

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Regular Session

Thursday, July 17th, 2025

6:00 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. County Manager Shannon Metty, Budget Officer Gus Rojas, County Attorney Evan Rosenthal, and Assistant County Attorney Kirsten Mood were also present.

The Jefferson County Board of Commissioners met to address a critical presentation from Lisa Berets of the Area Agency on Aging, who raised concerns about mismanagement by the Jefferson County Senior Citizen Board and outlined plans for transitioning senior services. Citizens voiced issues ranging from delayed public records to the impact of the local Winn-Dixie closing. The Board discussed allegations of insurance fraud involving the former HR Director and debated County Manager Shannon Metty's future, ultimately rejecting her termination but acknowledging ongoing concerns. Budget discussions affirmed a rollback millage rate, and a solar project by Duke Energy was approved amid public input. Additional matters included solid waste and fire assessment rates, a pending splash pad project, mosquito control staffing gaps, and the potential for broadcasting meetings to enhance transparency.

1. Call to Order, Invocation, Pledge of Allegiance (00:08:26)

2. Approval of the Agenda (00:11:15)

- a) Chairman Hosford notes changes to be made. Items on the Consent Agenda C, F and H will be pulled and put in General Business under P, Q and R.
- b) We have a new Item A at the top-Discussion of Former HR
- c) Item S added to General Business: Mosquito Control
- d) Off General Business, we will pull Item I- Pickleball Court Award. J is the Intent to Award Continuing Services Contract- pulled.
- e) **Commissioner Hall motions to approve these changes, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved.**

3. Public Announcements, Presentations & Awards (00:11:37)

- a) Lisa Berets: Executive Director of Area Agency of Aging
 - Presents on behalf of her organization and states their shared goals. She shares that there have been many programmatic and systematic issues that have been identified by her staff, threatening the health and welfare of the seniors. Demand for compliance letter issued by their attorney to the Jefferson County Senior Citizen Board of Directors. The issues range from ongoing noncompliance with operations regarding nutrition, other related documentation not being submitted completely, and improper cost allocations. The Senior Center building itself does not have an assessed estimated value. Her agency will not be working to resolve the corporation's debt. We have consulted with leadership that represents the interest of your citizens.

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- In light of her concerns, her Board has considered contract termination. Her transition plan is to conduct two public hearings to give the community the opportunity to learn about her agency. She is looking for volunteers who would like to host educational crafting and recreational engagement for seniors who are participating in their programs. We have considered looking into alternate locations—the senior center flooded last April. There is also a drainage grate in the back portion of that building, clearly not the senior center’s responsibility. She asks that the board please ensure that there is no delay in service to our seniors and that we can continue to serve based on community input.

4. Citizens’ Request & Input on Non-Agenda Items (00:28:49)

a) Mark Winchester

- Several weeks ago, his attorney sent a public information request to Shannon Metty, and he has still not received a response. Today, he put in a request to the Courthouse for the same information. He told the Commissioners on April 20, 2023, meeting of these concerns. He claims that Chairman Hosford said he was tired of hearing him tell them they did not know the law.

b) Tammy Lester, et al.

- Speaks on behalf of the Winn Dixie closing. She expresses short-term concerns for employees and associates at that store who will be displaced, especially seniors and those with disabilities. She asks that the Board draw up a resolution in support of our one and only full-service grocery store and its leaving.
- **Commissioner Surles motions to proceed in drafting a resolution, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously passed by the board.**

5. Consent Agenda (00:39:32)

- ##### a) Commissioner Surles motions to approve the Consent Agenda, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously passed by the board.

6. General Business

a) Discussion of Former HR Director Resignation (00:40:03)

- Chairman Hosford states that he asked for this item to be placed on the agenda last night. He speaks to the very serious allegations of insurance fraud out of the HR Director’s Office, which he will refer to FDLE for full investigation. Requests that counsel draft a letter to FDLE to send over. He passes the gavel to Vice Chair Commissioner White. In his opinion, the Board should act, otherwise it is complicit.

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- **Commissioner Hosford motions to turn this over to the proper authorities to investigate, seconded by Commissioner Hall and unanimously passed by the board.**
- Citizens to be Heard: Philip Colandra, Eric Paul

b) Manager to Coordinator Discussion (00:45:06)

- Counsel reiterates the options discussed at the last meeting regarding this matter. She presents a brief background of the County Coordinator role. There is not a substantive difference between a Coordinator and a Manager, except that the duties of a manager are explicitly set forth in Chapter 125. This Board adopted the Manager Ordinance formally, incorporating those duties from Chapter 125 FL Statutes, and the Commission had already previously approved various personnel policies that included a non-interference policy. Going forward from the adoption of that ordinance, amendments to our policy were adopted. The biggest change was adherence to the county's purchasing policies, ensuring that the board, rather the Clerk or other department head that lacked the legal authority to do so, were the individuals who signed the agreements by the county.
- To roll back to that traditional form of government, the counsel requires further direction as to what the Board would like to be changed. We have suggested reducing purchasing authority, removing responsibilities concerning contracts and leases, and revising the personnel policy to require the coordinator to collaborate with the board regarding hiring and firing.
- The first option is to demote the County Manager to Deputy and conduct a search for a new Manager. The County Manager would have to agree to this arrangement, and the Board would have to identify an interim manager until a new manager is hired. Incidental to that, your HR Director and Deputy Manager role are currently one and the same in your organizational chart. Counsel highly recommends separating those two and allowing your new manager or interim manager to hire either a new HR professional or going out to bid and finding a professional firm to execute this on the county's behalf. The second option is the termination of the current Manager, with eight weeks of severance pay without cause. To avoid future litigation, we recommend termination without cause.
- The final option is to hire a new Deputy Manager. We would need directions for the manager, as we would need her cooperation to hire a

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new Deputy. The suggestion is to have a new Deputy, who is a Professional Manager, come in and provide support.

- Citizens to be Heard: Vivian Hall, David Collins, Henry Gohlke, Philip Colandra, Chris McDonald, John Broadway, Amy Paul, Byron Arcenau, Gus Rojas, Brian Metty, Clayton Tolbert, Michael Schwart, Lynn McGrady
- Commissioner Gramling proposes a motion to terminate Shannon Metty for cause, providing an example of the insurance issue that occurred last week. She suggests an independent audit. She continues to list the notification in the paper, where Shannon did not notify the proper channels before posting that legal notice. Had there been a budgetary change, it would have required board approval.
- Shannon Metty rebuttals that she knew of the situation, and that the employee had different circumstances other than the traditional. She did not know that it was against CHP Policy. It is not fair to get rid of her before the investigation. The accusations for cause are uncalled for and untrue.
- **Chairman Hosford passes the gavel to Commissioner White. Commissioner Gramling amends her motion for termination without cause, seconded by Commissioner Hosford. Commissioners Surles, Hall, and White vote in opposition. Motion fails.**
- Chief Deputy Clerk Sherry Sears reads a statement on Trey Hightower's behalf, thanking the County Manager's staff for their efforts during the transition of leadership in the Clerk's Office.
- Counsel states that it is within the board's discretion to adopt an alternative option, reiterated by Assistant County Attorney Kirsten Mood.

c) Proposed Budget & Millage Rate Discussion (01:55:23)

- Gus Rojas highlights the County Manager's proposed budget. \$37,467,439 in budget authority for appropriate expenditure reserves. Rollback rate is 7.6529.
- **Commissioner Surles motions to approve the rollback rate, seconded by Commissioner White. It is not brought to a vote.**
- Counsel needs directions on what number to include in the TRIM notice. In September, you can always go down, but you cannot go up. If the TRIM notices go out with the rollback rate in it, you cannot exceed that come September.
- Gus Rojas states that the official estimate for sales tax is high, fuel taxes are much higher than historical figures, but we do not have the exact

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numbers. He advises sticking with the 7.8266 and then rolling back prior to the hearing.

- **Commissioner Surles amends his motion to keep the rate where it is at, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously passed by the board.**

d) **Comp. Plan Transmittal Hearing (02:05:05)**

- This is the first of two public hearings on the revised Comp Plan. This year is a request authorization to transmit the Comp Plan to the state for renewed comments, and then after comments are received from the state, which can take several months, a second hearing is held for adoption. However, they are not ready to transmit Comp Plan Hearing due to a missing item- the Capital Improvement Schedule.
- Counsel speaks to the recently passed legislation that will affect the Comprehensive Plan—SB 180. It prohibits any city or county that was within the disaster declaration areas for those trio storms we had in 2024 from adopting any more restrictive or burdensome amendments to their comprehensive plan or land development codes prior to October 2027. Several of the proposed changes were removed from the draft, because they appeared to be burdensome or restrictive.
- **Commissioner White motions to table the item until the next board meeting, seconded by Commissioner Surles and unanimously passed by the board.**

e) **QJ Procedures for Duke Solar Item (02:11:35)**

- Counsel Kirsten Mood states the procedural rules for the Quasi-Judicial Hearing.
- Counsel Kirsten Mood conducts Ex-Parte disclosures and swearing-in.
- David Wheeler states that this is the second of the two-hearing process; the first was held on June 12 with all Commissioners present. There were seven comments from the public, five of which were in the immediate area of the project. Joining us tonight is Terrel Arline, the county's appointed land-use attorney.
- Scott Mixon- Applicant with Duke Energy
 - We are pleased that we have applied, and we are completely compliant with that Solar Ordinance. We want to demonstrate that we have listened to property owners and community stakeholders, and we have adjusted the plan based on feedback. We will, at the end of this presentation, respectfully request that the Board approve our plan. We are going to stand by our commitments.

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- The location for the Bailey Mill project is off West Capps Highway. Duke Energy Florida will be responsible for paying taxes on the site, up to 50 million dollars in ad valorem taxes over a period of 30 years. We have made improvements to the map since we last presented it, because there was one property owner we did not meet with: Mr. James Lamb.
- Vanessa Goff- Director of Renewable Development
 - They wanted to ensure that they were in the community, understanding everyone's concerns. She addresses said concerns.
- Erin Grafton– Certified Planner SWCA Inc.
 - We have worked closely with county staff, and the planning director staff has determined that the application meets the requirements of the Jefferson County Comprehensive Plan and the Land Development Code. Solar facilities are an allowable use in all agricultural land use categories per Florida Statute.
 - The application is consistent and meets all applicable provisions with the Jefferson County Land Development Code. Solar facilities are permitted use within the AG20 land use district and require approval as a major development. The project does not exceed maximum impervious service ratios.
- Terrell Arline states his job here tonight is to represent staff. He wants to ensure our record is solid to support the county's ultimate decision. He questions David Wheeler regarding his position with Jefferson County.
- David Wheeler speaks to Terrell Arline's line of questioning.
- Citizens to be Heard: Sydney, Stephanie Stiles, Felicia Lamb, Mags Lamb
- Board discussion regarding the application.
- **Commissioner White motions to approve the Duke Solar Item, seconded by Commissioner Hall. Chairman Hosford votes in opposition. Item passes 4-1.**

f) Duke Bailey Mill Solar Power Plant Application

g) Big Bend Transit Agreement/Contract/Discussion (03:24:09)

- Shannon Metty explains the circumstances surrounding the contract.
- Counsel says that they have not received a draft of this contract.
- Shannon Metty corrects her statement to reflect that they are working on a draft, which will convert Big Bend transit to a month-to-month purpose. Requests that the board will allow them to move forward with a contract with them for at least another six months.

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- **Commissioner Surles motions to continue the expired contract on a month-to-month basis on the same terms whilst working on an RFP, seconded by Commissioner White.**
- Shannon Metty states that they offered to cut the weekend runs and up the ridership costs. Ultimately, it will be approximately \$50,000 to finish out the year.
- Chairman Hosford inquires about the cost of adding a Saturday route onto the contract to satisfy customer demand.
- **Commissioner Surles amends his motion to include a Saturday route in the contract, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously approved.**
- Citizens to be Heard: Lynn Yarborough, Roddie Isam, John Nelson, Donna Stephens, Jack Truman

h) Splash Pad Discussion (03:58:30)

- Shannon Metty states that this line-item is not complete. She will bring this item back with some actual costs.
- Chairman requests a quote from insurance included in the cost.

i) LifePak Surplus/purchase (04:00:42)

- Shannon Metty explains the nature of the item.
- **Commissioner Surles motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner White. It is not brought to a vote.**
- Kirsten Mood points out multiple typos in the document.
- **Commissioner Surles amends his motion to include the proposed changes, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously approved.**

j) Preliminary Rate Resolutions for Fire Rescue (04:01:29)

- Counsel explains that the next three items are the first step in the process for the county to reinstitute its special assessments for fire, solid waste, and Aucilla Shores. The first one on the table is fire; the proposed rates are the same as they were last year, which was \$198.00 per dwelling unit and 4 cents per square foot for non-residential. This will generate a gross revenue of \$1,398,326.54.
- **Commissioner Surles motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously approved.**
- Counsel states that direction from the Property Appraiser is needed. Maximum allowable is \$315 per dwelling unit and 6 cents per square foot.

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- Counsel corrects his statement: the maximum rate is \$297, and 6 cents per square foot for commercial.
- Chairman Hosford proposes keeping this item as status quo for this year and addressing it next year with a stipulation in place every two years to increase the price per dwelling unit the maximum allowable price is satisfied.

k) Preliminary Rate Resolution Solid Waste (04:08:45)

- Counsel explains the nature of the item, with the intention of keeping the rates the same as last year (\$248 per dwelling unit).
- **Commissioner Surles motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved.**

l) Preliminary Rate Resolution Aucilla Shores (04:09:32)

- Counsel explains the nature of the item; the assessment rates are \$157 per lot and \$31.41 per hanger lot, which is the same as we've had in prior fiscal years.
- **Commissioner Gramling motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously approved by the board.**

m) Meeting Broadcast Discussion (04:11:22)

- Chairman explains the concerns surrounding the public being able to attend and participate in the meetings. Wakulla County broadcasts their meetings live on Facebook. He proposes reaching out to them to discover the cost of broadcasting meetings. His request is to get a vote to have staff and counsel bring an item detailing the cost and workload of implementing this idea.
- **Commissioner Surles motions to approve meeting broadcasting once we have better internet connection, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously approved by the board.**

n) Ratify Purchase/Grant for Fire Dept. Brush Truck (04:16:10)

- This item was previously Item C on the Consent Agenda.
- **Commissioner White motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved.**

o) CareerSource Capital Region Local Workforce Board Appointment (04:16:53)

- Counsel states that we do not have an appointment resolution. It will be brought back at the next meeting. No board action.

p) Ratify Chairman's Signature on Legislative Law Enforcement Salary Grant (04:17:23)

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- This is a grant agreement that the Chairman signed on behalf of the County for the benefit of the Sheriff.
- **Commissioner White motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved.**

q) Mosquito Control (04:18:04)

- Commissioner Surles was confronted today that there is no department head for Mosquito Control. We are in peak mosquito season.
- Shannon Metty states that she has a meeting with the state on Wednesday to examine the Mosquito Control office.

7. Clerk of Court (04:19:52)

8. County Engineer (04:20:12)

- a) Provides updates on Boston Highway Phase I and II. County Engineer suggests a Certification of Construction and Compliance.

9. County Attorney (04:22:09)

- a) In discussions with the County Manager and with Code Enforcement Staff, it has become clear that the county has additional special magistrates for the code enforcement process. Counsel issued an RFQ seeking special magistrates to fill that role. It will ultimately come before the board for award; there is no financial commitment.

10. County Manager (04:23:02)

- a) Apologizes for her husband's remarks—they were inappropriate. The kennels are finally skirted, and the fence will be installed next week. There was only one bid regarding the pickleball item; it will be brought before the board next week. We are conducting a dependency audit. She sent out an email outlining what the employees must bring to open enrollment. The Clerk's Office is assisting her with centralizing some of the collections.

11. County Commissioners (04:25:57)

- a) Commissioner Gramling states that sometimes difficult discussions are necessary. She is always respectful and professional, and she requests the same conduct from her colleagues.

12. Adjourn (04:27:07)

- a) **Commissioner Gramling motions to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner White and unanimously approved.**

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ATTEST

Cecil Trey Hightower

Clerk of the Circuit Court

ATTEST

Austin Hosford

Chairman