

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Regular Session
Thursday, June 18, 2026
6:00 PM

The Board met on this date in Regular Session. Chairman Ben White, Commissioners Jessica Gramling, JT Surles, Austin Hosford and Gene Hall were present. County Manager Ron Russo, Clerk of Court Trey Hightower, and County Attorney Evan Rosenthal were also present.

The Jefferson County Board of County Commissioners met on June 18, 2026, beginning with a veteran's recognition ceremony and a proclamation honoring local veterans, as well as Captain Daniel Dexter Walker for his 26 years of service with Jefferson County Fire Rescue. During regular business, the Board approved a data center moratorium ordinance, accepted a SCOP award for Boston Highway Phases I and II, approved appointments to the Tourism Development Council and The Original Florida Tourism Task Force, approved the employment agreement for incoming County Manager Doug Baber, and approved a contract with David Theriaque's law firm for special counsel services. The Board deferred action on a TDC appointment pending review of a potential conflict of interest and took no action on proposed building and planning fee study. Additional discussion included infrastructure improvements within the industrial park, ongoing transportation projects, county office closures around the July 4 holiday, and efforts to pursue economic development opportunities. The meeting concluded with commissioner reports, public comments, and approval to adjourn.

1. 6PM Call to Order, Posting of Colors by Big Bend Honor Guard, Pledge of Allegiance, Nation Anthem by Michelle Milligan (00:00:01)

- a. The meeting began with a veteran's recognition ceremony. Chief Burris delivered the opening prayer, followed by the presentation of colors by the Big Bend Honor Guard, the Pledge of Allegiance, and the National Anthem. County Manager Russo and the commissioners recognized distinguished guests, including a state representative and a Marine Corps captain, and introduced the commanders of American Legion Post 49 and VFW Post 251. The commanders thanked the Board and community for honoring veterans and highlighted their organizations' continued commitment to serving veterans and their families. Mr. Russo then recognized Jefferson County veterans who served during World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, and the Global War on Terrorism, asking those present to stand and be acknowledged. A proclamation honoring all Jefferson County veterans was read, expressing the County's appreciation for their service, sacrifice, and defense of American freedoms. The ceremony concluded with the playing of Taps, group photographs, expressions of gratitude to attending veterans, and a brief recess before the Board proceeded with its regular agenda.

2. Public Announcements, Presentations and Awards (00:37:20)

- a. The Board of County Commissioners issued a proclamation honoring Captain Daniel Dexter Walker for 26 years of exemplary service with Jefferson County Fire Rescue, recognizing his exceptional professionalism, calm leadership, extensive

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Regular Session
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6:00 PM

experience, and unwavering dedication to protecting life and property. It notes that he has earned the admiration and gratitude of county leadership, fellow responders, and citizens through his reliability, courage, and commitment to public safety at all hours. The Board extends its sincere appreciation and heartfelt thanks for his sacrifice and lasting contributions to the safety and well-being of Jefferson County, formally recognizing him and presenting him with a retired Jefferson County Fire badge on June 18, 2026.

3. Approval of the Agenda (00:41:10)

- a. Commissioner Gramling motions to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Surles and unanimously approved by the board.**

4. Citizens Request and Input on Non-Agenda Items (00:41:32)

- a. Paul Henry addressed the Board regarding property taxes, noting the increase in county property tax revenues and requesting information on how the additional funds are being used. He encouraged the County to consider property tax relief measures while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

5. Consent Agenda (00:45:05)

- a. Commissioner Gramling motions to approve the Consent Agenda, seconded by Commissioner Hall and unanimously approved by the board.**

6. General Business (00:45:25)

a. Data Center Moratorium (00:45:30)

- i. County Manager Russo introduced the item.
- ii. County Attorney Evan Rosenthal reported that, pursuant to the Board's prior direction, the data center moratorium ordinance had been drafted and was ready for adoption by the Board.
- iii. **Commissioner Gramling motions to approve the Moratorium Ordinance, seconded by Commissioner Surles and unanimously approved by the board.**
- iv. Commissioner Hosford questioned whether the proposed moratorium was the best course of action.
- v. County Attorney Rosenthal advised that, due to legal uncertainties related to recently enacted SB 180, a one-year moratorium on data centers would be a more prudent option than a permanent ban at this time. He explained that SB 180 restricts local governments from adopting more burdensome land development regulations or comprehensive plan amendments before October 1, 2027.

b. SCOP Award – Boston Hwy I and II (00:50:03)

- i. County Manager Russo informed the board what the SCOP award entailed.

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Regular Session
Thursday, June 18, 2026
6:00 PM

- ii. **Commissioner Surles motions to approve the SCOPE Award, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved by the board.**
- c. **TDC – Appointment (00:50:56)**
 - i. **Commissioner Gramling motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner Surles. It is not brought to a vote.**
 - ii. Commissioner Hosford informed the Board of a potential conflict of interest involving TDC funds going to the Chamber of Commerce while the Chamber director serves on the TDC board.
 - iii. County Attorney Rosenthal advised the Board to pause the appointment while the potential conflict of interest involving TDC funds and the Chamber director's service on the TDC board is reviewed.
 - iv. The item was deferred pending the receipt of additional information.
- d. **The Original Florida Tourism Task Force – Appointment (TDC) (00:51:58)**
 - i. **Commissioner Surles motions to approve, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved by the board.**
- e. **County Manager Contract (00:52:20)**
 - i. County Manager Ruso introduced the item.
 - ii. County Attorney Rosenthal summarized the proposed County Manager employment agreement with Doug Baber, including a June 22 start date, a \$140,000 annual salary, standard benefits, relocation reimbursement, a vehicle allowance, and first-year leave benefits.
 - iii. **Commissioner Gramling motions to approve the contract for the new County Manager, seconded by Commissioner Surles and unanimously approved by the board.**
- f. **Theriaque Contract for Special Counsel (00:55:13)**
 - i. County Attorney Rosenthal reported that, at the Board's direction, staff obtained a proposal from David Theriac's law firm to serve as special counsel for planning and land use matters on an as-needed basis at a rate of \$300 per hour.
 - ii. **Commissioner Surles motions to approve the contract for Mr. Theriaque, seconded by Commissioner Gramling. Commissioner Hall votes to deny. Motion Passes 4-1.**
 - iii. Citizens to speak: Paul Henry
- g. **Award RFP 2026-07 Building and Planning Fee Study (00:59:50)**
 - i. County Manager Russo informed the board of a \$40,000 contract with MGT to conduct a building and planning permit fee study, noting that MGT was ranked number one by the review committee.
 - ii. **No Motion is made; item does not pass.**

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Regular Session
Thursday, June 18, 2026
6:00 PM

iii. Citizens to speak: Paul Henry

h. Discussion of Sale of Surplus Property in the Industrial Property (ITB 2026-01) – Natural Shrimp Property (01:01:00)

- i. County Manager Russo reported that the Board had previously awarded 9.99 acres in the industrial park to Therma Save Company (appraised at \$184,800, bid \$276,000, now under contract) and requested authorization to apply for a Rural Infrastructure Fund grant of over \$2 million.
- ii. County Attorney Rosenthal clarified that the needed approval is for county staff to submit the application for the RIF Grant.
- iii. Mr. Russo informed the Board that, if awarded, the RIF Grant would be used to obtain an easement at the industrial park for the installation of water and sewer infrastructure as part of the economic development efforts to enhance the property.
- iv. **Commissioner Surles motions to approve the county staff submitting the application, seconded by Commissioner Gramling and unanimously approved by the board.**
- v. Commissioner Hosford inquired whether sewer service was already available within the industrial park.
- vi. County Engineer Baumgardner clarified that the RIF project would extend water and sewer utilities through the easement on the industrial park parcel, that utilities are already available in the area.

7. Clerk of Court (01:03:20)

- a. Clerk Hightower reported that auditors are currently working on the FY 2024–25 audit, anticipated for presentation at the July 16 board meeting and highlighted significant progress in timeliness compared to prior year, thanking the finance staff, Board, county staff, fellow constitutional officers, and Moran and Smith for their work and partnership in improving the county's financial reporting.

8. County Engineer (01:05:16)

- a. County Engineer Baumgardner provided brief project updates, noting efforts to schedule pre-construction meetings with Capital Asphalt for Waukeelah Highway and with the contractor/WSB for Boston Highway Phases 1 and 2 around the July 4 holiday, and reported that the 60% design submittal for Asheville Highway is expected to be submitted to FDOT by the end of July.
- b. Commissioner Gramling inquired whether the discussions with CW Roberts would take place before July 4.
- c. Mr. Baumgardner informed the Board that the goal is to begin as soon as possible, starting with the meeting with CW Roberts.

9. County Attorney (01:06:43)

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Regular Session
Thursday, June 18, 2026
6:00 PM

10. County Manager (01:06:48)

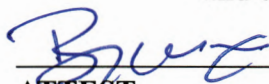
- a. County Manager Russo reported that the Board reached consensus to align county office closures with the Governor's schedule by closing county offices on July 2, 3, and 6. The Board also agreed to proceed with the July 2 Board meeting and ensure that all critical services remain operational during the closure period.
- b. Mr. Russo reminded the Board of the employee recognition luncheon scheduled for June 25 at 11:00 a.m. at the Extension Office, thanked the Board for sponsoring the event, and noted that employees are looking forward to the fellowship.

11. County Commissioners (01:07:40)

- a. Commissioner Gramling requested Board consensus to have staff speak with the School Board about relocating a District One school bus stop from the corner of Ashville Highway and Deerwood where parking has become an issue to the Volunteer Asheville Fire Department, in response to citizen requests for additional parking.
- b. Commissioner Surles recommended coordinating with the Sheriff's Office to assess sight distance and vehicle speeds on Ashville Highway particularly near the hill at the current location to ensure the safety of any revised bus stop placement.
- c. Commissioner Hosford reported that he missed the prior meeting to attend a CareerSource board of directors meeting in Miami, where a budget of approximately \$250 million was finalized, and stated he plans to work with County Manager Doug Baber to pursue funding for quality job creation in Jefferson County, potentially visiting the Capital Region in July.
- d. Commissioner Surles thanked road department employees Mr. Jon Sever and Mr. Russo for their successful litter control efforts on county roadways and expressed appreciation to the board for supporting the program, and commended Commissioner White for his quick response to a reported slip-and-fall at the Wacissa River.

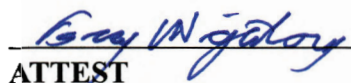
12. Adjourn (01:13:37)

- a. Commissioner Hall motion to adjourned, seconded by Commissioner Hosford and unanimously approved by the board.



ATTEST

Benjamin White, Chairman



ATTEST

Cecil "Trey" Hightower, Clerk of Court