



MINUTES

Aransas County Commissioners Court Budget Workshop

9:00 AM – Tuesday, September 5, 2023

The Aransas County Commissioners Court met on Tuesday, September 5, 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 \(aransascourttx.gov\)](https://www.aransascourttx.gov), 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
2. Announce and Schedule the 2024 Budget Public Hearing for September 5, 2023 at 9:00 AM date and time the 2024 budget will be adopted – Jacky Cockerham / Judge Garza

Commissioner Rousseau - comments from a constituent read

- Patrick Kane – I am opposed to the drastic tax increase. The county needs to scrub the proposed budget again and find additional savings. The county also needs to do a better job projecting revenues to ensure they're not understated during the budget process. I've reviewed the budget and believe at least \$2 million dollars in revenues and savings are achievable without being too onerous on the county.

Judge Garza – comments from a constituent read

- Robin Wright – It is my understanding that you are promoting the maximum tax rate for property taxes. If so, I must ask how you can justify putting this burden on the people? With everything else increasing astronomically, do you not realize how this will hurt a lot of people? As a minister, I see a lot of folks who just barely get by now. People are hurting financially now. Why push them over the edge? I pray that you will vote against this massive tax increase. I respectfully ask that these comments be read into the record at the Commissioner's Court on Tuesday, Sept. 5, 2023.
- Daniel Hopson – I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed increase in the property tax rate being discussed at the upcoming public hearing. I cannot attend the hearing by I would like my comments read into the record at the Commissioner's Court.
The property owners of Aransas County cannot continue to shoulder the onerous burden of ever increasing property taxes. Individuals who have worked every day of their lives to own their property and home should not be taxed out of them.

Jacky Cockerham – This is the one this hearing is the budget hearing not the one for the Tax Rate, as soon as we close this hearing the Tax Rate hearing will start.

Commissioner Rousseau

- Commissioner's Court Budget - \$50,000 salary adjustment, can we eliminate that? Judge Garza and Jacky Cockerham noted that this has already been taken out of the 2024 budget.
- Tax Assessor Collector Budget – at the meeting last week, had a different budget that was proposed and voted on. This one shows amount due from the entities including the county of \$1,509, 236.00. This is about \$250,000 - \$300,000 more. The county's percent is usually about 23%? Jacky Cockerham stated it is based on our levies. This is an increase over what Anna Marshall was given that we put into our budget. Anna Marshall stated that she does not set that number, it comes for the Appraisal District. Jacky Cockerham stated she has not received those numbers yet. Pat Rousseau wants to read it so it's in their heads and be aware of the Appraisal District's approved budget that shows our amount that will be due to be \$347,000, and we have allocated only \$302,000.
- County Sheriff Budget – Commissioner Rousseau - Ms. Rutledge made the comment last week that the Sheriff's Office has been allocating money for electronic ticket writers for a few years. Can we get that done this year? To eliminate the cost of those for next year's budget. There was a statement that the contract wasn't done yet. Commissioner Dupnik – he believes it is their intention to get it spent when they get a contract. Commissioner Rousseau – so can we reduce the budget for that amount? Commissioner Dupnik – he plans on getting it in 2024. Misty Kimbrough – my memory is that this is a Tyler product that they need and getting a contract with Tyler is not easy. Jacky Cockerham – that is exactly what the issue is.
- Animal Care Budget – Commissioner Rousseau – what was the \$10,500 listed as office furniture going to be used for? Tana Taylor - That is for the new truck. Commissioner Rousseau – not the \$60,000 for machinery? Tana Taylor the \$60,000 is to replace the old vehicle.
- Child Safety Fund – Jacky Cockerham this is a fairly new fund. We have not budgeted anything before but we do intend on transferring the fund balance and also the Elections Conferences
- Elections Budget – Service Contract Fund Balance under Misc. Supplies there is \$20,000 does that include the special thermal paper for ballots. Jacky Cockerham, we will talk to him about that.
- Indigent Health Care – 520 – previous budget pages the balance of 2022 \$2,235,000, but in the new pages it is showing \$2,795,000, this is a significant change. Jacky Cockerham – could have been a correction of a formula. We proposed to move \$1,500,000 back into Health Care Sales Tax for more flexibility to spend it. Commissioner Casterline – have looked at using funds out of Health Care Sales Tax for Animal Control? In the order it quotes “health and safety regulations”. Jacky Cockerham – yes we do for, flea and tick and rabies shots. Commissioner Casterline – the way it reads getting animals off the street is a health and safety issue. Commissioner Rousseau – \$20,000 from Health Care Sales Tax is going to Animal Control in 2024 in addition to what was put in for flea and tick control. Commissioner Casterline – if taking animals off the street could qualify then we could use a lot more of it. Jacky Cockerham – we can look into that.
- Health Care Sales Tax – professional services of \$15,000, what was that for? Jacky Cockerham – I will have to look into that. Commissioner Rousseau – line item COA Nutrition? Jacky Cockerham – that is the Council on Aging that also includes “Meals on Wheels”. We have left that one at \$45,000 for several years and I know that their cost have gone up and wonder if ya'll want to give them a little more? Tana Taylor – I do believe they requested \$60,000. Commissioner Rousseau – propose that we move it to \$60,000, this comes from the Health Care Sales Tax. Jacky Cockerham – we also need to consider that we have not finished the contract for the ambulance and we may need additional funding for it.

Citizen to be heard – Kristi Rutledge – Thank you for considering usage for the funds and hopefully improve the tax rate. A 27% tax increase is a huge deal. You were talking about Animal Care Services, I foster to adopt this week who had been in the shelter for 6 months. I want to encourage funds from the Health Care Tax for things like: spay and neuter, flea, and transition to adoption, they goal should be to get them adopted into safe homes. That is possible with the volunteers and donations from the community. Pet

ownership is not only for the pet but benefits the health of the owner as well. Expenses that were added to the budget: \$200,000 for the airport for a grant match. If we don't have the grant we shouldn't budget it, it means 1¢ on the tax increment. The Sheriff has quite a few line items that have not been spent for last few years that's another 1¢ on the tax rate. It represents over taxation. We should not increasing: travel, meals, conferences, travel allowances, and unnecessary things. Things that are not necessary to keep the county running. The cost of everything is going up but my income is not. So when the county, city and school district raises taxes all at the same time and the tax appraisal food goes off my table and maybe not get Christmas gifts for my grandkids. These are the realities.

Commissioner Chaney – on the spay and neutering what is our budget for this to date? Jacky Cockerham – we have gotten a lot of donations for this. Tana Taylor – through July they are at \$6,700 that donations have not paid for. The budget is \$8,000 for 2023, but for 2024 we've increased that to \$10,000.

Commissioner Chaney – to make a difference in how many animals are out there is to spay and neuter.

Jacky Cockerham – let's look at using Health Care Sales tax. Can we double for this this could be a major step forward. **Commissioner Rousseau** – education is also needed to help the issue. We need to get people to understand they are responsible for taking care of all of the animal's need. Shots, spay or neuter, heartworm treatment, etc. Another Chance is helping getting the spay and neutering done by taking animals to Corpus Christi to get it done as there are not enough vets in our community to handle the load.

Commissioner Casterline – there is a lady who has too many cats that are just free to roam the neighborhood and the numbers are growing at a crazy rate. The cats are causing problems on other people's property and tearing stuff up. Cats are everywhere. **Jacky Cockerham** - we will verify that we can use Health Care Sales Tax for spay and neutering.

Judge Garza

- Airport Runway Lights – this is a need the \$240,000 we will use ARPA funds to pay for it. I would rather pay \$240,000 than \$2,400,000 next year. **Jacky Cockerham** – we did verify that the ARPA funds are eligible to pay this.
- The tax rate is at 23% right now.
- Has the current budget published with the changes we made this week? **Jacky Cockerham** – no sir, but we can get it done.
- We are removing the COLA and giving the option for a 1 step increase if they merit the raise. Elected officials won't get it. **Anna Marshall** – Elected Officials are county employees too. **Commissioner Chaney** – I just can't see not giving a COLA.
- Property Values – we based our budget on the certified estimated values, they are now at 95% and the values went down. We are not getting more money it has gone down. **Anna Marshall** – the rate is 4.904858199. **Commissioner Rousseau** – many people and entities have talked about what the Appraisal District Chief Appraiser said, I and the Judge were at that meeting, the finding for most of the people who have protested have been in favor of the protesters. I have read and heard that the contrary was stated and that is not correct. The graphs provided showed that the success rate of people who were protesting and it was very much in favor and believe they had 2 times the number of protests this year. The protest hearings are not yet finished. **Anna Marshall** – our role changes every month so that number that I just gave you may be different. The estimate is down 3%.
- Sales Tax is on the decline so we are not putting an increase for sales tax.
- **Commissioner Dupnik** – as far as the 1% step increase based on performance what do you anticipate the savings to be versus the 2% COLA? **Commissioner Rousseau** – a step increase is 2.5%. **Judge Garza** -- if everybody gets a step increase it's an increase of \$30,000 compared to a 2% COLA for everyone. **Commissioner Dupnik** – I know we are always concerned about costs. But in talking to different departments they are losing employees because it easy to find a job with better pay, even though we know about the benefits for retirement, but people have to live. About 170 of our employees, the median salary \$47,000 per year. **Misty Kimbrough** - what is bring home out of that? **Commissioner Dupnik** – even with the 2% COLA only nets the employee about \$75 per month before taxes and other

deductions. I understand that everybody is suffering in the street and that's true but we have to have competent and qualified employees. Just like the school district has lost people it's a think our departments deal with continually. I'm sure there are employees who won't qualify but for the most part our employees are competent and qualified. The 1 step is 2.5%. Commissioner Rousseau – and we do offer longevity pay. We are public servants and with that comes responsibility and I think to some extent some pride in what we are doing. Does that bread on your table, I don't know. For me salary is not the overriding issue. I believe we should reward people who are exceptional by giving an evaluation and a merit increase. If they are not doing an exceptional job they need an evaluation and be brought up to speed on their shortcomings, correct them or find a different position. The last few years COLAs given totaling 17.5%. We have provided. Some departments have taken advantage of merit increase system and we are going to address that and hopefully that will go away. I think our message to the employees is if you are doing a really good job you need to get rewarded. If you are just showing up every day and you don't really care then you can keep your same pay. Commissioner Chaney – who is driving the things we do? Costs of fuel, taxes, food, and purchasing everything. I don't see us balancing this on the backs of the employees and I think that's what we are doing. I don't agree with that and I won't vote for that. I will pass the budget as a whole but I'll make sure the employees know that this commissioner supports the basic cost of living, merit raises are good for those that are eligible by performance. A decrease in the employee's purchasing power year to year is not acceptable.

Jacky Cockerham – we need to be sure to announce the day and time we are going to adopt the budget.

Next Monday, September 11, 2023 at 9:00 AM we will have another public hearing for the budget and the tax rate to comply with statutes that we adopt the budget as soon as we have the public hearing.

V. Adjournment

Judge Garza – Can I have a motion to adjourn

Commissioner Rousseau so moved, Commissioner Casterline seconded

Motion carried 5-0: it was so ordered

Meeting adjourned at 9:45 AM

ARANSAS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' COURT



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

Ray A. Garza
Ray A. Garza, County Judge

