

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE JASPER COUNTY COUNCIL  
APRIL 20, 2021**

The Jasper County Council met this date at 7:00 P.M. C.S.T. at 910 S Sparling, Rensselaer, Indiana, with the following members present: Rein Bontreger, Stephen Jordan, Gary Fritts, Brett Risner and Jeff DeYoung. Also present was Auditor Donya G. Jordan. Paul Norwine and Brian Moore were present via Zoom. Mr. Bontreger called the meeting to order and those present and online stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance led by Mr. Fritts.

MINUTES: Mr. DeYoung made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 16, 2021 meeting, as presented. Mr. Jordan seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

STEPHEN EASTRIDGE / NIPSCO TASKFORCE / ABATEMENT: Mr. Eastridge stated that there is close to \$9 million coming to the County and the local municipalities from the American Rescue Act. He said that there was quite a bit of time spent discussing what things would look like beyond the closing of the Schaefer Generating station. He would like to give the Council and Commissioners an update on what the Taskforce has accomplished and what they still need to work on. His office is still waiting on more information detailing what that American Rescue Act dollars can be used for. They would like the money to be used for things that continue to grow the county.

Mr. Eastridge stated that the following abatement request has a deadline of May 17<sup>th</sup>. This is the first abatement his office has done using the new scorecard. It is for a digester that will go on DeJong's Farm with a pipeline that will go to Hidden View Dairy. The project will cost approximately eight million dollars that will create one job with a salary of approximately \$80,000.00 per year. He is recommending a seven-year personal property tax abatement. He provided the Council with the scorecard used to make the recommendation. The abatement would equate to roughly \$40,000.00 in tax savings over the life of the project. A public hearing would need to be held before May 17<sup>th</sup> to establish the ERA and approve the tax abatement, if the Council chooses to do so. Mr. Bontreger asked Mr. Eastridge if DeJong and Hidden View contacted him or if he contacted them. Mr. Eastridge replied that they reached out to his office and were unaware of the new scorecard. Mr. Norwine and Mr. Moore stated that they would like to see the scorecard and how it was filled out. Mr. Norwine asked if the dairy would do the project without the benefit of the tax abatement. Mr. Eastridge replied that they are not moving forward with the project until the abatement process is completed. Mr. DeYoung asked what the big hurry is and Mr. Eastridge replied that May 17<sup>th</sup> is the state cut-off for the abatement to be put on the tax rolls for the following year. He said that this project got lost in the chain of emails. There was a brief discussion about the project meeting the qualifications on the scorecard. Mr. Eastridge stated that, if the company accepts the abatement, they agree to not appeal the taxes for the life of the project. There was a brief discussion regarding advertising. Mr. Risner made a motion to allow Attorney Ahler to craft a resolution. Mr. DeYoung seconded and the motion carried unanimously. The Council will agree to the findings in the scorecard. There was a vote taken and the motion carried unanimously. Mr. Eastridge stated that he would like the Council to establish the ERA's so that the next time an abatement is applied for, the ERA part of it will already be done.

JACOB TAULMAN / REQUEST TO MAKE PART-TIME POSITION FULL-TIME: Prosecutor Taulman was not on the call. Mr. Norwine stated that, at the Commissioners meeting, it was stated that this topic would be discussed at the meeting the Commissioners were having the Friday after the Commissioners meeting. He asked if anyone had heard what they decided. Mr. Bontreger replied that the meeting was simply a listening session and he does not believe the Commissioners have made a decision on whether they are going to agree to that. Mr. Jordan made a motion to table the request. Mr. Fritts seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

KARA FISHBURN / VOTE CENTERS: Mrs. Fishburn stated that, last year, both County Chairmen and Mr. Culp asked her to look in to the vote center concept. She said she's received numerous emails from her fellow Indiana Clerks about how well the vote centers work in their respective counties and how they save the taxpayers money. The Jasper County Election Board has decided to move forward and are in the early stages of planning. She provided the Council with a resolution that needs to be signed. The resolution allows the Election Board to move forward with the vote centers. The Election Board would be responsible for adopting the plan. She said that the Commissioners signed their resolution at their last meeting. She explained that a vote center is a polling location where any eligible voter in Jasper County may go to vote.

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KARA FISHBURN / VOTE CENTERS CONT'D: It eliminates the need for the traditional precinct based polling locations and allows voters more flexibility regarding where they go to place their vote. The vote centers that will be placed throughout the county are linked by a secure connection and an electronic poll book that will instantaneously update as voters check in. There are significant cost savings that are expected over time. Taxpayers will realize a cost savings over time on things such as poll worker wages, polling site rentals, meals for poll workers and equipment. There will be more voting machines at each voting center location which will help shorten the voter's wait in line. She said that, in the midst of the COVID pandemic, it has become evident to them that this is the perfect time to address the vote center concept. Each year, it seems to get more difficult to find poll workers. They found it to be most challenging during the 2020 elections due to COVID. Some of the polling locations were working without a full election staff. She feels that the vote centers will be much more convenient for both the voters and the poll workers. There are approximately forty-eight counties that already use vote centers as well as others that are in the early planning stages. She encourages her constituents to voice their questions or concerns. The Jasper County Election Board will be holding a public comment period that will be open for approximately thirty days. The information will be publicized in the local newspapers, on the radio and on the Jasper County Clerk's facebook page. She said she has always taken great pride in the security and integrity of the election. She thanked everyone that has worked on the vote center plan. She said they already have a few potential locations that they will be going to look at on Monday. Mr. Jordan asked how many voting machines the County currently has and Mrs. Fishburn replied that there are approximately sixty-eight. There are a few that are only used for parts. She is hoping that this can be started next year during the primary election so they can work out any issues before the general election. She said that, since most of the county's population is in Keener Township, they may determine that there are eight machines needed there and they can get by with four at another location. They will start with six machines at each location and will evaluate it as they go. Mr. Risner asked if one early voting center location being open two Saturdays will be enough and Mrs. Fishburn replied that one will be in DeMotte and one will be in Rensselaer. She said that there will always be the largest voter turn-out during a presidential election. She said she still feels two are adequate but it is something she can bring up at the next Election Board meeting. Mr. Fritts expressed concern that Keener Township Fire Station may not be large enough. He asked if it's possible to add another location in Keener Township. Mrs. Fishburn replied that they are also considering the DeMotte library but they have not physically gone there to look at it. Mr. Fritts suggested that she look in to Emmanuel Church. Mr. Fritts made a motion to approve the Resolution approving the designation of Jasper County as a vote center county. Mr. Risner seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

SALARY ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS: Auditor Jordan stated that Sheriff Williamson requested that \$428.00 be transferred from one line to another line. The Sargeant 2 salary will be increased by \$428.00 and the Senior Corp salary will be reduced by \$428.00. The CASA Director's salary is being increased to \$42,771.00. Mr. DeYoung made a motion to approve the salary ordinance amendment, as proposed. Mr. Fritts seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

HERITAGE BARN ORDINANCE: Auditor Jordan explained that the state legislators passed this deduction. What is being presented to the Council for their consideration is an ordinance for permission for the Auditor's Office to charge a \$50.00 annual fee for this deduction. The money has to be divided between the public safety departments. There was a brief discussion regarding the assessment listed on the current deduction application the Auditor's Office received and the requirements that must be met to qualify for a heritage barn. Mr. Risner made a motion to approve the \$50.00 annual fee. Mr. Jordan seconded. There was further discussion. Mr. Fritts read the ordinance and requirements aloud. A vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

EMS FUNDING: Mr. Bontreger stated that Mr. Culp is looking in to the Jail as a possible funding source for EMS going forward.

COVID UPDATE: Mr. Culp stated that Ms. Louck has informed him that there are fifteen thousand residents that have received at least one dose of the vaccine.

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SECURITY GRANT / FEDERAL FUNDING UPDATE: Mr. Culp stated that there will be a security grant applied for to try to increase security at the Prosecutor's building. He said that the County still doesn't have much guidance on what the federal dollars can be spent on.

PUBLIC DEFENDERS: Mr. Bontreger stated that Judge Potter reached out to him and will be doing some research regarding public defenders.

There being no further business and no public comment, Mr. Norwine made a motion to adjourn. There was no second and the motion died for the lack of a second. Mr. Norwine made a motion to continue this meeting to May 14, 2021. Mr. Moore seconded. There was further discussion regarding advertising. There was no vote taken and motion and second died. Mr. Moore made a motion to continue this meeting to May 14, 2021 at 3:30. Mr. Norwine seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

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Rein O. Bontreger, President

ATTEST:

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Donya G. Jordan, Auditor of Jasper County