



MINUTES

Aransas County Commissioners Court

Budget Workshop

9:00 AM – Monday, September 11, 2023

The Aransas County Commissioners Court met on Monday, September 11, 2023, at 9:00 AM, in the Aransas County Courthouse, 2840 Hwy 35 N, Rockport, Texas. Aransas County Commissioner’s Court meeting video recordings are available by following this link: [Commissioners Court Minutes and Agendas \(aransascountytexas.gov\)](https://www.aransascountytexas.gov/commissioners-court-minutes-and-agendas), then scroll to the bottom of the page and select the date you wish to view.

Present: **Ray A. Garza**, County Judge
Jack Chaney, Commissioner Precinct 1-1A
Leslie Casterline, Commissioner, Precinct 2
Pat Rousseau, Commissioner, Precinct 3
Robert Dupnik, Commissioner, Precinct 4

- I. **Called to order at 9:00AM**
- II. **Roll Call & Declared a Quorum**
- III. **Item for deliberation and/or Action**

- 1. Public comments will be taken regarding the Proposed Aransas County 2024 Budget – Jacky Cockerham / Judge Garza

Citizens to be heard:

- Andrew Kane – The tax increases we are seeing are unaffordable. I’m facing \$300-\$400 from the county and \$300-\$400 from the city and both said we could afford the buildings. I listened to the whole meeting again last night and the financial advisor Ted Henderson, if he walks in this room I’m going to run him out of here, he said we can do these tax notes and finance for 13 years and our taxes can go down, the citizens taxes won’t go up because of this Courthouse. We are at 25-27%, Jack and Leslie you voted for this. Push for budget cuts, give us relief. You wanted this Courthouse, find a way to pay for it without sticking it on the back and burying your citizens, it’s just not right.
- Jeff Hutt – Item # 401 it has attorney fees for \$213,000, I assume these are attorney fees that we have to pay the attorney to fix the insurance problems that we had because we did not have a contract with our insurance provider?
- Judge Garza – can we do Q & A during a hearing?
- Jennifer O’Steen – this is really supposed to be a hearing for public comment but we can respond with information. I will agree that those attorney’s fees that were incurred and are related to the insurance lawsuits.
- Jeff Hutt – OK. There’s also a line item, the Nueces County Inmate Agreement. Since 2020 the budget revenues for this contract have never been met. In 2021 we estimated almost \$2,500,000 but each year we have never met those projections. But each budget showed that we were going to meet that projection. Why were we never informed that we were not going to meet this budget projection.
- Judge Garza – this year we’re realistically budgeting that item
- Jacky Cockerham – those budgets are prepared 18 months in advance so we don’t know until the end of the next fiscal year. We anticipate and look at trends and we did fix it this year.
- Jeff Hutt – but each year we projected for a higher sum than we got when it came to budget time. In August we were still projecting we were going to reach those numbers. Is there a reason we did not meet these numbers and why did the jail costs not decrease, if the number of inmates was lower?

- Judge Garza – jail costs are fixed costs if we have 1 inmate or it's full. We did lower the food costs for 2024 due to the projection of inmates going down.
- Jeff Hutt – I've raised two issues here that we had two failures to accurately follow up on contracts. The only way I can look at this and I've tried to figure out who is responsible for this mess? And I keep coming back to the County's Auditor's Office. It's one thing to make a mistake but it's another thing to not admit that you've made a mistake and not make corrections. That's kind the same as this budget, we've been told that we got here because of good financial planning. But, when you have to raise your budget 23% that's not good financial planning. We were told that last year we knew we would have to raise the budget rate this year. I understand and appreciate better than most what has happened here but Judge the 23% you are going to drive people out of their homes. You have going to have people who have raised their children here and have had lifelong homes who realize at this point "I cannot afford to live in this community anymore, I have to sell and move." There are real repercussions to this. For many of us who have come and asked to cut the budget and we've suggested even cutting COLA's, But when we are told we shouldn't try to lower the budget on the backs of our employees from public officials who aren't bearing the tax burden that the rest of us feel, that's a slap in the face. When you come up for election especially for those elected officials who have accepted a COLA and have not been contributing to the tax base we will hold you accountable. Thank you.
- Lowell Rothschild – I think you are going to see we are here for Another Chance RFT, I know this is a budget hearing so let me try to tie the two together. Obviously one thing from the last meeting was large number of donations that Another Chance & Cat Tails voluntarily provided to the county over the last 7-8- years. Hundreds of thousands of voluntarily given to the county provided in both goods and services. Infrastructure that has permanently been installed at the Animal Control Facility. There was question as to "validity" of those donations. As I see people here to try to cut the budget it may not try to discourage people from voluntarily donating money to a cause that obviously the Commission believes is important. Something that earlier in the year the county changed the name from Animal Control to Animal Care. If the commission does indeed want care for the animals as just opposed to the control of animals as the name would suggest that it's going to need the money to do that and I don't think it should flippantly suggest that money that has been donated for the last eight years by not just these organizations but the hundreds if not thousands of local people who have supported those organizations. Those who have donated those monies or bought raffle tickets to support those organizations. All of those people believe that the services provided by Animal Care or Animal Control are important as well. And those willing to donate their time and their money for free it's something that as look to either not raise the budget more or to lower the budget. It's monies that I think the county should seriously consider embracing rather than shunning.
- Judge Garza – Thank you.
- Scott Hime – Federal Government implemented "Internet for All", they are taking the internet to the Winebago Tribe in Nebraska at the cost of \$53,000 per household in some cases exceeds the cost of the house they are bringing it too. There are issues like that that don't make sense and we can make those cuts. Someone just mentioned Animal Care vs. Animal Control, there are going to be costs associated with that and we have to make a decision are we willing to pay for animal pet mediation for people but if you try and get rid of it people are going to scream. They talked about what came before with the courthouse and with other things in our budget. There's no doubt that it's true and yet here we are. We have to deal with the reality on the ground. We are going to have to deal with the sins of the past. There are things I know you can't do anything but find a way to pay to get it built, we are locked in. We can re-litigate the mistakes of the past and it'll wear us down and beat us to death. If there are things, I hate to pick on Animal Care vs. Animal Control because there will be people outraged at that. But, there are other things, even though "Internet for All" sounds like a noble idea but at \$53,000 per connection you can't afford it and yet they're spending the money. I think there are some place are going to scream. Cut as much as you can but we can't re-litigate the past. We have to deal with this and I know we have

gone into reserves to the point that if we don't replenish them we are playing roulette with our future. If something goes wrong. I would urge you make the cuts you can, live with the rest and maybe people will hold you accountable, maybe they don't. But at least we should try and appreciate the fact that if mistakes were made in the past we can't re-litigate that. I don't like the extra money and I know people are going to hurt from this. I also know it's not realistic to expect you to cut certain things. Everything has gone up in this country and there is no reason we should expect that the cost of government would go down. Make the cuts you can and we'll have to live with the rest. Thanks.

- Judge Garza – Thank you.
- John Lazzarotti – forgive my New Jersey accent. I am a born-again person moving here to Texas. I consider myself to be a refugee from another land. I was in government for a long time up there but I am retired. I came here in support of Another Chance RFT who I work with. I prefer not to be in this setting anymore. I actually don't pay too much attention but I hear 25% increase and even I cringe because one of the things I ran from was high taxes. I came down here with everything I own. I was a resident of Burlington, New Jersey for 50 years. My family, my mother, my grandkids, they live there. I'm coming down here and bring everything I have my wife and me. I volunteer with the fire department, with Another Chance RFT and I try to stay as active as possible. From my prior position I understand taxes have to go up. You can't fix a pothole if you don't have money to fix the pothole, and expenses go up. Where I see the problem, and I see it from my experience back home, is what I view to be out of control growth in certain areas in this County. Those areas will directly impact your budget. I see houses here and houses there, the necessity to widen roads and infrastructure. I don't want to take a dime away from the employees because in my mind they are doing their job. If they live here they are paying taxes. So do your job, we give you something to do it, you do it well and respectfully you'll never hear a complaint from me. The town I lived and worked in failed to see this, proper growth and failed to go after commercial rateables. Rateables that do not impact your bottom line. Warehouses, I know there ugly but they don't send kids to school, they pick up their own trash. They have their own fire protection systems they have their own alarm and they're paying taxes. You have a stretch of 35 that is nothing but woods and I'm not trying tear up the woods but really what are we looking at here. How much can you cut the turkey to the bone before you just don't have any more turkey. I hear cut, cut, cut, and believe me I'm all you guys on not wanting to pay more taxes. That's one of the reasons I moved here. I think we need to look in the growth direction, I think we need to look in how can we create revenue that doesn't cost us something on the other side? That can't happen overnight. It's not easy work but every community I've seen in my time that's done well has flipped that balance from putting the tax burden on the residents to the commercial. So, you know you moved to a tourist town and when you move to a tourist town that's related to tourism a lot of the income comes from those things. People move here and a lot of the homes are second homes. People's impact is not going to be the same. Quite frankly they'll never feel the impact. Some of those people I know personally. Some are my family. My sister bought a house here, she comes here twice a year, it doesn't matter to her what the taxes are, she's more fortunate than a lot of us. Nothing against those people but they won't feel it. The people that will feel it are the more moderate or lower to moderate people. My point was to try to balance the growth. The more houses I see go up the more I cringe, they only bring a need for services. They don't bring anything with them. Thank you.
- Judge Garza – Does anybody else have anything else to add?
- Commissioner Rousseau – New Budget Pages
 - I saw we added \$54,000 in facilities equipment for the grant match for the generators and we need those. I believe there's \$56,000 available in ARPA fund, can we pay that with the ARPA rather than the General Fund?
 - Jacky Cockerham – if we see that we have that, we don't have all of cost in, we can do that. We could do a line item transfer.
 - Judge Garza – there is an agenda item in the regular meeting we are going to go through that.

- Commissioner Rousseau – I will save it for then.

V. Adjournment

Commissioner Rousseau moved to adjourn the public hearing on the budget, Commissioner Dupnik seconded

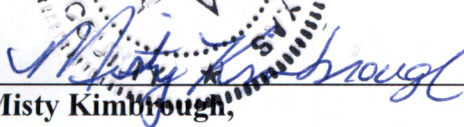
Motion carried 5-0: it was so ordered

Meeting adjourned at 9:21 AM

ARANSAS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' COURT



Ray A. Garza, County Judge



**Misty Kimbrough,
Ex-Officio Clerk of the Commissioners Court**