The Jasper County Council met this date at 6:00 P.M. C.S.T. in the Commissioners Room, Suite 202, of the Jasper County Courthouse located at 115 West Washington Street, Rensselaer, Indiana, with the following members present: Rein Bontreger, Stephen Jordan, Gerrit H. DeVries, Andrew Andree, Paul Norwine, Brett Risner, Kendall Culp, Richard Maxwell and James A. Walstra. Also present was Auditor Kimberly K. Grow and Deputy Auditor Tina Porter. Let the record show that Gary Fritts was absent. Mr. Bontreger called the meeting to order.

DAN FAGEN / FINANCIAL ARTS: Mr. Culp stated that last year, the County was over budget on the health insurance by approximately $500,000.00 and, in turn, raised premiums by about that much to cover the shortfall. The Commissioners told the broker, Financial Arts, that the County could not raise premiums for 2019. The Council then cut the budget by $500,000.00 for 2019. The Commissioners met in Executive Session with the third party administrator, Key Benefits. The County received four bids, with three of them coming in lower than Key Benefits. Mr. Dan Fagen stated that the County chose UMR, which is the largest third party administrator in the country. The network is United Healthcare. Coverage begins January 1, 2019. Employees will be able to choose from three plans, one of them being the current plan along with two HSA’s with lower premiums and higher deductibles. Mr. Dan Fagen explained that the County will have to pay Key Benefit Administrators for the administration of handling the run-out claims for a period of five months. At the request of Mr. Fagen, UMR has agreed to waive two months of administrative fees in the amount of approximately $13,000.00. Mr. Fritts asked if the three plan choices and the HSA will be a nightmare for the Auditor’s Office. Mr. Fagen replied that, for the three plans, it’s a matter of changing prices and deductions. The County will not be handling anything to do with the HSA. If the employee sets it up, it will be up to them to do that on their own. Mr. Maxwell asked what the maximum contributions are per year. Mr. Fagen replied that it’s $3,500.00 for single and $7,000.00 for a family. If you are over fifty-five, you can contribute an extra $1,000.00. Mr. Fritts asked if there are any estimates on premiums for the employees. Mr. Bontreger gave him a handout showing premium amounts. Mr. Culp stated that this switch is saving the County close to $1,000,000.00.

COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT: Mr. Culp stated that the Highway Department was at the last meeting to request to hire two additional employees for plowing. The money was requested in the budget, but was not approved. The positions would be paid out of Motor Vehicle Highway, not County General. Mr. Bontreger stated that the Council was aware that the Highway Department would be replacing the employees that were retiring. They did not fill the other requests because, as has happened in the past, if a salary is funded it will be filled and they had not received word that it was approved by the Commissioners. Mr. Bontreger stated that Ms. Witherington had said she thinks she has enough money in the budget to transfer money in order to start paying two new people right away and an additional would then have to be done in February. Mr. Norwine asked if MVH money has to be used in a certain amount of time. Mr. Culp replied that it does not, but a certain percentage does have to be used on roads. He stated that there are also two employees in the Surveyor’s Office that help with plowing subdivisions, parking lots and county owned properties. Mr. Walstra and Mr. Culp informed the Council that the Highway Department does not have enough employees to cover the districts with the employees they have now due to the health issues. Mr. Culp stated that, if they hire two, they are technically only gaining one due to the one that lost his CDL because of health issues. He said that the Commissioners approved the hiring of the two new positions.

NIPSCO: Mr. Culp stated that NIPSCO has appealed their assessment for this year and Mrs. Hoffman has been unable to come to an agreement with them. He would like to form a task force to discuss NIPSCO and the challenges that it will cause the county. He said that he will be meeting with NIPSCO tomorrow before they meet with their tax team, but he believes they only want to meet with him for public relations reasons. He would like to have emergency services, fire department personnel, members of the taxing units such as Kankakee Valley Schools and some business owners, along with a Council member and a Commissioner on the task force and would like the meetings to be open to the public. They could ask NIPSCO to make a presentation at one meeting and ask Mrs. Hoffman to make a presentation at another and get some dialogue to where the county can control some of the dialogue rather than just reacting.
NIPSCO CONT’D: NIPSCO is approximately thirty percent of Kankakee Valley School Corporations assessed value and approximately thirty five percent including Georgia Pacific.

He stated that Mr. Eastridge is getting a lot of calls from business and industry regarding development opportunities. He will bring those to the Commissioners when appropriate. He said the County doesn’t have to accept all of them, but they certainly shouldn’t say no to all of them either. They just need to figure out what is right for the county and find out what NIPSCO’s thinking. NIPSCO is talking as if they want to switch over to renewables. He said they’ve asked NIPSCO to remember Jasper County with their future plans.

Mr. Norwine stated that Umbaugh gave a presentation at the school board meeting. When Georgia Pacific was at KV for the career fair, the representative was pretty certain they won’t be closing down because they’ve been stockpiling. Mr. Culp stated that, in addition to the Kankakee Valley School Corporation rate, there will be an increase in the county rate, the Kankakee township rate and the library rate. Mr. Norwine stated that he finds it hard to believe that they would completely shut down the gas generators that are already there. Mr. Maxwell replied that they will only be used in an emergency. Mr. Culp stated that NIPSCO calls them “peakers” that are only used at peak times when they need a boost in power output. The power generated by the peakers is very insignificant. Mr. Norwine mentioned the proposed rate increase and stated that NIPSCO has not been approved for that yet. Mr. Bontreger stated that, when NIPSCO appeals their taxes and ends up paying less, he doesn’t believe the savings is being passed on to the customers. Mr. Norwine asked if NIPSCO saying they will be able to save customers money is because they will be saving on assessed value in Jasper County.

Mr. Risner stated that NIPSCO has said they can buy power for one-third of the cost that it takes to produce it with coal. Mr. Fritts asked if the batteries NIPSCO has in their development plan would be located at the Schaefer plant. Mr. Walstra stated that he believes NIPSCO is going to see how the county reacts to wind and solar to determine how they react to the county. Mr. Risner stated that, in White County, NIPSCO has one hundred and twenty acres where they are storing wind power. Mr. Walstra stated that the power from the storage facility is going to an area just north of Indianapolis. NIPSCO anticipates their assessed value will decrease by three hundred and ninety four million by 2023. There was discussion that the assessed value should be based on the actual value. Mr. Bontreger stated that the Department of Local Government Finance will not allow the assessor access to how they reached the assessed value numbers as it is considered confidential information.

Mr. Culp stated that the numbers they give the Utility Regulatory Commission are extremely higher than the numbers they give the assessor; however, they should match or at least be close. He stated that it’s a legislative issue that he’s talked to the governor about.

Mr. Bontreger asked Mr. Culp what the timeline is for setting up the task force. Mr. Culp replied that he would like to have the first meeting by January and then have a meeting every couple months. Mr. Fritts asked what NIPSCO’s plans are for the physical building. Mr. Culp stated that the Commissioners have asked them and they’ve stated that they might take they stacks down, but they don’t know. He stated that wind turbines have decommissioning agreements and he’s unsure if there was one signed with NIPSCO when they came to Jasper County in the 1970’s. He said that there was another coal generating power company that contacted Mr. Eastridge about purchasing the facility; however, they will need someone to buy the power and NIPSCO will not buy the power if it’s coal generated.

PNC BANK BUILDING PURCHASE: Mr. Maxwell stated that the county has been in negotiations with PNC since July. The earnest money was paid November 10th. Closing will take place on December 7th. There have been two appraisals done and they both came in higher than the purchase price. There was an environmental inspection done and the results were normal. There was boring done that came back clear. The report is in the file in the Auditor’s Office. The roof units are approximately three years old. He stated that he was in the basement the day after it rained over five inches and there wasn’t any evidence anywhere in the building that showed signs of water infiltration. The building was built in 1969. There will need to be an elevator put in and the restrooms need to be made handicap accessible.
PNC BANK BUILDING PURCHASE CONT'D: There are two large vaults, which could be used for microfilm storage. Mr. Fritts asked if they plan on using the drive-through for payment of taxes. Mr. Maxwell replied that they are going to wait and see what the contractors come up with. They will be moving everyone from the annex in to this building and plan on selling the annex building so they don’t have to put any more money in to it. Mr. Jordan asked if they’ve thought about moving any other offices over there besides just the annex. Mr. Maxwell replied that there’s not enough room. Mr. Norwine asked if it would make sense to have something operating in the annex as opposed to a total shutdown. He stated that he’s asking because he’s heard that since the closing of St. Joe, things have started to deteriorate. Mr. Maxwell replied that the Commissioners will have to keep it up, but the biggest reason they want to sell it is because they can buy the PNC building and renovate it for less money than what it would cost to update the heating and cooling in the annex. Mr. Jordan asked if it would be beneficial to have the prosecutor and probation in the courthouse where there is security. Mr. Maxwell replied that the new prosecutor doesn’t want to be in the courthouse. He stated that their final plan is not official yet. They are waiting on the reports from the contractors. He said that, if they were to move offices from the courthouse over there, the offices in the courthouse would then need to be remodeled as well to accommodate the offices from the annex. Mr. Andree asked if the county still needs the vacant lot on the southwest side of the courthouse. Mr. Maxwell replied that the county does not need it. Mr. DeVries asked if the building will provide for a larger meeting space. Mr. Maxwell replied that there’s not enough room. He said there is a meeting room in the basement; however, it doesn’t hold many more people than the Commissioners room. There was discussion regarding the need for a larger meeting space.

Mr. Bontreger asked about an estimated timeline as far as renovation and when it would be completed and ready for occupancy. Mr. Andree stated that he is working with Hamstra Builders and Titan Construction trying to get design figures and pricing for the end of January. Mr. Maxwell suggested taking the department heads over to look at the building. Mr. Culp stated that the release of information has been limited because the environmental report wasn’t received until right before the down payment was due. The goal was to move everyone out of the annex.

DOOR QUOTES: Mr. Culp stated that the employee (west) door has malfunctioned twice recently and Auditor Grow stated that it’s not working currently. There was discussion on the proposals.

SUBDIVISION ORDINANCE: Mr. Fritts stated that he received a call from a resident stating that the subdivision requirement for rural areas was bumped from one acre to two acres. The resident is concerned that this would limit new subdivisions in the county. Mr. DeVries replied that he would have to check the UDO.

COURTHOUSE ATTIC INSULATION: Mr. Andree provided the Council and Commissioners with quotes for insulation to be put in the attic.

ENERGY SAVINGS PROJECT UPDATE: Mr. Andree stated that the work at the Courthouse is approximately two months from being complete. They will begin work on the air handlers next week. The boilers are done and the chillers are in. There have been no change orders so far. During the last construction meeting, it was brought up that there has not been a glycol mix in the lines for the boilers. There are two air handlers in the attic above the courtroom. If either of them freeze, they will start leaking. The proposal to add thirty percent glycol will add roughly $15,000.00 to $20,000.00. Once the insulation is added to the attic, it will increase the likelihood that they would freeze since the attic will be colder. Mr. Norwine thanked Mr. Andree and Mr. Risner for all the work they’ve done on this project.

2019 MEETING SCHEDULE: There was a brief discussion regarding next year’s meeting schedule. It was agreed that there will be two joint sessions.

There being no further business, Mr. Walstra made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Fritts seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Rein O. Bontreger, President

Kimberly K. Grow, Auditor of Jasper County