

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE JASPER COUNTY COUNCIL
MAY 18, 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, Paul Norwine and Jeff DeYoung. Also present was Auditor Donya G. Jordan. Brett Risner 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. Norwine.

MINUTES: Mr. Jordan made a motion to table the minutes from the Regular April 20, 2021 meeting until June, at which time they will also have the continued meeting minutes of May 14, 2021 to consider. Mr. Risner seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

JOHN CRIPE / REMINGTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION: Mr. Cripe was present and stated that they've formed a Remington Economic Development Commission. The County Council will have an appointment to that Board. The Remington Town Council and Council President also have an appointment. They would like for the County Council to appoint Stephen Eastridge. Mr. Bontreger stated that he spoke with Mr. Eastridge and he is willing and would be more than happy to serve on the board. Mr. Norwine made a motion to appoint Mr. Eastridge to the Remington Economic Development Board. Mr. Fritts seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

NIPSCO TASK FORCE MEETING: Mr. Culp stated that Mr. Eastridge spoke at the May Commissioners meeting regarding the five recommendations from the Taskforce. He said that Mr. Eastridge gave them an update on the progress that's been made for each recommendation. It was all precipitated by the federal relief money that is expected to come back to the County. One of the recommendations was to develop the interchanges and form TIF districts. A TIF district has been established at Exit 230. Another recommendation was to update the comprehensive plan which is in the process of being done. One other recommendation was to hire a grant writer. An ordinance was adopted at the Commissioners continued May meeting to receive the American Rescue Plan money. The money should have come in on May 11th, but to his understanding, it has not been received. He said that the Commissioners are receiving a lot of requests for use of the money. The Commissioners are supposed to present a plan to the Council and the Council will be the ones to appropriate the money; however, he would like the Council and Commissioners to work together to develop a plan. He knows that broadband, sewer and water are three things that can be invested in. Broadband is the only one that would pertain to the County. He said he received a call from a township trustee asking if some of the money can be used for EMS funding.

WILSON INDUSTRIAL SALES TAX ABATEMENT: Shannon Shanley was present and stated that this is the ninth year of a ten year abatement. They've averaged just under seven new employees per year over the nine year time period. When they filed for the abatement, they told the County they would hire between five to ten new employees each year. They've struggled with hiring and retaining drivers. They are actively looking to fill four positions. Not every new employee they've hired have been residents of Jasper County but a large percentage have been. Keegan Wilson was named President effective January, 2020. Mr. Fritts made a motion to continue the abatement. Mr. Risner seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

PROSECUTOR TAULMAN / REQUEST TO MAKE PART-TIME INVESTIGATOR FULL-TIME: Prosecutor Taulman stated that he went before the Commissioners to request permission to make his part-time Investigator full-time. He said that his part-time Investigator, Pat Harper, retired in March. It is a challenge to find someone willing to do the job on a part-time basis. He said that one of the concerns the Commissioners expressed to him was where funding would come from for a full-time Investigator. He thought if he spoke with the Council, they could figure out a funding source to alleviate one of the Commissioners' concerns. He said that his goal is to make it a salaried position in the amount of \$53,000.00, which is a little less than what other similarly sized counties pay their Investigator. He thinks that that's a good, appropriate number based off of the amount of law enforcement experience that is required to be a good Investigator. He said that the Sheriff's Deputies are making high \$56,000.00 to \$58,000.00. Mr. Bontreger asked who is doing the investigative work in the absence of an Investigator and Prosecutor Taulman replied that a lot of it is piling up. He said that several Officers have said they would be willing to do as much of the investigative work as they could during their shifts as they have time. He's also spoken with Andy Boersma who said that he would be willing to help out as time would allow.

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PROSECUTOR TAULMAN / REQUEST TO MAKE PART-TIME INVESTIGATOR FULL-TIME CONT'D:

In the interim, he is trying to have his staff absorb as much of it as they possibly can; however, it has added additional stress and strain to what they are currently doing. Mr. Bontreger asked if a dedicated Investigator enhances the quality of the cases and helps them achieve better success. Prosecutor Taulman explained that an Investigator takes the initial information provided to them by law enforcement and obtains additional details through further investigation and talking to witnesses, making sure they can find the witnesses and that they are available. When a witness changes their story, they send the Investigator out to track that person down to get some additional statements. The Investigator also tracks down uncooperative witnesses and explains to them why it's important that they cooperate. They also work with law enforcement to clean up subpoenas. The Investigator also gets things that are needed for probable cause affidavits or search warrants. This position is instrumental when they are talking through a case as far as what Law Enforcement Officers see on the ground because of that background in law enforcement. Mr. Bontreger asked Prosecutor Taulman how much money he has left of the \$38,000.00 that was budgeted for Pat Harper and if he has someone lined up for the job if, hypothetically, the Commissioners agree to making the position full-time and if, hypothetically, the Council agrees to fund it. Prosecutor Taulman replied that he's spoken with a number of people who say they may be interested depending on what the pay is. Several people have said they are only interested if it's a full-time position. He can only think of one person who said they might be willing to consider it on a part-time basis. Mr. Bontreger asked if there is any wiggle room on the \$53,000.00. Prosecutor Taulman replied that his goal was to ask for \$55,000.00 but, in reality, it's a really high number so he thought \$53,000.00 was more reasonable. He thinks that the person that will take the job will be moving laterally from a law enforcement agency to his office. In order for it not to be a huge pay cut, it will need to be pretty close to \$53,000.00. Mr. Bontreger stated that there are a few offices that have employees with part of their salary being paid by the County and part of their salary being paid from another source to get to the total desired package. He asked Prosecutor Taulman if he has a resource to cover some of the salary. Prosecutor Taulman replied that he thought about having the employee spend a few hours per week on child support investigations so he could pay for those hours out of the IV-D Incentive Funds. Mr. Bontreger asked if that amount could be budgeted each year so he would have the set figure for the year and Prosecutor Taulman replied that he would just need to come up with a percentage of time the Investigator would be working on child support. Mr. Moore asked Mr. Taulman, since he's talking about pay, if the qualifications would determine what the Investigator would be "worth" and if he would try to get the best person he could for that amount of money. Prosecutor Taulman replied that that is correct, he would try to get the best person for the funds. He further stated that they were really lucky to find Pat Harper with approximately forty three years of experience willing to work for \$25.00 per hour. This was a huge savings to the County for the past number of years while he was in that position. Mr. Norwine said that the concern he has is that the Council saw people leaving Community Corrections. He asked if there's a possibility employees will leave the Sheriff's Department and if there's a way they could increase the part-time line for the Sheriff's Department so the deputies could earn extra money while gaining experience investigating. Prosecutor Taulman replied that he doesn't know who the new employee would be or where they would come from but does know that there is a chance they would come from a local law enforcement agency. Part of the reason is because they try to hire from within the county. He said that the deputies are already working overtime and are already away from their families. He doesn't know if it will be feasible for them to be available when he needs them to be if they are working a few extra hours of overtime since they are already working twelve hour shifts. Doing it this way would be piecemealed and not a great way to achieve what they need to within the office. Mr. Jordan stated that he was on the Council when they created the part-time position. He asked how it was handled prior to the part-time position being created and Prosecutor Taulman replied that he's not sure he knows the answer to that question. He said that Sheriff Williamson and Andy Boersma might be able to answer that question as it was before he was an attorney and not familiar with the workings of the Prosecutor's Office. He's sure that a lot of the work fell on the Sheriff's Department and as the workload of both the Sheriff's Department and the Prosecutor's Office increased, it was determined that it was best to create that position. Mr. Bontreger asked if any fellow Council members would like to make a motion for anything. He explained that he doesn't want to get ahead of the Commissioners but feels like they need to know if the Council would be willing to fund the position. Mr. Jordan stated, if the Council appropriates the money, the Elected Official can fill the position without the Commissioners approval.

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PROSECUTOR TAULMAN / REQUEST TO MAKE PART-TIME INVESTIGATOR FULL-TIME CONT'D: Auditor Jordan suggested that the Council wait so she can research to see what funding the Prosecutor has. Mr. DeYoung made a motion to table this request until June. Mr. Jordan seconded. Prosecutor Taulman stated that another thing an Investigator does is organize all the witnesses for trials. He currently has a trial every week for the month of June so he would like to get a full-time person hired so he is not falling behind trying to gather evidence. Mr. Jordan stated that, if the Council agrees to move forward with a full-time position, it would come out of County General. Mr. Bontreger and Mr. Jordan both agreed that County General is already under a lot of pressure. Mr. Fritts stated that Prosecutor Taulman needs a full-time Investigator. Mr. Norwine asked if it's possible for the Council to have the numbers prior to the next Commissioners meeting so the Commissioners can make a decision at their meeting. Mr. Bontreger replied that the Council can also continue their meeting. Mr. Bontreger asked Mr. Culp if the Commissioners are willing to make an affirmative decision at their next meeting and Mr. Culp replied that one of the Commissioners asked for another month to do some more research. It will be on the June agenda. Mr. Bontreger asked Prosecutor Taulman if it's possible to hire a part-time employee for a couple months to see if they are going to like the job. This will give the Commissioners and Council time to make a decision. Prosecutor Taulman replied that it's certainly a possibility; however, his concern is that the person he would hire would be making a lateral move and they may have a family and more than likely already have a full-time job and the benefits that come along with a full-time job and would need to maintain that. Asking someone to try to take it on as a part-time position is probably pretty challenging as it would be putting a strain on that person. Mr. Jordan asked if the Council votes down the motion and second to table if the Council could come up with a motion that would support making the position full-time but not tie down the fund it would be paid from. That would give time to research to try to come up with other money. Mr. Bontreger stated that the Council could make a motion contingent on whether or not the Commissioners approve the position. Regarding the motion and second to table this request until June, a vote was taken and there were 0 ayes and 7 nays. Motion was defeated.

Mr. Fritts stated that Prosecutor Taulman needs an Investigator. He asked if \$52,000.00 would be enough. He said that Prosecutor Taulman is trying to do a good job for the county. Mr. Jordan and Mr. Risner agreed that it needs to be figured out what fund this could be paid for out of. Mr. Bontreger asked Prosecutor Taulman if he could make it work using Title IV-D and the remainder of the part-time money. Prosecutor Taulman replied that he does not know how much he has left in the part-time line. There was talk of how much the Council estimated he should have left in the part-time line. Mr. Fritts made a motion to support a full-time Investigator if they can identify where the funds will be coming from and they are more clear on funding. Mr. Jordan stated that, if they use what is left in the part-time line, the excess can be covered with an additional appropriation later on. Mr. DeYoung seconded. Mr. Norwine asked if this would be automatic or if it would be dependent on the Commissioners' decision. He expressed his concern with bypassing the Commissioners but he said he also supports Mr. Fritts. Mr. Bontreger asked the Council if they would like to amend the motion to be contingent on Commissioner approval. Mr. Boersma asked Prosecutor Taulman when he has a homicide trial. Prosecutor Taulman replied that the next homicide trial is scheduled for the end of September. He further stated that he has an attempted murder trial scheduled for June 22nd and "battery resulting in serious bodily injury" starting June 23rd and "battery with a deadly weapon" the week before that and a burglary trial scheduled for June 2nd. He knows that there are more trials scheduled for July and August. He said that he has a lot of respect for the conversation that he had with the Commissioners at the May meeting. He told the Council that he will not fill a full-time position without the Commissioners' approval. Mr. Bontreger stated that the Council will be voting to appropriate the funding for a full-time Investigator but it is essentially pending Commissioners' approval. A vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATION / SURVEYOR: Mr. Urbano stated that this additional appropriation request is in a fund that is already established. They will be using the funding to upgrade their GPS equipment and purchase an additional base station. Mr. Fritts made a motion to approve the request in the amount of \$14,049.00. Mr. Norwine seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

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ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATION / EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: Mr. Fritts made a motion to approve an additional appropriation request in the amount of \$30,000.00 for two outdoor light towers. Mr. Jordan seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

SALARY ORDINANCE AMENDMENT: Auditor Jordan stated the Sheriff moved \$890.00 from one pay line to another. The CASA is a correction in the line number from April. Mr. Bontreger read the amounts aloud. Mr. Fritts made a motion to approve the salary ordinance amendment, as presented. Mr. DeYoung seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

BUDGET REDUCTION: Mr. Bontreger stated that all the additional that were done a few months ago for IT must be undone. Auditor Jordan stated that, when the budgets were done in 2020, they were not advertised but were in the budget books. They should not have been in the budget books if they were not advertised. They were also not in Gateway. Mr. Bontreger read the resolution aloud. The total amount is \$514,000.00. Mr. DeYoung made a motion to approve the budget reduction resolution, as presented. Mr. Norwine seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

ANDY BOERSMA / UPDATE: Mr. Boersma stated that he's had fifty-nine cases for the year. They've already exhausted more than half of their budget. He said he will need to ask for additional appropriations in June.

125TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COURTHOUSE: Mr. Culp stated that 2021 is the 125th Anniversary of the Courthouse. He said that they are in the planning stages to have a small celebration. He would like to put a small committee together to assist in the planning and execution of the activities. The Commissioners will be having Brandon Schreeg at their June meeting to discuss the sidewalk project that was previously discussed regarding the Rensselaer Downtown Revitalization.

REQUEST TO MAKE PART-TIME INVESTIGATOR FULL-TIME CONT'D: Mr. Culp stated that the concern with this request is not the Prosecutor, but rather others that are asking to move part-time positions to full-time. They Commissioners do recognize the Prosecutor's need but do not want this to have a domino effect. Mr. Fritts asked how much benefits cost per employee and Mr. Culp replied that it's roughly twenty-five percent of their salary.

COURTHOUSE GROUNDS: Mr. Bontreger thanked the Commissioners for taking care of the Courthouse and the grounds. Mr. Culp replied that they used part of the additional ten percent of the COVID money to purchase and install the sign on the northeast corner of the Courthouse lawn. The messaging on the sign will be done through software. The sign was discussed a few years ago as part of the Downtown Revitalization Plan. There were also portable signs purchased for the fairgrounds.

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

Rein O. Bontreger, President

ATTEST:

Donya G. Jordan, Auditor of Jasper County

