

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Regular Session

Thursday, May 7, 2026

9:00 AM

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

The Jefferson County Board of County Commissioners met at 9:00 a.m. and approved the agenda and consent agenda before receiving updates and conducting multiple budget, grant, and procurement discussions. Key actions included approval of economic development initiatives, including workforce surveys and a \$25,000 grant application, and authorization of Hazard Mitigation Grant projects for a jail generator and Department of Health wind retrofit, both largely and fully funded. The Board awarded Small Nonprofit Grants to the Humane Society, MakaCloud, and the Monticello Opera House while discussing concerns about 4-H funding structure and a \$5,000 pass-through involving Dirty Pecan, with further review deferred. Extensive presentations were heard from candidates for county attorney services and engineering consulting contracts, alongside routine department updates on roads, solid waste, library services, and Extension programming. The County Manager also reported on veteran's services improvements through a state partnership, animal services changes following the City of Monticello's decision to maintain its current agreement, environmental testing plans near the Trulieve facility, and progress on county manager recruitment, while additional updates included infrastructure projects and the arrival of historic document reproductions for public display. The meeting concluded with commissioner comments and adjournment.

- 1. 9AM Call to Order**
- 2. Approval of the Agenda (00:19:57)**
 - a. Commissioner Gramling motions to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Hall, and unanimously approved by the board.**
- 3. Public Announcements, Presentations, and Awards (00:20:07)**
- 4. Citizens Request and Input on Non-Agenda Items (00:20:17)**
- 5. Consent Agenda (00:20:25)**
 - a. Commissioner Surles motions to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved by the board.**
- 6. General Business (00:20:40)**
 - a. ARPC – Economic Development Update (00:20:41)**
 - i. County Manager Russo introduced Carolyn Smith from the Jefferson County Economic Development Committee.
 - ii. Carolyn Smith updated the Board on the Economic Development Committee, noting strong stakeholder participation and five meetings held to date. She reported three priorities: retaining youth through workforce

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training and job opportunities, supporting local businesses, and addressing workforce readiness gaps, along with ongoing data review and development of workforce surveys.

- iii. Commissioner Hall requested clarification on the designated point of contact.
- iv. Carolyn informed the Board that Commissioner White was currently the designated point of contact.
- v. **Commissioner Surles motions to approve the distribution of surveys, seconded by Commissioner Hosford, and unanimously approved by the board.**
 - i. Carolyn also requested authorization for the Economic Development Committee to apply for a Duke Energy Foundation grant of up to \$25,000 to support development of an integrated economic development webpage with data visualization, branding, and outreach efforts.
 - ii. **Commission Surles motions to approve the application process for the Duke Energy Foundation Grant, seconded by Commissioner Gramling, and unanimously approved by the board.**
- b. **Hazard Mitigation Grant – Jail Generator (00:28:00)**
- c. **Department of Health, Wind Retrofit Award (00:28:00)**
 - i. County Manager Russo requested that General Business Items B: Hazard Mitigation Grant – Jail Generator and Item C: Department of Health Wind Retrofit Upgrade be combined and considered together.
 - ii. Chairman White agreed to combine the items.
 - iii. County Manager Russo informed the Board of two Local Mitigation Strategy grants: one fully funding a jail generator and another supporting a Department of Health wind retrofit, with a total project cost of approximately \$114,000 and a \$2,745 local share. Emergency Management Director Christy Anderson was present to address questions.
 - iv. Emergency Management Director Kristy Anderson advised that both the jail generator and Department of Health wind retrofit projects were Hazard Mitigation Grants that had undergone an extensive RFI review process. She noted that the jail generator was funded at approximately \$500,000 at 100% coverage, and the retrofit required only a small local match, with both projects vetted and approved by the Local Mitigation Strategy Committee.
 - v. **Commissioner Surles motions to approve all items from B and C under General Business as well as the construction agreement, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved by the board.**
- d. **Small Non-Profit Grants Application Presentations (00:30:30)**

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- i. County Manager Russo provided an overview of the Small Nonprofit Grant Program, noting it supports nonprofits that enhance the quality of life for Jefferson County residents and is governed by Resolution 2024-05 and established policy. He explained that the program provides \$15,000 annually with a \$2,000 cap per organization and requires standard organizational and IRS documentation. He reported that 13 applications were received, with one ineligible, seven missing required documents, and six complete, and reminded the Board that it retains full discretion in awarding funds, including applicants with incomplete submissions.
- ii. Annie Anderson from the Humane Society explained that the organization had operated locally since 1984 and was missing only its articles of incorporation due to its age and requested grant funding.
- iii. Tiffany Wilkie, representing her animal sanctuary MakaCloud, requested funding assistance to help cover food, veterinary care, and medication expenses.
- iv. Commissioner Gramling expressed a preference to create a single, strengthened 4-H line item within the Extension Office budget rather than relying on the Small Nonprofit Grant Program, and suggested potentially increasing overall 4-H funding while clarifying the structure of the existing \$5,000 and \$2,000 allocations and Dirty Pecan support.
- v. The Board and County Manager Russo discussed the 4-H funding structure, considering how current and future grant funds should be directed and whether they should remain within the Small Nonprofit Grant Program or be consolidated into the Extension Office budget.
- vi. County Manager Russo recommended postponing a final decision on 4-H funding and returning with a more detailed, structured proposal at the next meeting so the Board could better determine how 4-H and Dirty Pecan-related funds and line items should be organized.
- vii. Commissioner Surles moved to approve grant funding for the Humane Society and MakaCloud to avoid delaying the applicants who had presented at the meeting, no second.
- viii. Mike Haring, Director of the Monticello Opera House, reported record youth participation and requested grant funding to support the Opera House's murder mystery dinner theater programs.
- ix. **Motion from Commissioner Surles to give the Humane Society, MakaCloud and The Monticello Opera House \$2,000 each from the grant, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved by the board.**

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- x. Commissioner Hall asked whether nonprofit grant recipients would be required to submit a written report detailing how the awarded funds were used.
 - xi. County Manager Russo responded that all nonprofit grant recipients would be required to submit a written report by the end of the fiscal year detailing how the awarded funds were used.
- e. Continuing Attorney Service Presentation (00:51:10)**
- i. County Manager Russo informed the Board that the current contract for county attorney services is set to expire on June 30. He further advised that proposals had been received from Mr. Scott Snavely, Constangy, Brooks, Smith & Prophete LLC, and Nabors, Giblin & Nickerson. Mr. Snavely was unable to attend the meeting and therefore did not provide a presentation regarding his proposal.
 - ii. Attorney Scott Poole of Constangy, Brooks, Smith & Prophete outlined his 30 years of public sector labor and employment law experience, including service as chief legal counsel and parliamentarian for the Duval County School Board. Ms. Thompson highlighted her operational experience overseeing HR, policy compliance, public records, and procurement for a large public entity, noting that together they could provide both legal counsel and practical support to county staff.
 - iii. County Attorney Evan Rosenthal of Nabors, Giblin & Nickerson stated that NGN exclusively represents local governments and has worked with all 67 Florida counties, offering full-service counsel in areas such as land use, litigation, procurement, and animal control. He proposed continuing with Rosenthal as primary attorney, supported by former Jefferson County Attorney Heather Encinosa and other subject matter experts, while maintaining the current retainer and hourly rates.
- f. Continuing Engineering Consultant Presentation (01:07:30)**
- i. County Manager Russo explained that eleven engineering consultant firms had submitted qualifications and would present for consideration under a three-year continuing services contract with two one-year extension options, noting that the Board could select one or multiple firms to be on call for future engineering work.
 - ii. Project Manager Shandra Gaines of WSB explained that the firm had supported Jefferson County for five years, including work on Government Farm Road, Asheville Highway, and South Water Street. She noted that WSB had expanded from a CEI-only practice to a full-service engineering

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- firm with grant writing, planning, and project management capabilities, staffed by former public sector and FDOT professionals.
- iii. Joanna Moore of LJA Engineering, along with civil engineer Cody Boomer and transportation engineer Jared Hanson, presented the firm's qualifications in land development, stormwater, and transportation engineering.
 - iv. Meredith Heard of MH2 Engineering presented the firm's ability to support the county from project planning and grant assistance through design and construction administration.
 - v. MLD, an architectural firm with 48 years of experience in roofing, waterproofing, building envelopes, and historic preservation, presented its long-term continuing services work for state and local entities. The firm described itself as locally rooted, with several team members residing in the county, and noted it had assembled mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and civil engineering subconsultants while supporting community organizations and schools, positioning itself to serve as a continuing services architect/engineer for the county.
 - vi. Kimley-Horn was represented by Kaybre Prince, Jim Donahue, Chris Helm, and Allie Palmer, who outlined the firm's local resources in Tallahassee and its multidisciplinary capabilities in transportation engineering, stormwater and site design, planning, and grant support for Jefferson County.
 - vii. Panhandle Engineering, represented by Doug Crook and Julie Dennis, described its full-service civil engineering work for local governments across the Panhandle and highlighted Julie Dennis's firm, Ovid Solutions, which specializes in securing and administering grants for community infrastructure projects.
 - viii. Neel-Schaffer, Inc., represented by Greg Wayt and Donald Stanley, emphasized the firm's broad engineering and funding experience across the Southeast and its local team's ability to provide turnkey support to Jefferson County from grant acquisition and design through construction and project closeout.
 - ix. The Balmoral Group, represented by Nate Wilbur and Alison Campbell, highlighted the firm's expertise in economics, hydrology/hydraulics, and GIS-based data visualization, as well as its experience administering and managing grants for resiliency and infrastructure projects for rural counties.
 - x. Southeastern Consulting Engineers, represented by Jack Husbands and Hunter Baumgarner, noted their role as Jefferson County's current engineer, emphasizing FDOT prequalification, successful grant acquisition, and

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experience delivering local transportation and infrastructure projects from design through construction.

- xi. CTS Engineering, represented by Martellus Bennett and Rob Stephenson, presented itself as a rapidly growing firm with a new Tallahassee office, offering full service civil and transportation engineering, construction services, and strong grant support capabilities for county projects.
- xii. North Florida Professional Services, represented by Greg Bailey, Trace Flowers, and Mark Mason, highlighted nearly 30 years of experience serving rural Florida communities, with in-house capabilities including transportation and utility design, planning, comprehensive plan and land development updates, and interim staffing support for local governments.

7. Clerk of Court (02:05:15)

- a. Clerk of Court Trey Hightower advised the Board that he would be coordinating a meeting with the auditors regarding the FY 24-25 audit during the following week.

8. County Engineer (02:05:40)

- a. The County Engineer Hunter Baumgarner reported that staff reviewed Lloyd/Ted Rentz Park and developed a concept to improve traffic flow and parking by adding a second entrance/exit at the existing three-way stop, separating parking for the pickleball and tennis courts from the ball fields and connecting access points with some required tree removal. He also noted that the Asheville Highway project design had been submitted to FDOT for initial review, and that on Waukeenah Highway the contractor would return to complete final surface patching and striping once scheduling was confirmed.

9. County Attorney (02:09:05)

- a. The County Attorney Evan Rosenthal provided a brief county manager recruitment update, noting that all responsive applications had been forwarded to the commissioners. He stated that the Florida Association of County Managers was evaluating the applications and preparing a short list, which was expected the following week for Board discussion and direction at the May 21 meeting.

10. County Manager (02:09:42)

- a. County Manager Russo reported ongoing challenges with the shared Veterans Affairs position under the existing MOU with Madison County, noting the county offset Officer Jones's salary by approximately \$32,000 for about two days of service per week, but that coverage and access had been inconsistent. He stated the goal of developing a more robust local veterans' program and informed the Board that the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs had offered to provide a Veterans Services Officer one day per week at no cost. He requested the Board's concurrence, without formal vote, to move forward in engaging the state agency to

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supplement and strengthen current services while a long-term solution was developed.

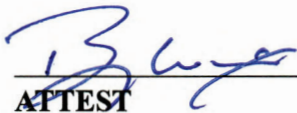
- b. County Manager Russo reported that, after inviting the City of Monticello to a joint Animal Services meeting and proposing a revised interlocal agreement, the city declined and requested to continue under the existing arrangement. He stated he was now working with the County Attorney on a July 15 exit strategy, noting that City calls accounted for approximately 60% of Animal Services workload.
- c. Citizens to Speak – Clayton Tolbert
- d. County Manager Russo reported that the county had engaged a nationally accredited Tallahassee laboratory to develop a water and air quality testing plan around the Trulieve facility and had invited the lab and other state subject matter experts to the May 21 meeting to present their proposed testing methodology and coverage area to the Board.
- e. Commissioner Hosford inquired whether State Water Management District agencies would attend the next meeting.
- f. County Manager Russo responded by informing the Board that the Suwannee River agency and the Health Department would be present at the next meeting.

11. County Commissioners (02:20:39)

- a. Commissioner Hall requested an update regarding the status of the flagpole.
- b. County Manager Russo informed the Board that the county had been gifted high-quality reproductions of seven founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, making Jefferson one of only a few hundred counties nationwide to receive them. He stated he planned to bring examples of the documents and a mock-up design to the next meeting.

12. Adjourn (02:21:49)

- a. **Commissioner Surles motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Hosford.**



ATTEST

Benjamin White, Chairman



ATTEST

Cecil "Trey" Hightower, Clerk of Court