks to the newspaper for publishing the Property Fraud Alert. The Clerk has a new Facebook page.

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7. County Engineer

- Complications on Waukeelah Highway. Working with CWR and FDOT to fix the edge of the highway.

8. County Attorney

- Winchester vs County. Winchesters request for motion to strike portions of the written closing argument. The county won the legal proceeding. We are still waiting for the final order.

9. County Manager

- Holiday Schedule- Request for the county employees to be off the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. The planning commission met and did not decide on the comprehensive plan. Private road grant will be put out from RFP on Wednesday. Commissioner Surles requests the list of the private areas that have not completed the documents. In January, there will be a workshop on the gym. Aucilla Shores is pending. Pushed out the app for the county.

10. County Commissioners

- Commissioner Hall is thankful for the progress on Ashville/Waukeelah Highway.
- Commissioner Gramling thanks everyone for the warm welcome.
- Commissioner Surles thanks County staff for the improvement of the dump sites.
- Commissioner White welcomes Jessica Gramling.
- Chairman Hosford thanks the board for being elected as chairman. He wants the citizens of Jefferson County to have confidence in the way their taxpayer money is spent. With everything that has happened in the Clerk's Office in the past couple of years, it is imperative that we remain proactive. He wants to ensure the Clerk's Office is transparent and asks for a forensic audit for the last five years of all county expenditures—from the board of commissioners to constitutionals.
- BJ Nelson states that the money that it would take to do this could be better spent going forward instead of going back to look at something that has already been done. Perhaps the state may be more interested in that, but constituents are not concerned with things that you cannot do anything about. Once the audit is done, is there some other intention other than proving transparency? Chairman Hosford replies transparency is the chief objective—he wants to take actions to clear the cloud of mistrust.
- Chairman Hosford explains that the state auditor for the Clerk's Office said it was the cleanest budget they'd ever seen, but forensic auditor said \$800,000 was missing from that same audit.
- Lynn McGrady sees the need for transparency, and it would bring a sense of comfort. You would also learn a lot regarding what needs to be changed. She sees it as a long-term investment.

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- Lee Howard agrees with Lynn McGrady. There are a lot of new people coming into these offices and they are unfamiliar with the full scope of information. Forensic audit is necessary to confirm that their books are indeed clean.
- Commissioner Gramling clarifies that there was probable cause for the previously discussed forensic audit; does not agree with the need for another one.
- Chairman Hosford rebuttals that you cannot put a price on transparency.
- Joy Frisby reads the audits that come out every year—she sees in the recommendation that these offices are typically understaffed. The tax collector’s office often did not turn theirs into the county commission. The Supervisor of Elections and Clerk of Court did not have enough staff.
- Shanna Boutwell is the Tax Collector Elect and requests an audit for the tax collector’s office.
- Stephanie Stiles supports the idea and thinks it is important for accountability. We need more time to figure out what else is going on because we may have gotten lucky and only caught one individual. A lot of people share this opinion.
- BJ Nelson agrees with Stiles about getting input from constituents. She provides an example of how Aucilla Shores had a poor reputation twenty years ago and they focused on the future. Do not base decision on hearing from a couple of people.
- Clerk Hightower explains that the Clerk’s Office is trying to nail down the separation of duties and implement policies where there are none.
- Chairman Hosford explains that the mess at the Clerk’s Office was so bad that Charles Culp was the only person that could provide insight, which is a problem. This is where a lot of his concerns originate from.
- Melissa Froemming supports the idea of a forensic audit. One person was caught, but that raises the question of how many others are incompetent and/or arrogant.
- Commissioner Hall consents, but the rest of the board did not consent for an audit of county expenditures/RFP.

11. Adjourn

- **Commissioner Surles motions to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Hall and unanimously passed by the board.**