

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Regular Session

Thursday, May 15th, 2025

6 PM

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

At the May 15 meeting of the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners, Chairman Hosford called the session to order and adjusted the agenda to prioritize a mural award and a presentation by Jefferson County Fire Rescue's Tommy Arthur, who requested additional funding for life-saving cardiac monitors. The board discussed possible funding sources, including restitution funds and contingencies. Public comments included updates on legislative advocacy for agriculture. In general business, the board approved a mural project highlighting local ecology, a budget increase for the Property Appraiser due to ongoing litigation, and received updates on historical building grants, RESTORE Act project options, and ongoing issues with private road maintenance. The board also established an auditor selection committee, discussed DOT project updates, reviewed statutory limitations to land development changes following recent legislation, and received departmental updates, including on animal shelter construction and equipment procurement. The meeting concluded with discussions on water line issues and potential funding strategies before adjournment.

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

2. Approval of the Agenda

- Chairman Hosford calls for the approval of the agenda, noting two changes: moving Item E, Mural Award, to the top and adding a presentation by Tommy Arthur about life-saving equipment.
- **Commissioner Gramling motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously passed by the board.**

3. Public Announcements, Presentations & Awards

- Tommy Arthur- Jefferson County Fire Rescue
 - Requesting \$105,000 in funding for two Life Pack cardiac monitors. The State only awarded \$100,000. The current monitors are aging and being phased out, and access to parts and servicing is becoming increasingly difficult. New Life Pack monitors offer advanced technology. These advancements improve survival rates for citizens and visitors. Due to limited state funding, only two monitors can be approved under the grant.
 - By approving this request, the county will secure four lifesaving monitors. This investment is about ensuring the safety, health, and wellbeing of the community we serve.
- Chairman Hosford asks County Manager Metty how this request factors into our budget.

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- Shannon Metty explains that the state grant agreement is still pending, and the funds are currently unbudgeted.
- Commissioner Surles suggests utilizing funds from restitution.
- Clerk Hightower expresses that some of the restitution funds are guaranteed to the board, and some are for DOR. A substantial amount is due to the board. He does not provide an exact figure.
- Commissioner Surles expresses interest in creating a future agenda item for public comment.
- Evan Rosenthal needs to meet with Trey Hightower and Gus Rojas to discover the source of the funds.
- Commissioner Gramling says that these funds were taken from the people of Jefferson County, and they need to be given back in a meaningful way.
- Commissioner Hall asks the County Manager how much money we have in contingency. Approximately \$500,000.

4. Citizens Request & Input on Non-Agenda Items

- Chris Tuten
 - Thanks Commissioner White for hosting the First Responders' event and the Tuten family. Thanks to Commissioner Surles for the items he donated at the auction.
 - Provides updates on legislative efforts, including a failed bill to eliminate 55% of the soil and water boards and SB 1080 that passed but had its agricultural enclave portion removed.
 - Emphasizes the importance of continued advocacy for local agricultural interests, with plans to work on related legislation in the next session.

5. Consent Agenda

- a. Commissioner Hall motions to approve the Consent Agenda, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously passed by the board.**

6. General Business

a. Mural Award

- Kirsten Mood presents on behalf of the County Budget Officer.
 - The Selection Committee met in April to evaluate proposals. Mrs. McCoy was the highest ranked proposer.
- **Commissioner Surles motions to approve the Mural Award , seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously passed by the board.**
- Sam McCoy and Megan Mick, Artist Faculty at Florida State University, describe their vision for the mural, which will feature local wildlife and ecological elements.
- Shane Willendorf -Land Conservancy Director

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- Expresses support for the Wildlife Corridor Mural. He is excited that prescribed fire is being highlighted in the mural.
- Commissioner Hall asks where the mural will be located. It is on the Vintage Treasures building, which is on the corner of Dogwood and 19.
- Citizen to be Heard: Lynn McGrady.

b. Property Appraiser Budget Request

- Property Appraiser Angela Gray
 - Asks for a bump in her budget for the current year regarding ongoing litigation in her office. \$57,930.
 - **Commissioner Surles motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously passed by the board.**
 - If she wins, she will request attorney's fees.

c. A Building Discussion

- Kirsten Mood
 - Report on grant agreement between the county and Department of State Division for Historical Resources. The county must agree to maintain the property, no modifications may be made without approval, every effort will be made to make design modifications in accordance with those preservation practices, and the division has the right to inspect the property at any time.
 - Any violations grant the division the right to the full grant amount less 10% for each year past the first five years. The second grant agreement will expire in October of this year. The third grant expires in October 2026. Procurement was unsuccessful in finding a contractor to do the work that was agreed upon.
- County Manager
 - Spoke with JJ Scott on Tuesday. The plan that they put together for the last \$500,000 is to fix water damage/hurricane damage (the window on the north side). They can also fix the wood rot outside of the building. It is an easy scope to fix; there still is no match. A full report will be provided in mid-June.
 - Chairman asks what strings are attached.
 - Commissioner Surles inquires when the restrictions expire. Kirsten Mood reiterates that the restrictions on the second grant agreement expire in October of this year, and the third and final agreement expires in October 2026. As long as the building is being maintained and there is no change to its status, they do not intend to seek any claw backs.

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- Commissioner Gramling inquires if there is a springhead.
- County Manager Metty responded that there is not.
- Chairman asks counsel what is required from the board.
- Kirsten Mood responds to accept the report or provide further directions.

d. RESTORE Funds Update/Review

- The board receives an update by Evan Rosenthal on Restore Act funding available to the county, which includes \$12.8 million for projects under the spill impact component (POT 3).
- Jefferson has three projects included in the SEP developed back in the 2017-2018 timeframe. Potential projects include sewer force main extensions, improvements to the Wacissa Park area, and expanding coastal access. Very little activity has occurred to date on any of these projects. The SEP is intended to be a living document and can be amended.
- With respect to infrastructure projects, there is a limit on how much can be used. Under the Restore Act, only 25% of the overall pot of money consortium can be used for infrastructure. Projects need to be consistent with the goals and objectives of the Restore Council's Comprehensive Plan. Evan Rosenthal provides some examples of how other counties are using their allocations.
- Chairman inquires about land acquisition about different project ideas. How would land acquisition work with RESTORE?
- Counsel responds that it is one of the projects included in the SEP—potential land acquisition around the Wacissa.
- County Manager responds that the Wacissa was full, so additional launch sites were unnecessary. Chairman suggests other options, such as the dog track, which would allow the county to do projects such as emergency operations center(s).
- Commissioner Surles recalls the consultant that they met with regarding Wacissa.
- Evan Rosenthal responds that there are other consulting firms. He will meet with the consortium's General Manager to ask about reimbursement.
- Chairman inquires how our current storm shelter is rated.
- It is a shelter of last resort rated between a category 2 and 3.
- Commissioner Hall inquires if funding is being taken away from emergency management at the federal level. Kristie Anderson states that Kevin Guthrie, the Emergency Management Director for Florida, is

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telling us that we do not know yet. As of now, we are supposed to plan that we will not have those funds, which are usually around \$50,000.

- Citizen to be Heard: Lynn McGrady

e. Audit Selection Committee

- Evan Rosenthal
 - Request for approval of resolution that stands up the Jefferson County Auditor Selection Committee in accordance with State law governing the process for selecting an auditor. The county's existing contract is set to expire upon completion of the 23-24 audit; it needs to procure a new auditor. The committee must consist of each of the County's constitutional officers and the Chair of the Board of County Commissioners or their designee.
- **Commissioner Gramling motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner Hall and unanimously passed by the board.**
- Commissioner Surles inquires if this item is statutory. Counsel responds that it is statutory: the contract with the current auditor has no additional renewals in it.

f. Private Roads Funds Update

- County Manager Shannon Metty
 - Many signatures are still required for Murmuring Creek and Osprey. If we do not get them, we can try to do another road or reallocate those funds. After speaking with Commissioner White, he has gotten the signatures needed for Deer Run. The plan is to give Osprey and Murmuring Creek another two weeks to get the signatures in, otherwise we will move to amend to add Deer Run. The bid came in at \$500,000 less than our total appropriation.
- Chairman met with one of the landowners on Osprey today and informed him of the two-week deadline.

7. Clerk of Courts

8. County Engineer

- Received comments on the last application cycle for DOT projects. We sent those comments to DOT. We are getting close-out documents for Waukeena. We have addressed 60% of the comments for Phase I & II of Boston Highway.
- Commissioner Surles commends the team for the job they did on the shoulder of Waukeena Highway.

9. County Attorney

- Provides an update on the comprehensive plan. He will appear before the planning commission next week. A bill was passed, but not signed by the governor, (SB 180)

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that affects the county's ability to make changes to the comprehensive plan and the land development code. It prohibits counties and cities that were included within the disaster declaration areas for hurricane Debby, Helene, and Milton, from adopting more restrictive or burdensome amendments to their comp plan or land development code prior to October of 2027.

- Chairman will meet with Evan Rosenthal tomorrow, May 16, for more information.

10. County Manager

- Watching a couple of property tax bills and trying to understand them, and how they will impact the board budget-wise. We are trying to make sure our budget falls in line with whatever possibilities may lie ahead.

11. County Commissioners

- Commissioner Gramling asks for an update on the kennels.
 - Shannon Metty responds that the electrician had to revisit to correct the AC units. The city has put in a tap for plumbing. Once it is finished, we will bring in some extra dirt and get a quote for the fence to better protect the dogs.
- Commissioner Surles thanks the road department for its work on Waukeenah. He asks how the board voted on the two tractors.
 - Shannon Metty responds that we are trying to surplus the extra mac truck. They are trying to get us to come out of pocket about \$30,000. We just spoke with Crystal Tractor on Tuesday. If we get at least \$130,000, we are only coming out of pocket a smaller amount. Commissioner Surles asks if we may pull the trigger on one tractor. Shannon states that if we pull the trigger on one, then we lose the whole package deal.
- Chairman states that Jefferson Water Community received another call this week for Whippoorwill.
 - Shannon Metty states that it is a high priority. They cannot locate the leak without digging up the entire road.
 - Chairman asks if consortium funds be used to rerun some water lines appropriately in our county.
 - Counsel responds that he will investigate this idea.

12. Adjourn

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