

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Budget Workshop
Thursday, April 16, 2026
6:00 PM

The Board met on this date in Budget and Regular Session. Chairman Ben White, Commissioners Jessica Gramling, JT Surlles, Austin Hosford, and Gene Hall were present. County Manager Ron Russo, Clerk of Court Trey Hightower, and County Attorney Evan Rosenthal were also present.

The meeting opened at 6 PM with standard formalities before shifting into departmental budget discussions led largely by Ron Russo. Tourism Development funding was reviewed, noting a slight anticipated decrease and the need for clearer oversight of expenditures, while Veteran Affairs highlighted opportunities for expanded outreach, partnerships, and improved public awareness through better communication and a redesigned website. Small local programs and grants were confirmed as fully utilized, with a request to maintain current funding levels. Animal Control emerged as the most pressing topic, with extensive discussion about staffing shortages, funding needs, and service expectations; proposals included hiring a kennel technician, adding an animal control officer, exploring privatization, and leveraging partnerships or training programs. Public input and commissioner comments emphasized the growing demand for stronger animal control services and clearer ordinances, culminating in a consensus to revisit and formally consider updated animal control ordinances at a future meeting.

- 1. 6PM Call to Order, Invocation, Pledge of Allegiance (00:00:27)**
- 2. Tourist Development (00:01:32)**
 - a. Ron Russo discusses the tourism development background, receiving \$96,250 last year and anticipating \$90,000 next year.
 - b. Commissioner Hall inquires about the nature of the decrease in promotion and advertising. Ron Russo responds that he will acquire more information.
 - c. Citizen to be Heard: Rose Murray
- 3. Veteran Affairs (00:04:59)**
 - a. Ron Russo announces that \$33,150 was budgeted last year, with a continuation budget request. There is an opportunity to network for a robust budget program. He promotes a booth at the Watermelon Festival and mentions possible partnering with the American Legion.
 - b. Commissioner Hall urges for the hours of the Veterans Affairs office to be posted to generate public awareness.
 - c. Ron Russo highlights the website redesign and ease of navigation once complete.
- 4. Small Local Programs & Grants (00:09:13)**
 - a. Ron Russo states that \$69,500 was budgeted last year, requesting a continuation budget. These funds were spent in full.
- 5. Animal Control (00:09:47)**
 - a. Ron Russo states that last year's budget was \$124,999. He outlines five potential possibilities for consideration, suggesting a kennel tech, or alternatively, another animal control officer. The board may also consider adding both a kennel tech and an animal control officer. He mentions the possibility of privatization.

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- b.** Cassie, Director of Animal Services, emphasizes the importance of proper resources and adequate funding for the Animal Control Department. She asks the board's support in providing the necessary funding to allow the county the services it deserves.
- c.** Commissioners Hosford and Surles comment on the prioritization of this issue. Commissioner Hosford inquires about requirements for meeting a bronze standard. Ron Russo recommends hiring a kennel tech, pending more accurate data insights.
- d.** Citizens to be Heard: Andrew Fischer, Kay Curtis, Demia Bratley, Rachel Herman
- e.** Commissioner Surles mentions the possibility of hiring a part-time individual or partnering with the courts to seek community service.
- f.** Counsel Evan Rosenthal details animal control ordinances that were previously rejected by the board.
- g.** Commissioner Hosford requests that the ordinance be brought to the next meeting as an agenda item, with a consensus from the board.

***Regular session directly follows.**