

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Regular Session

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 Board addressed a range of county business with a strong focus on upcoming funding opportunities, infrastructure, and community concerns. A key highlight was discussion of the Small Cities Community Block Grant, a \$2.2 million opportunity supporting economic development, with emergency shelter and neighborhood revitalization identified as top priorities and a follow-up public hearing scheduled for April 28. The board approved several items, including a rural planning grant, participation in the CORE reimbursement program, and implementation of a burn ban for public safety, while also voting to terminate an impact fee study contract due to delays. Additional actions included directing staff to draft letters regarding Opportunity Zone 2.0 and concerns about water quality at Trulieve. Legislative updates, facility improvements, and operational enhancements were also shared, alongside citizen input on local issues such as flags at county buildings and environmental concerns. The meeting concluded with routine reports, commissioner comments, and adjournment.

1. Agenda Item-Small Cities Community Block Grant (00:31:03)

- a. Ron Russo states that this grant is only open for one month, and the application is due on May 5, 2026. It will require another public hearing, tentatively scheduled for April 28th. This grant is \$2.2 million, and it can be used for economic development in several forms.
- b. Taylor Parkins states that one of the requirements is to hold a citizen's advisory task force, outlining projects seen as a necessity and ultimately providing a recommendation to the board. The first recommendation is to provide emergency shelter, which would demo an old gym. The second recommendation is to explore other neighborhoods' revitalization projects in underserved areas of the county.
- c. Chairman White commends the staff for its urgency in this matter.
- d. Commissioner Surlles inquires about the probability that the shelter will be prioritized. Taylor Parkins responds that given it is an urgent need, it increases the application's competitiveness.
- e. **Commissioner Gramling motions to approve a follow-up meeting on Tuesday, April 28, seconded by Commissioner Surlles. No vote is taken.**
- f. **Commissioner Gramling amends her motion to approve a follow-up meeting on Tuesday, April 28, with Chairman White attending via zoom, seconded by Commissioner Surlles and unanimously approved by the board.**

2. Approval of the Agenda (00:39:35)

- a. Item G added by County Manager Russo for Chief Burrus to provide a request for a Burn Ban.
- b. Item H added by Commissioner Hosford for Trulieve discussion.

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Regular Session

Thursday, April 16, 2026

6:00 PM

offer at this time. This does not prevent the county from having discussions with Solero in the future.

- ii. Commissioner Hosford recuses himself due to a conflict of interest in business ownership.
 - iii. **Commissioner Surles motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and approved by Commissioners Hall and White. Motion passes.**
 - iv. Citizens to be Heard: Carly Perry, Kay Curtis
- c. **Meeting Time Change Discussion (01:06:37)**
- i. Ron Russo states that more than half of researched counties follow the same manner as Jefferson County, with a split meeting schedule.
 - ii. **Commissioner Hall motions to approve meeting time changes. No second is made and no vote taken.**
 - iii. Commissioner Surles comments that the board has done well at dividing the issues appropriately.
 - iv. Commissioner Hosford comments that the board only agreed to do this under the provision of high-speed internet and enhanced camera quality.
 - v. Citizens to be Heard: Carly Perry, Andrew Fischer, Rachel Herman, Lynn McGrady
 - vi. Ron Russo commits to covering mundane, routine topics in morning meetings.
 - vii. Clerk Trey Hightower speaks to the YouTube video and audio quality.
- d. **Opportunity Zone 2.0 (01:17:08)**
- i. Ron Russo provides background information, calling Victor Leotta and Jeff Hendry to the podium.
 - ii. Victor Leotta and Jeff Hendry provide a brief presentation.
 - iii. Commissioner Surles inquires about the scoring.
 - iv. Victor Leotta responds to Commissioner Surles and explains that the scoring is based on the federal definition of income compared against the benchmark level used statewide for median family income. A county's score is determined by three main factors, commercial visibility, infrastructure and access, and economic need. In addition, a risk penalty is applied, which negatively affects the overall score.
 - v. Commissioner Hall asks about the possibility of assistance with a strategic plan.
 - vi. Victor Leotta responds to Commissioner Hall letting the board know when phase two is complete a team will help seek investors for each county.
 - vii. Citizens to be Heard: Brenda Wirick, Nikki Salls, Robin Fruity, Carly Perry

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Regular Session

Thursday, April 16, 2026

6:00 PM

- viii. Commissioner Surles motions to approve writing a letter, seconded by Commissioner Hall and unanimously approved by the board.**
- e. CORE Scope Approval (01:48:04)**
 - i. Ron Russo details the program, which will reimburse costs up to a total of \$3.675 million over 17 years.**
 - ii. Charles McDonald, Northwest Florida Health Network, speaks to the CORE Program.**
 - iii. Commissioner Surles motions to approve the program, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved by the board.**
- f. Impact Fees (01:56:47)**
 - i. Counsel Evan Rosenthal details the Impact Fee Study, which is not ready to move forward. By law, the county has one year to adopt impact fees by the time the study starts, which was June 2025. We will not be making the deadline in time.**
 - ii. Commissioner Hosford motions to terminate the contract, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved by the board.**
 - iii. Commissioner Hall asks why the consultant could not meet the June deadline. Counsel Evan Rosenthal responds that it is unclear why they could not meet the deadline.**
- g. Burn Ban Update (01:59:03)**
 - i. Chief Burrus states that the ten counties to our west already have bans in place. In the interest of public safety, we request a burn ban in place.**
 - ii. Commissioner Surles motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved by the board.**
- h. Trulieve Water Quality Discussion (02:01:06)**
 - i. Commissioner Hosford references news reports and Facebook posts of water runoff at Trulieve. He visited the location and was concerned by his findings. He encourages the board to write a letter to the Water Management District outlining their shared concerns.**
 - ii. Commissioner Gramling concurs with Commissioner Hosford's recommendation to write a letter.**
 - iii. Chairman White spoke to Trulieve, relaying the information they conveyed to him. They informed him that the retention pond is strictly rainwater. Board consensus is reached to write a letter to the Water Management District and to include our local delegation. Ron Russo will follow up the legality of dumping water onto neighboring property with the water management district.**
 - iv. Citizen to be Heard: Kate Calvin, Carly Perry, Felicia Lamb, James Lamb, Stacy Chambers**

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Regular Session

Thursday, April 16, 2026

6:00 PM


- v. Commissioner Surles inquires about acceptable levels of nitrate.
 - vi. Commissioner Hosford speaks to Leon County's Environmental Department and possible need for an environmental department for Jefferson County.
 - vii. Counsel requests clarity regarding the language included in the letter and to whom it will be sent to.
 - viii. Commissioner Gramling asks for clarity regarding testing for potential water contamination levels.
 - ix. **Commissioner Hosford motions to direct counsel to write a letter detailing the discussed concerns, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved by the board.**
- 7. Clerk of Court (02:39:52)**
- a. Trey Hightower reports that we received \$4,173,687.75 in former ARPA funds from FEMA. He thanks the county staff, commissioners, and sheriff and everyone involved in the process. Announces the departure of Deputy Clerk Lila Eaton and introduces Ashley Thomas as her replacement.
- 8. County Engineer (02:41:37)**
- a. Hunter provides updates on Waukeelah and Ashville Highway.
- 9. County Attorney (02:42:32)**
- 10. County Manager (02:42:35)**
- a. Ron Russo states that the industrial park sign will have our logo with lights. We have several no truck signs with noticeable improvements. Provides updates on basketball courts, equipment training, and staff development. He has \$400 leftover from Christmas cards that he would like to put toward an employee recognition luncheon in June. Advanced Aging Solutions will be providing seniors with education and outreach on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. He met with insurance broker Brown & Brown and evaluated our vehicles, reporting that we will be receiving a check for \$9,423.
- 11. County Commissioners (02:45:25)**
- a. Commissioner Hall compliments Ron Russo on the employee recognition luncheon.
 - b. Commissioner Hosford follows up on the Lloyd bus stop situation.
 - c. Commissioner Surles asks Ron to collaborate with other county officials to correct the parking at the rec park.
- 12. Adjourn (02:48:51)**
- a. **Commissioner Hosford motions to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Surles and unanimously approved by the board.**

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Regular Session

Thursday, April 16, 2026

6:00 PM



ATTEST

Benjamin White, Chairman



ATTEST

Cecil "Trey" Hightower, Clerk of Court

FORM 8B MEMORANDUM OF VOTING CONFLICT FOR COUNTY, MUNICIPAL, AND OTHER LOCAL PUBLIC OFFICERS

LAST NAME—FIRST NAME—MIDDLE NAME Hosford, Austin	NAME OF BOARD, COUNCIL, COMMISSION, AUTHORITY, OR COMMITTEE Jefferson County Board of County Commissioners
MAILING ADDRESS 1 Courthouse Circle Room 10	THE BOARD, COUNCIL, COMMISSION, AUTHORITY OR COMMITTEE ON WHICH I SERVE IS A UNIT OF: <input type="checkbox"/> CITY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COUNTY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER LOCAL AGENCY
CITY Monticello	COUNTY FL 32344
DATE ON WHICH VOTE OCCURRED April 18th 2026	NAME OF POLITICAL SUBDIVISION: N/A MY POSITION IS: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ELECTIVE <input type="checkbox"/> APPOINTIVE

WHO MUST FILE FORM 8B

This form is for use by any person serving at the county, city, or other local level of government on an appointed or elected board, council, commission, authority, or committee. It applies to members of advisory and non-advisory bodies who are presented with a voting conflict of interest under Section 112.3143, Florida Statutes.

Your responsibilities under the law when faced with voting on a measure in which you have a conflict of interest will vary greatly depending on whether you hold an elective or appointive position. For this reason, please pay close attention to the instructions on this form before completing and filing the form.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 112.3143, FLORIDA STATUTES

A person holding elective or appointive county, municipal, or other local public office **MUST ABSTAIN** from voting on a measure which would inure to his or her special private gain or loss. Each elected or appointed local officer also **MUST ABSTAIN** from knowingly voting on a measure which would inure to the special gain or loss of a principal (other than a government agency) by whom he or she is retained (including the parent, subsidiary, or sibling organization of a principal by which he or she is retained); to the special private gain or loss of a relative; or to the special private gain or loss of a business associate. Commissioners of community redevelopment agencies (CRAs) under Sec. 163.356 or 163.357, F.S., and officers of independent special tax districts elected on a one-acre, one-vote basis are not prohibited from voting in that capacity.

For purposes of this law, a "relative" includes only the officer's father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, brother, sister, father-in-law, mother-in-law, son-in-law, and daughter-in-law. A "business associate" means any person or entity engaged in or carrying on a business enterprise with the officer as a partner, joint venturer, coowner of property, or corporate shareholder (where the shares of the corporation are not listed on any national or regional stock exchange).

ELECTED OFFICERS:

In addition to abstaining from voting in the situations described above, you must disclose the conflict:

PRIOR TO THE VOTE BEING TAKEN by publicly stating to the assembly the nature of your interest in the measure on which you are abstaining from voting; *and*

WITHIN 15 DAYS AFTER THE VOTE OCCURS by completing and filing this form with the person responsible for recording the minutes of the meeting, who should incorporate the form in the minutes.

APPOINTED OFFICERS:

Although you must abstain from voting in the situations described above, you are not prohibited by Section 112.3143 from otherwise participating in these matters. However, you must disclose the nature of the conflict before making any attempt to influence the decision, whether orally or in writing and whether made by you or at your direction.

IF YOU INTEND TO MAKE ANY ATTEMPT TO INFLUENCE THE DECISION PRIOR TO THE MEETING AT WHICH THE VOTE WILL BE TAKEN:

- You must complete and file this form (before making any attempt to influence the decision) with the person responsible for recording the minutes of the meeting, who will incorporate the form in the minutes. (Continued on page 2)

APPOINTED OFFICERS (continued)

- A copy of the form must be provided immediately to the other members of the agency.
 - The form must be read publicly at the next meeting after the form is filed.
- IF YOU MAKE NO ATTEMPT TO INFLUENCE THE DECISION EXCEPT BY DISCUSSION AT THE MEETING:
- You must disclose orally the nature of your conflict in the measure before participating.
 - You must complete the form and file it within 15 days after the vote occurs with the person responsible for recording the minutes of the meeting, who must incorporate the form in the minutes. A copy of the form must be provided immediately to the other members of the agency, and the form must be read publicly at the next meeting after the form is filed.

DISCLOSURE OF LOCAL OFFICER'S INTEREST

I, Austin Hosford, hereby disclose that on April 16th, 20 26 :

(a) A measure came or will come before my agency which (check one or more)

- inured to my special private gain or loss;
- inured to the special gain or loss of my business associate, _____ ;
- inured to the special gain or loss of my relative, _____ ;
- inured to the special gain or loss of _____, by whom I am retained, or
- inured to the special gain or loss of _____, which is the parent subsidiary, or sibling organization or subsidiary of a principal which has retained me.

(b) The measure before my agency and the nature of my conflicting interest in the measure is as follows:

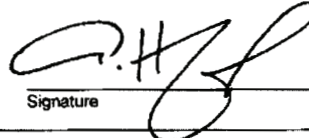
I am the owner of the Marathon Gas Station on 5185 S Jefferson Street. This results in a conflicting interest in voting on any matters relating to the Truck Stop Involvement.

If disclosure of specific information would violate confidentiality or privilege pursuant to law or rules governing attorneys, a public officer, who is also an attorney, may comply with the disclosure requirements of this section by disclosing the nature of the interest in such a way as to provide the public with notice of the conflict.

Date Filed

4-28-26

Signature



NOTICE: UNDER PROVISIONS OF FLORIDA STATUTES §112.317, A FAILURE TO MAKE ANY REQUIRED DISCLOSURE CONSTITUTES GROUNDS FOR AND MAY BE PUNISHED BY ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING: IMPEACHMENT, REMOVAL OR SUSPENSION FROM OFFICE OR EMPLOYMENT, DEMOTION, REDUCTION IN SALARY, REPRIMAND, OR A CIVIL PENALTY NOT TO EXCEED \$10,000.