

# JENNINGS COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

March 11, 2025 @ 6:00 p.m.

Annex Building

Tina Ellis, Mike Gerth, Gene Rudicel, Jerry Lamb, and Dave Cheatham were present. Tina Ellis opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance. Dave Cheatham followed the Pledge of Allegiance with prayer.

There are four sets of minutes to be approved. The first set is the amended minutes from January 31, 2025. Gene made a motion to accept the amended minutes for January 31, 2025. Dave C. seconded the motion, passed on 4 out of 5 votes. Mike abstained because he was not present for the meeting. The next set of minutes to be approved is for February 6<sup>th</sup>. This was a joint executive session with the council and commissioners. Mike made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 6<sup>th</sup> meeting, Gene seconded the motion, passed unanimously. The minutes from February 10 are for a joint workshop between council and commissioners. Gene made a motion to approve the minutes, Jerry seconded the motion, passed unanimously. The last set of minutes are from the regular scheduled council meeting on February 11, 2025. Jerry made a motion to approve the minutes. Dave C. asked if the council could have a discussion before they vote. Tina asked Dave C. if he had an amendment, and he replied possibly. Dave C. said there are four items that he has questions about. Two of these items he would like the Auditor to explain on what she found out after researching the topic. The discussion will be about body cameras at the jail and the payment to the Economic Development Council. Dave C. said he doesn't know if they need to have the discussion before or after the minutes are approved. Tina said that she would add that to the new business as a follow up. Dave C. said that also in the minutes, he thinks that this was just a statement but wants to make sure that it was just a statement and not a motion. In the last meeting Councilman Woodall talked about the TIF appointments being a lifetime appointment. Dave C. said that it shows this in the minutes but there needs to be clarification on whether that was just a statement or a motion. The Auditor's office replies that it was just a statement. Sarah said that she has talked to several people, and it is not a lifetime appointment. The TIF board appointments are annual appointments. Tina said that the meeting minutes would not need to be amended and that the minutes from this meeting would reflect that the council found out that it is an annual appointment and not a lifetime appointment. Dave C. seconds the motion to approve the February 11 meeting minutes, passed unanimously.

Tina introduces Parker Fletcher from Todd Rokita's office. Todd explains that his office returns over a million dollars in unclaimed property to Hoosiers every week. Todd explains the process of going on to the website to see if you or any of your loved ones has any unclaimed property. Some examples of unclaimed property could be wages, commissions, overpaid utility bills and much more. Todd's office hold onto unclaimed property for 25 years. After 25 years, if it is not claimed, it becomes the States property. If you find money for family members, you cannot claim it. The website you go to is [indianaunclaimed.gov](http://indianaunclaimed.gov).

Cody with the Sheriff's Department came to the council to discuss appropriations. The council could not make any appropriations at the last meeting, so they asked Cody to come back for the March meeting. Tina explains that the Tek 84 (body scanner) invoice is a service

agreement/contractual services and they missed it in their budget. Tina says that the sheriff was going to pay for the Tek 74 invoice out of the misdemeanor fund, but that had not been appropriated yet either. Tina said she thinks we could pay for the Tek 84 invoice out of Safety Lit. Dave C. asks if it was ever found out for sure as to where it was paid in the past. Cody says that it was approved for a five-year service agreement with the option to continue that service agreement after five years. Tina said that it is possible that it was in the 2020 Go bond and it was paid for five years. The Auditor says that the purchase date was February 26, 2020. It was purchased out of the rainy-day fund. The auditor asked Cody if he knew if Tek 84 was paid out of the commissary at any point in time. Cody replied that he doesn't believe that it was, but this happened before he was in the position he is in now. Gene made a motion to pay \$11,225.00 out of Safety Lit, Jerry seconded the motion, passed unanimously.

The sheriff attended the commissioner meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> to discuss items in the 2024 Go Bond. Kenny provided a list of items that he believed should have been in the 2024 Go Bond. The list that Kenny provided includes the body cams, License Plate Reader, Guardian RFID, Lexipol, Cert equipment, Surveillance Equipment, Dash Cams, jail maintenance, and three vehicles. The only items that were added to the 2024 Go bond were the body cams, the license plate reader, and the automobiles. The commissioners told Kenny to attend the council meeting to get the other items added to the bond. Cody said that the vehicles should have been increased to \$240,000.00. This would allow for four new vehicles. Mike made a motion to appropriate \$448,244.56 in the 2024 Go bond for nine new line items. Gene seconded the motion, passed unanimously. These nine lines include the following for a total of \$448,244.60.

Body Cam \$27,822.60  
 License Plate Reader \$25,500.00  
 Guardian RFID \$18,000.00  
 Lexipol \$8,524.00  
 Cert Equipment \$14,000.00  
 Surveillance Equipment \$5000.00  
 Dash Cam \$59,307.00  
 Jail Maintenance \$50,000.00  
 Automobiles (4) \$240,000.00

Tina explains that when they met with Shepherd Insurance for this year's renewal, they suggested allowing a Risk Assessment Company to come into the jail and work with Cody to point out risk or things that would improve our numbers of liability. Nicci explains that at the end of 2024, there were several insurance companies that denied quoting the county for renewal. David Moore recommended that the county look at working with risk management. At the March 20 commissioner meeting, HR presented a proposal from LPMG. This company will work with the sheriff's staff and jail staff to customize SOP's and bring them up to date. They will perform court security training, press information training, and critical incident reporting. Nicci tells the council that the commissioners did approve the proposal and to come to the council for the funding. The commissioners suggested that this would be a good use for Safety Lit funding. Nicci explains that the county will not see a huge decrease in premiums this year, but it will make the county more marketable. Tina asks Cody what his thoughts are, and he said that it would benefit the county and would take a step in the right direction to decrease our premiums. Cody explains that they have started implementing things that were suggested, such as the body cams, and the dash cams. Jerry said that he is not against this, "Money bothers me", he says. Jerry asks if the county will save the \$33,000 that this is going to cost us? Cody says we

all know that the sheriff's office and the jail have the highest liability in the county. We will never know if it will pay for itself but if it prevents one lawsuit of \$100,000 it is worth it. It will take several years to see the decrease in liability. Dave C. asks if IPMG presented any background information of other people that use this program. Nicci replied with yes. Gene made a motion to pay \$33440.00 out of Safety Lit, Dave C. seconded the motion, passed unanimously.

Brad Ponsler introduces himself as chair of the current local water district and tells the council that he appreciates all the support they give every year. He explains that he is here to advocate and talk about a salary increase for his executive director. Brad explains that they have applied for a federal grant in the amount of \$600,000<sup>69,000</sup>, which includes matching funds. They have also acquired a clean water Indiana grant through the state. Jennings and Ripley will be partnering on this grant of \$60,000.00. Brad explains that he wants to hire and retain good staff and wants to continue to support conservation efforts in Jennings County. Brad explains that Soil & Water has a low budget request every year. He explains that they provide education, such as field days and classroom education. Brad says that currently the executive director's salary is \$48,008.93, and he is asking for an increase to \$52,603.00. Tina asked Brad how he came up with that number and he said that other department heads are in similar positions and that is their current salary. Tina explains to Brad that he is referring to elected officials, and his director is not an elected official. Dave C. asked Brad if he was making this request for the next budget, because we have already completed the budget for this year. Brad said that he would be bringing this request for the 2026 budget but also wants it to be considered currently. Jerry asked if they would be willing to take the \$52 and not get overtime or comp time? Tina said that they could not do that because that position is not a salaried position. Mike says that this is the second time this has come up this year. Mike says that it is very tough from a council's perspective. He wishes that the council could come up with something that is merit based on seniority and time. Mike says that it is very hard for the council. He says that one of the things the council gets is "My department works harder than that department". He says I am paraphrasing, but that is what we get. Tina asks Brad if the director's position pay is what the past director was paid. Brad replied yes. Tina explains that the past director had many years in, and the new director came in at that same pay.

Michael Cole from NV Fire is representing the 911 board and the NV Fire Department. The last ordinance was rewritten in 2022 to include EMA, Jerry Shepherd. Michael explains that since then, NV Fire Department has grown to almost a career Fire Department, He says that there are a few volunteers left but they are very few and far between. The needs of a city department are different than those of a county department. We all do the same job, but our needs are a little bit different. Alex has typed up an amendment and basically the amendment says that the Chief of the NV Fire Department is an automatic appointment by the mayor. The volunteers would also have an appointment to represent their departments, as far as the county fire departments go. The only thing that was found is that Howard Malcomb was still listed, and Dave C. took over his position, and this was corrected. Britt said that 911 did pass the amendment. Dave C. asks if this is creating a new board position and if this position is paid. Michael responding with yes, it would be the county fire chief position, and no they are not paid positions. Gene made a motion to approve the amendment, Dave C. seconded the motion, passed unanimously.



The treasurer reports that she invested \$6 million into the money market since February. The county has earned \$18,900 in interest. Tina says that she would like to invest \$6 million more. The council members think that that is a great idea. Mike made a motion to allow Tina B. to invest \$6 million into Indiana Trust at 4.32% interest, Gene seconded the motion, passed unanimously.

Tina Ellis said that the balance in the Riverboat seemed a little high. The auditor's office reported that the Riverboat was reimbursed \$100,000.00. Gene made a motion to appropriate the Rainy-Day Fund balance of \$781,443.00 and the Riverboat Fund balance of \$581,457.00. Mike seconded the motion, passed unanimously.

Dave C. made a motion to appropriate the following funds for the sheriff's department:

Accident Report Fund - \$5008.00

Non-Reverting Prisoner Reim - \$35,695.00

Firearms Training - \$47,302.00

Inmate Med Care Reim - \$3,780.00

Misdemeanant Fund - \$112,969.00

Sex & Violent Offender - \$23,737.00

Vehicle Inspection - \$5402.00

Sheriff Forfeiture - \$44,550.00

Sheriff Donation Fund - \$2,664.00

Sheriff Continuing Ed Fund - \$9,388.00

Gene asked what the total is for appropriating all the above funds. Tina answered \$290,495.27.

Dave C. says this question again. This money has already been budgeted, and we are simply releasing it to be spent, and Tina replies, correct. Gene seconded the motion, passed unanimously.

Tina reads an email from Reedy on additional appropriations that need to be made due to compensation corrections on the 2025 budget. The following will require additional appropriations: Crystal Wilson, Nicci Lucas, EMT Shift Aidman, Chief Medic. Medic Shift Aidman, and the Level 2 and Level 3 certifications. Gene made a motion to accept the additional appropriations listed from Reedy, except for the Recorder part time because there was nothing listed. Tina said that the council will appropriate that later. Dave C. seconded the motion, passed unanimously. The paylines for Crystal Tyler, Bill Harrison, and Kennedy Cross will be increased to \$41,200.00. They are receiving the increase due to passing certifications. Gene made a motion to approve the increase for Crystal Tyler, Bill Harrison, and Kennedy Cross. Dave C. seconded the motion, passed unanimously.

Tina reads additional appropriations that need to be approved because they were missed on the budget. The additional appropriations are listed below.

County Attorney - \$7500.00 that was missing on Alex's salary. Tina says that they can go ahead and approve the additional appropriations but will have to seek more later because the county used that payline to pay Barnes & Thornburg for litigation.

Indiana Department of Unemployment - \$26,000.00

Bituminous - \$500,000.00

Deputy Prosecutor/New - \$11,962.00

Deputy Prosecutor/Existing - \$8157.00

Kennel Tech - \$5014.00

Park Director - \$3,282.00

Court Reporter - \$1000.00

Secretary Circuit - \$39470.00

Amy said that there are two people on the highway that will need additional appropriations. After some discussion, Tina said that we would make these appropriations later because they are unaware of the amount needed. Mike made a motion to approve the additional appropriations, Gene seconded the motion, passed unanimously. Gene made a motion to transfer \$500,000 out of the general fund into the bituminous account for paving. Dave C. seconded the motion, passed unanimously.

Tina presented an invoice from Reedy Financial for \$670.25 that needs approved for payment. This invoice is for the work that was completed for the Go Bond. Mike made a motion to pay the invoice, Dave C. seconded the motion, passed unanimously. Tina also presented invoices from JNRU. Brian Hatfield came to the council and the council committed x amount of dollars for a study at JNRU. Tina does not remember where the council committed the money from. Mike said the invoices are from JNRU, but it is not a JNRU study, it is a regional study. JNRU is just taking the lead on it. The counties portion of the study is a total of \$20,250.00. Dave C. made a motion to pay \$20,250.00 out of the Riverboat fund. If it is found that the council originally appropriated the money from another fund, the council will bring that back to another meeting. Jerry Lamb seconded the motion, passed on a 4-5 vote. Mike Gerth abstained from the vote because he is on the board at JNRU.

Tina said that in the February meeting, the council discussed hiring their own attorney. The council assigned a board that consisted of Dave Woodall, Dave Cheatham, and Gene Rudicel. Dave W. was put in charge of this and interviewed a gentleman that came to the meeting and spoke to the council. From then on, the council needs to decide whether they want to move forward or table. Tina asks Dave C. what the committee is recommending. Dave C. says that he is still in favor of hiring an attorney for a couple of reasons. Number one, the candidate was on an as needed basis. There is not a retainer and there is no cost except for when the council needs him.

Alex Z. is the county commissioner's attorney. He does help the council out but is not council's attorney. Dave C. said if things came up the council could call this attorney to get answers. The hourly rate for this attorney is \$185.00 per hour. Dave C. thinks this candidate is a good choice because he is already involved in local government. Mike says that his concern is that people will use him and will cost the council. Dave C. says that no one else in the county government could make the call to the attorney except for the council. Tina says that Alex Z. is the commissioner's attorney, but all the department heads utilize him. Dave C. said that the contract could read that the attorney is the attorney for council only, not for department heads, and not for employees. Jerry says that he personally is not in favor of an attorney, but he doesn't feel it should be voted on until the entire board is present. Gene said that he doesn't want to make any motions without the entire board present. Dave C. makes a motion to table the idea until the next meeting. Gene seconded the motion, passed unanimously.

Tina said that they can now discuss the follow up on amending the minutes that Dave C. mentioned earlier in the meeting. Tina says that Dave C. wanted the auditor to address what she had found out about the TIF appointments and the Economic Development invoice. Dave C. said the first thing is: the question came up in the last meeting about the Economic Development



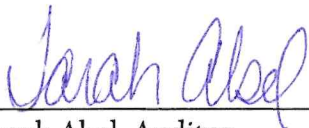
invoice and the history of it. The second thing, in the work session, we talked about meeting with the school system, and I have emailed you that information. The third thing is about Senate bill one and how it will affect the county's finances. Tina says that the council will let the auditor address the economic development invoice and then go from there. The auditor says that when the council brought up the economic development invoice she had to go back and do research to get all the information. There was concern raised about a bill that wasn't paid from 2023. Sarah says it felt as if she was accused of not paying a bill that was claimed to be submitted multiple times. Sarah asked the individual to share the emails that were claimed to be submitted multiple times. Those could not be produced. Sarah explains that all the invoices had been sent directly to economic development and did not make it to her office. She also explains that she paid two separate invoices that totaled \$59,000 to Legacy Sports. When an invoice came in for Schmidt the auditor was not expecting it. Sarah was told by the council if the department head submits an invoice, just pay it. She continues to say "I can not do that. I must do my due diligence and make sure that I'm looking at everything and that it makes sense". Tina says that there was an invoice that came in, and the department head okayed it and they were within their budget so that is why council is asking why it wasn't paid. Sarah says that she was not aware of the third invoice and that is why she was perplexed because I didn't know about a third one. Sarah contacted Schmidt and they stated that they had sent an invoice to Economic Development and there was still a past due amount from 1/15/24. Sarah said she cannot pay something if she isn't aware of it. Dave C. tells Sarah thank you for her explanation. This invoice has been received by the EDC and has been paid.

The other question was concerning the TIF appointments. It is not a lifelong appointment, so Tina wants that reflected in the minutes. The TIF appointment is an annual appointment. The council has ~~one~~ appointment, and the commissioners have ~~one~~ appointment. The next thing Dave C. wanted to discuss is payroll. Dave C. says that we are trying to be proactive and looking ahead at new payroll software. Dave C. said we care about the taxpayer's money and do not want money wasted on lawsuits. Matt S. asked Dave to go to the school system and see what payroll system they utilize. Dave C, Nicci, and Sarah met with the school's financial officer. The school system uses one payroll/timekeeping system. Dave C. said he knows it will be a high cost upfront but in the long run it will save money. Tina said this will go to the commissioners for their approval.

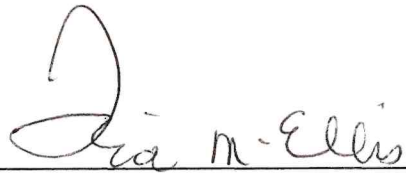
Dave C. also mentions that he thinks that the county should be proactive and start thinking about finances. The current bill that passed out of the Senate to the House would cut property taxes. Dave C. says that the county needs to find efficiencies in our systems and find ways to be more efficient. Tina says that the commissioners must adopt a policy that requires everyone across the board to use the same software. The council says that the department heads need to manage their employees comp time.

Tina presents a quote from Shoemaker to the council members. She said that the quote still needs to be presented to the commissioners. The council wants to move the cabinet because there has been trouble with it and the meetings must be live streamed in July. The sound system has already had to be reset. Tina, Marie, and Dave met Mark Farmer (Shoemaker) and decided that the cabinet needs to be moved to the corner. There will also be a pole put in to get rid of all the cords. This is a tripping hazard which is a liability.

Sarah said that in the meeting last month, Deputy Cody Low came and said that a child was not able to be seen by their physician. Sarah stated that this really bothered her knowing a child was not able to be seen. After looking into this Sarah found that was not the case, that was not what happened. The auditor's office pays the insurance for everyone that has that deduction and will continue to pay it unless there is a notification that says not to. When Sarah went back and talked to Cody about this, he said that when he came to the meeting he was upset and didn't have all the information. Cody said that the problem had been resolved. Sarah asked him if he would come back to a meeting or send something out and Cody said, "Do you want me to have remorse. Sarah says a little integrity and professionalism goes a long way. No one is perfect, Sarah says, we make mistakes. But in this case, I would have been quick to acknowledge it if I had made the error, I would have fixed it, and I would have publicly come out today and said I made the error. Sarah wants to apologize for that being said. It wasn't actual or factual and I believe that Deputy Low won't do that anymore and I believe that he will come and talk to me about it. Sarah says that she just wants us all to work together to resolve any issues that we have. The door is always open, and it is open to anyone that has a question about payroll, or taxes. There has never been a door pushed closed and not had anyone to be able to talk to us. Amy is my first deputy, Gena Bowman is a tax deputy, and Ashley Blackman is the claims deputy. Dave C. says you know, I worked for school for many years, and if there's a problem from a teacher or an employee, we wouldn't go straight to the school board and I don't think it's proper for our county employees if they have a concern to come straight to the County Council, and we don't deal with that. Tina says, that is not our lane, anyway, and we said that before. So, I just appreciate Sarah and thank you for letting us talk. Dave C. made a motion to adjourn, Gene seconded the motion, passed unanimously.



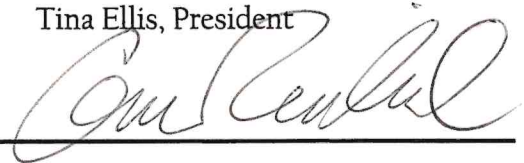
Sarah Abel, Auditor



Tina Ellis, President



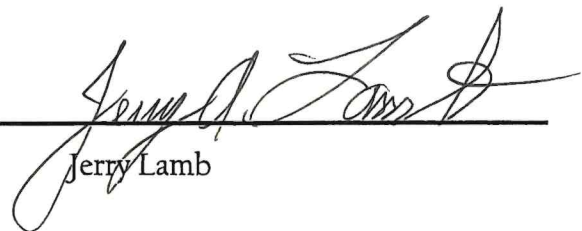
Mike Gerth, Vice President



Gene Rudicel



Dave Cheatham



Jerry Lamb

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Mandy Creech

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Dave Woodall

