

**Jasper County Board Minutes**  
*COUNTY OF JASPER NEWTON, ILLINOIS*

County Office Building 204 W Washington St, Newton, IL 62448

January 11, 2024

The County Board met in regular session on Thursday, January 11, 2024. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm by proclamation according to law by Sheriff Francis. Sheriff Francis led a moment in silence and the Pledge of Allegiance. Members present were Bollman, Deckard, Geier, Heltsley, Judson, Pickens, Spiker, Warfel, and Weddell.

The county flag on display, the sheriff's office has 3 poles and wondering what the third flag would be, the flag on display is from 1976 and was created for the county by a group of residents.

Public comments:

Jessica Wells is the new University of Illinois Extension County Director. She is taking over for Carl Baker who accepted another position. 5 years of higher education and leadership but new to extension, she does have a great group to work with. She spoke about Snap Education and other items.

Michael Murbarger spoke on behalf of the Wade Fire Protection District about the energy transition grant. The fire department along with other taxing bodies will be affected by the closing of the power plant.

Spiker moved to approve the agenda. Weddell seconded the motion. Motion carried on a voice vote.

Reports:

*County Departments*

**Ambulance** - 137 runs total in December; 911- 60; Transfers/Discharges – 42; Refusals/canceled en route/no patient found – 19; Mutual Aid – 16 Clay Curtright has passed the requirements of paramedic.

**Highway Department** - Full Board approval needed on the following resolution: Resolution Appropriating Funds for the Payment of the County Engineer's Salary – Sec: 24-00000-00-GM. Effingham Animal Health installed the hoop on the salt storage hoop building and is now complete. The MFT Rock & Pipe Letting for County and Township is scheduled for January 22, 2024.

**Board of Health** – In packet. The construction work on the outside is looking good. Blood Drive will be February 8<sup>th</sup> at the Knights of Columbus Hall 12-5:30 pm. Free PSA and Cholesterol Clinic will be February 13<sup>th</sup> 7 am – 1 pm. There are appointments to the board of health. The next board of health meeting will be Jan 22.

*County Positions/Services*

**Building Maintenance** – Dec. 19 Amy Tarr asked about getting her office windows tinted to reduce glare. Dec. 20 Inspected the north steps and porch at the courthouse with Sheriff Francis and Dick Mahaffey. Dec. 30 Received estimates from Jason Bierman on Tom's office wall for \$5,090 and for the county building storage room for \$9,646. We will proceed with Tom's Office wall. Decided to look for a cheaper solution for basement storage. Jan. 8 Talked to Al Thompson of the American Legion about the safety problem with the north courthouse entrance, so he could be thinking about next years Veteran's Day program.

IT Consultants – Elections and IVRS internet connection was changed over. Office 365 is pushing 2<sup>nd</sup> authentication, gave examples of ways to have second authentication. The threat locker recommendation was sent out and has not been looked at yet.

Animal Control – In Packet

*Elected Officials*

**Treasurer-** Reports from Bigard were sent in the board packet. The general fund income of \$199,308.91, and the personal property income of \$28,018.58 with a total income for December was \$227,755.84. The expenses for December were \$290,446.93. Total income less expenses for December a net loss of \$62,691.09.

**Other Elected Officials/Offices**

The clerk reported February 8<sup>th</sup> will be the start of early voting.

Judson made a motion to approve the consent agenda containing the following items: Approval of County Board December 14, 2023, Minutes; Adoption of Ordinance for Maximum Setback Zones Concerning Newton Well Field Water Distribution System; Adoption of Resolution Concerning Election Judge Compensation; Appointment of Dr. Michelle Braddy to the Board of Health for a 3-Year Term [February 2027]; Reappointment of Mary Finley to the Board of Health for a 3-Year Term [February 2027]; Reappointment of Dr. Ryan Jennings to the Board of Health for a 3-Year Term [February 2027]; Approval of Discover Downstate Illinois Tourism as Jasper County's "State Certified Tourism Bureau"; Adoption of Resolution Appropriating Funds for County Engineer's Salary; File County Reports; and Allow Claims. Geier seconded the motion. Motion carried on a voice vote.

Old Business:

**Item A – Engineering & Architectural Feasibility Study/Inspection Report for Jasper County Courthouse.**

The Engineering & Architectural Feasibility Study/Inspection Report was distributed to all board members in December. Representatives from both Conner & Conner and ADG were on hand this to review and answer any questions related to the study/inspection report. Woodard spoke on the inspection report. Everything has a life expectancy, and the courthouse has come to that point. Major restoration could be 1.5 to 2 million to address the major issues to fix what is broke. The number would not include covering all compliances. If we did nothing how long would be functional 2 to 5 years. At what point is a building condemned; it is not there but in an emergency event the building could be an issue. Nothing historically like the original courthouse. Chairman's Comments: As a board, we have reached that decision point regarding our 148-year-old courthouse. We have many historical structures throughout our State and Country, but those buildings require regular maintenance and funding to keep them preserved and in good condition. The condition of the Jasper County Courthouse is not the fault of this board but rather the result of decades of neglect and minimal maintenance. The beautiful neoclassical domed structure that was originally constructed has been reduced to a simple two-story brick building. The dome and central tower were removed just after a few decades because it wasn't structurally sound, the roof flattened in the 1940s-1950s, and the large windows were removed for smaller windows with others being bricked up. On all four corners of the building, additions were added. There are numerous issues with the current structure as pointed out in the study as well as safety and health concerns for the public and employees in the building. We have passed the point of doing nothing Warfel believes the following 3 options are what lay before the board: 1. Restore & Repair Existing Structure. 2. Demolish and Build a New Structure. 3. Build a New Structure at a New Location. Again, Warfel reiterated that the condition of the Courthouse is not the fault of this board. As a board, we did not ask for this issue but because the Courthouse was not maintained properly, almost from day one, inevitably we have arrived at a critical juncture and must determine the best course of action. We could have a 10,000-12,000 square foot building. They are working with 7 to 8 courthouses. Next step is a building committee team working on

basic design. Asbestos estimate and demolition estimates could be investigated. Treccia asked if they have investigated the judicial requirements.

### **Item B – Energy Transition Community Grant**

The Grant has been awarded and the State is awaiting decisions from the County regarding how we wish to proceed forward. The County can't keep putting this issue off. The January meeting is the initial final decision step with a potential public meeting to follow. A final decision regarding the Courthouse should be reached in a timely manner. Heltsley would like to have a public meeting. Give the community notice. 5 million plus could be what we could get the grant over a 9-year period. We would have to get a loan, it could be paid back over 15 years. We must apply yearly for the grant. There is no guarantee on the grant funds. Geier was saying we would at least have it paid for by part of the grant. Someone in the future will have to deal with it and then there will not be funds then and costs will keep going up. \$250,000 has been spent on the courthouse since 2016.

### **Item C – City of Newton Green Space Project West of County Building**

A representative Judy McClure discussed the project in more detail. She has made a change from pavers to a sidewalk to make it more accessible. The city is going to take care of removing the concrete wall. Rex Vault is making the benches at a discounted price. Low maintenance plants will be included with a center feature. Tourism will assist with flowers. Welcoming space to draw people in. Warfel asked what the county would be expected to help. Bollman would like to know an estimate of the cost. Pickens said financially it would be tough for the county to contribute to the project and has never been an assumption to pay for the project. Proceed forward to granting the portion of land the county owns to the city.

### **Item D – County of Jasper Website**

At the City Council Meeting on January 2, 2024, the City of Newton approved moving forward on a joint County of Jasper/City of Newton website. Imagine This! Will be working with the various offices and departments at both the County and City level to build a website. This process will take some time.

### **Item E – County Text Notification System**

At the December meeting, the County Clerk had a county text notification proposal. It was also mentioned at the meeting that Hyper-Reach the Jasper County 911 text alert system could be used to send out county messages. Following the Jasper County 911 meeting on Friday, January 5, 2024, it was announced that the 911 board would like to maintain Hyper-Reach for emergency messaging only. Potential road closures and anything that would impact county residents in that manner would be acceptable. However, messages regarding taxes, voting, etc. would not be viewed as "emergency messages". Chairman's Comments: Warfel would suggest revisiting any county text notification system later and potentially after we see how effective the County website is at informing the public.

### **Item F – County EMA Building**

The County is in the process of getting a \$200,000 reimbursement from the State for our Jail Project. It has been suggested that we discuss the possibility of using that money for the building of a Jasper County EMA building, which we have tabled in the past. Weddell said we had originally ARPA funds allocated but he would like to see the funds allocated to the EMA building. Discussion on the topic took place.

New Business:

### **Item A – Adoption of Amendments to the Jasper County Personnel Policy [#22-12-15]**

With the Paid Leave for All Workers Act now in effect in Illinois, it will require us to amend our personnel policy to reflect the changes in the law. Any part-time worker or seasonal worker will accumulate (1) hour for every 40 hours worked. Since our vacation policy already allows for (2) weeks/10 days of vacation for any employee starting we are already in compliance with the minimum requirement regarding full-time workers. This accumulated time off will not be paid out upon termination, resignation, or retirement. The amended policy was distributed to all Board Members, Elected Officials, and Department Heads and is included in the board packet with most changes to the policy taking place on page 16 of the policy. Geier moved to adopt the amendments to the Jasper County Personnel Policy. Deckard seconded the motion. Motion carried on a voice vote. The Amendments to the Jasper County Personnel Policy have been adopted.

### **Item B – Adoption of Resolution Concerning Polling Place Location for Fox Township**

The County Clerk has asked the board to approve moving the polling place for Fox Township from the township building location at 5685 N. State Highway 130 Newton, IL 62448 to the West Liberty Equity Building located at 3795 North State Highway 130, West Liberty Illinois 62475. The location change is seen as needed for the convenience and accessibility of voters and election judges. If approved this change would go into effect beginning with the March 2024 General Primary Election and the new location would serve as the polling location for Fox Township moving forward. Judson expressed his concern on the taxpayers of Fox not having a building that is what the town fund is for. Bollman moved to adopt the resolution concerning a change in the polling place location for Fox Township. Spiker seconded the motion. Motion carried on a voice vote. The change in polling place location for Fox Township has been adopted.

Item C will be voted on after closed session.

**Board Comments:** Pickens said his grandmother was one of the women who helped with the making of the flag.

### **Chairman's Comments:**

The Jasper County Chamber of Commerce Banquet will be on Thursday, January 18 at the West End Reception and Events Center. The evening starts with a social hour at 5:30 p.m., Dinner at 6:00 p.m., Speaker and Awards at 7:00 p.m. The Dinner is catered by Ochs Street Meats and will be served at 6:30 p.m. Tami Phillips CEO of Norris Electric Cooperative will be the guest speaker for the evening. The Jasper County CEO is hosting a Murder Mystery Dinner & Live Action on Saturday, January 20 at 5:30 p.m. at the Scott Avenue Christian Church. Tickets are \$45 a piece or a table of 8 for \$320. Contact a CEO student to buy your tickets. The Jasper County Employee Appreciation Luncheon for all County Governmental Employees will be held on Wednesday, January 24, 2024, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the West End Reception and Events Center. All County Employees, Department Heads, Elected Officials, and Board Members are encouraged to attend. Tuesday, January 9, 2024, was Law Enforcement Appreciation Day. On behalf of the County Board, County Employees, Citizens of the County, and myself Warfel would like to extend a sincere appreciation and thanks to all the women and men in law enforcement who serve. Thank You! A reminder all Non-Emergency County Offices/Departments will be closed this Monday, January 15, 2024, in observance of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Holiday.

The board had an executive session with action taken following the executive session.

Geier moved for the board to enter an executive session under the following exception: Discussion of Collective Negotiation Matters (exception 2). Heltsley seconded the motion. Bollman, Deckard, Geier, Heltsley, Judson, Pickens, Spiker, Warfel, and Weddell voted yes. Motion carried on a roll call vote. The Board entered an Executive Session at 7:48 pm. Reentered open session 8:08 pm.

### **Item C – Approval of Agreement Between Jasper County and the Illinois Policeman’s Benevolent & Protective Association**

As a result of continued negotiations an agreement between both parties has been reached. Most of the changes in the agreement relate to an increase in wages/salary for Sheriff Deputies, Corrections Officers, and Dispatchers.

Heltsley moved to approve the agreement between Jasper County and the Illinois Policeman Benevolent & Protective Association. Deckard seconded the motion. Bollman, Deckard, Geier, Heltsley, Judson, Pickens, Spiker, Warfel, and Weddell voted yes. The agreement between Jasper County and the Illinois Policeman Benevolent & Protective Association is approved.

Warfel asked about a time which would be best for the meeting for the public on the courthouse. Geier emphasized the need for all board members to attend. Plan an evening and have security for the evening in the courthouse. Conner and Conner could be there to answer the questions on the inspection.

Geier moved to adjourn at 8:21 pm. Bollman seconded the motion. Motion carried on a voice vote.

The Next Board Meeting will be Thursday, February 15, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

Amy Tarr, Jasper County Clerk