

# JOINT SESSION OF THE JASPER COUNTY COUNCIL AND BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

NOVEMBER 21,2023

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The Jasper County Commissioners and Jasper County Council met this date at 6:00 P.M. C.S.T. at 910 S Sparling, Rensselaer with the following Commissioners present: Jeffrey DeYoung and James Walstra. Commissioner, Rein Bontreger, joined via Zoom. Council members present were: Stephen Jordan, Gary Fritts, Brian Moore, Paul Norwine, Eric Kidwell, and Jason Arnold. Also present were Auditor Donya Jordan and Deputy Auditor Treasure Gilbert. Those present stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance led by Mr. Jordan.

Mr. Jordan said Brett Risner resigned from the Council, effective immediately, on November 20,2023. He said the Republican Party will have a caucus on December 14,2023 to select his replacement.

KENNY HAUN / FUNDS FOR FIRE TOWER: Fire Chief, Kenny Haun, said their fire tower will be upgraded from three stories to five stories. He said the cost was originally around one million dollars but, they are now looking at around 1.2 or 1.3 million. He said they have made some changes and added some additional features that they felt was necessary. He said Newton County is somewhat on board with donating but, they are waiting to see what the City of Rensselaer donates. He said the City has spent \$40,000.00 for pipes and a transfer of \$30,000.00 was approved for concrete. Marion Township is donating \$35,000.00. He said they have also received around \$27,000.00 in grants. He said their goal is get around \$250,000.00. Chief Haun said they are looking at this amount because, they are unsure if the City will be able to install the water main so, they might have to contract that out. He said they have to have water at the tower within 50-75 feet of the tower any time they do training.

Chief Haun said their goal is to have the tower up by March 31,2024 and they already have trainings scheduled for May. He said they plan on having fire training every quarter. He said they have partnered with six instructors from the northern part of the state. He said they already have departments from Frankfort, Lebanon, Lafayette and Logansport looking at coming here for training. He said right now they are on a hold waiting for funding and finalizing blueprints. He said his goal is to get the concrete in before the snow comes. Mr. Arnold asked if he has enough funds for the concrete to do the foundation. Chief Haun said yes. He said the contractor they have lined up said they would do the labor for free if they pay for the concrete.

Mr. Jordan asked if Chief Haun would need a commitment before the first of the year or after. Chief Haun said after January 1<sup>st</sup>. Chief Haun said that the LEPC recently pledged \$5,000.00, with the Council's blessing. Mr. Fritts asked if there's other counties that want to participate. Chief Haun said most of them are saying to come back next year but, they didn't say no. Mr. Fritts asked if he had a tentative amount he is seeking from Jasper County. Chief Haun said \$75,000.00. Mr. Jordan said they will put this on the January agenda to make a decision.

DONYA JORDAN / CUMULATIVE FUNDS: Ms. Jordan said she thinks they need to wait to discuss this. She said they will see how they are sitting in 2024.

KAREN WILSON / LEPC DONATION: Ms. Wilson said at their October 5<sup>th</sup> meeting, the LEPC group voted and approved donating \$5,000.00 to the Rensselaer Fire Department for their new tower. She said she is asking for an additional appropriation to cover this donation. Mr. Jordan said they will act on this during the regular meeting.

## OTHER BUSINESS

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON: Sheriff Williamson said he is requesting to replace a correctional officer. Ms. Jordan said this should be decided during the Commissioners' Meeting. Mr. Bontreger asked if they could give him a consensus to go ahead and officially act on it in the meeting. He said his opinion would be to go ahead with his request.

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SHERIFF WILLIAMSON CONTINUED: Sheriff Williamson said he also has a request for a payout for vacation time. Ms. Jordan said he can ask during the Commissioners' meeting.

REIN BONTREGER / SOLAR ORDINANCE: Mr. Bontreger said that solar has been a hot topic recently. He said they have instructed Ms. Scheurich, from Planning and Development, and Ms. DeYoung, from JCEDO, to inform any prospects that our solar ordinance is going to undergo a review process and probably have some changes made. He said they would like to work on this in the first quarter of the year. He said they would like to have some of the Council join them on a committee along with Ms. DeYoung and Ms. Scheurich. He said along with this, they would probably have some community engagement meetings. He said they want to make sure they can logically guide how this development comes and recognize that they don't want to just stay on the State standards. He said they need some additional set-backs.

Mr. Bontreger said along with solar, they are probably going to be approached with battery storage so, they need to have a thoughtful process in figuring out how to deal with that. He said they have some research they need to do. He said they would like to do this with the Council, Planning and Development, and JCEDO. He said he welcomes the Council's feedback and engagement on getting this in place.

Mr. Jordan said as a reminder of how the process works; the Plan Commission reviews and sets the ordinances, along with help from the Commissioners and public hearings. He said once they are voted on by the Plan Commission, it is recommended and goes before the Commissioners for final approval of the ordinance. Mr. Walstra said it has to go through the BZA too. Mr. Bontreger said he would like to get a committee together by mid-January so they have plenty of time to methodically work through that thought process.

MR. MOORE / SETTING ORDINANCES/RESOLUTIONS: Mr. Moore said his understanding was that the Commissioners met with other Commissioners awhile back about the co2 thing. He said White County had presented a resolution that had something to do with that. He wondered if going forward, they could set some ordinances ahead of time. Mr. Bontreger said they have been talking about this with other Commissioners and he assumes it will be a topic of discussion at their upcoming Commissioners Conference. He said they recognize that there's limits on what they can do locally but, they want to explore and maximize their local options. He said they will update them as they get more information. He said they don't want to wait until a project is upon them and they want to be proactive and have some policies in place that hopefully won't get overridden by State or Federal guidelines. He said their attorneys are consulting with other county attorneys to find out what their options are.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

MICHELLE HOFFMAN: Ms. Hoffman said that in order to safeguard the citizens of Jasper County, it is of great importance that new County regulations, codes, and laws should be written. She said, "These laws properly written will not place the county at risk under any Indiana code. If anything, it will give the citizens reassurance that our county elected officials are concerned about our safety and our safety to the carbon dioxide storage." Ms. Hoffman read Indiana Code 14.39.2-5.7. She said she asks for them to look at and incorporate setbacks for the schools, hospitals, libraries, and subdivisions. She said they should ask the operating companies for self-contained breathing apparatuses for each EMT/EMS personnel and two extras to be on each fire truck and ambulance. She said they should also think about imposing a fire tax on the co2 sequestration company in order to pay for full-time employees on the department. She said electric vehicles should be requested for every department as well. She said they should be asked to maintain them, and add a new one every five years.

Mr. Moore said Ms. Hoffman brought up some very good points but, he wanted to go back to the point about electric vehicles. He asked her if she wants electric powered vehicles. Ms. Hoffman

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MICHELLE HOFFMAN CONTINUED: asked if there happens to be any type of breach or release of carbon dioxide, how would they get a fire truck or EMT there. Mr. Moore said he was just wondering where this was coming from; he said he understands now.

Mr. Fritts said as he looks at this from afar, considering what they are fighting here, the fight isn't necessarily at the County level. He said he thinks it's at the State or Federal level. He said without the Federal tax money, this wouldn't even get started. Ms. Hoffman said she knows but, she wants the County to be prepared. Mr. Fritts said they have been stripped of having the powers to prevent this from coming. Ms. Hoffman said they haven't stripped everything. Mr. Bontreger said she made some good points and he will pass them along to Attorney Beaver to incorporate them into discussions with other county attorneys. Mr. Jordan said that in discussion with Representative Culp, it was brought up to repeal House Bill 1209 but, they need to be careful with that so that it doesn't bring up something worse.

CRAIG STANDISH: Mr. Standish said that Mr. Bontreger talked about opening up the solar ordinance. He asked if the County was going to allow new applicants while this is being looked at. Mr. Bontreger said that if anybody reached out to Ms. Scheurich or Ms. DeYoung that they were told to tell them that they can expect there to be changes made to the solar ordinance. He said they can do preliminary inquiries but, they are expecting that any new projects would have to abide by the new regulations. He said they wouldn't sign or agree to anything until they get the new regulations set up.

MARY COOPERS: Ms. Coopers said she was wondering about the County getting several millions of dollars from the Dunns Bridge phase 1 payments. She asked if they ever paid. Attorney Beaver said there was not an Economic Development Agreement with them. Mr. Bontreger said the reason there was not an economic development payment on phase 1 because, they were up against the wall with Nipsco. He said they essentially almost zeroed out their assessed evaluation so, getting that investment was the economic development benefit. He said the fact that they had that investment, which would then alleviate and help to fill some of the tax hold that was going to be left by Nipsco.

Mr. Bontreger said the standard is, if you want any kind of agreement, abatement, etc., it now comes with economic development payments or payment in lieu of taxes. He said this is why Dunns 1 is slightly different.

Ms. Cooper said her next question is if the Schahfer plant is going to stop burning coal, then why is somebody investing a lot of money on brand new railroad ties in the line to the plant. Mr. Norwine said he asked the rail line if they knew something that we didn't know about Nipsco and he was told not necessarily. He said he was told that the rail line would like some type of development to keep use of that line and they don't want to give up that line anytime soon.

JIM SENECKZKO: Mr. Seneczko said he lives less than a quarter mile from the supposed solar field in Kniman. He asked why after Chief Haun's request of funds for the new fire tower, they would want to give a tax abatement to Nipsco, Dunns Bridge, or whoever. He said there's many other places to put a solar field and they shouldn't wipe out Kniman in the process. He also asked why they would want to destroy the property values of these homes. He said the fences around the solar fields are not attractive and look like a penitentiary. Mr. Fritts asked if he understands assessed evaluation. He said Nipsco is the highest tax payer in the county, and we were losing assessed evaluation and taxes were going to go up immensely. He said they needed to try to replace some of that AV and offer abatements. Mr. Jordan said that after the joint session, they will start the other meeting and have a public hearing on the abatement. Mr. Seneczko said they just want transparency.

JERRY SMITH: Mr. Smith said he is seeing that the Board is turning Jasper County into an industrial park. He said, "Nipsco got tax abatements for years and this is why you are going

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JERRY SMITH CONTINUED: broke.” He asked if it isn’t their goal to turn Jasper County into an industrial park, then what are they trying to do.

There being no further business, Mr. Moore motioned to adjourn this meeting, Mr. Norwine seconded, and the motion carried.



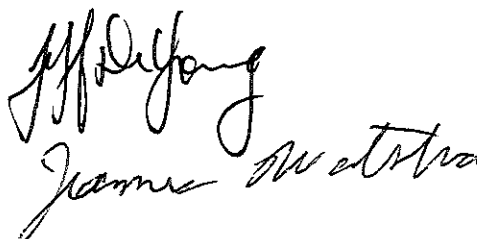
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Stephen Jordan, Council President

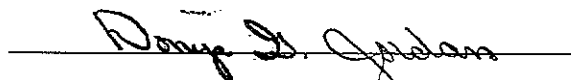


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Rein Bontreger, Commissioners President



ATTEST:



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Donya G. Jordan, Auditor of Jasper County