



# Taxation, Revenue, and Utilization of Expenditures (TRUE) Commission

Dr. Keshan Hargrove, Chair

## TRUE COMMISSION Meeting Minutes

September 7, 2023  
4:00 p.m.

Don Davis Room, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, City Hall

**Attendance:** Commissioners Dr. Keshan Hargrove (Chair), Charles Barr, Velma Rounsville (dep, 5:45), Bruce Tyson, Kim Pryor, Carter Jones, Daniel Henry

**Excused:** Commissioner Ramon Day

**Absent:** None

**Also:** Jeff Clements – City Council Research; Tommy Carter – Council Auditor’s Office

The meeting was convened at 4:03 p.m. by Chairwoman Hargrove and the attendees introduced themselves for the record.

### Invited Speaker – Sheriff T.K. Waters

Sheriff Waters introduced his management staff in attendance: Director of Personnel and Professional Standards Brian Kee, Chief of Budget Bill Clement, Undersheriff Brian Coursey. The Sheriff said the JSO has recently done a complete revision of its patrol zones for the first time in decades and has evened out the workload and the personnel distribution in the 6 Police Service Districts (PSDs), equalizing the districts to 115,000 – 118,000 service calls annually. His goal is for officers to spend more time doing proactive policing rather than constantly responding to calls. The JSO’s practice has always been to have single officers in assigned vehicles rather than two officers per car as is the case in other cities. The new budget has funding for 40 new officers; additionally the department has applied for a federal COPS grant that would fund 40 more.

Director Kee said the Sheriff agrees with the TRUE Commission’s recommendation of 2.73 sworn officers per 1,000 citizens; the department is currently at 1.8 – 1.9 per 1,000, and Jacksonville is growing rapidly so the force needs to grow just to keep up with the current rate. The JSO is running classes of 35-40 at a time through the police academy despite the difficulty of recruiting and finding sufficient qualified candidates. There are 5 academy classes scheduled for the next fiscal year. The department hires 100 officers per year on average, and about 5 per month retire. Adding more than 5 academy classes per year would require additional staff for the firing range and driving course, which are constrained in their capacity. Hiring 140 new offices per year is possible, but growing the force also depends in part on the amount of attrition that takes place. The new budget will fund 80 new positions, 40 City-paid and 40 paid by a COPS grant if it is awarded.

Director Kee said starting salaries are not under the Sheriff's control and are negotiated between the City administration and the Fraternal Order of Police; the upcoming year is the last year of the current 3-year contract and negotiations will be getting underway hopefully sooner rather than later. JSO pays a lower starting salary at \$47,916 than the Florida Highway Patrol, adjacent counties (i.e. Nassau County \$51,000, St. Johns County \$53,000), or other large Florida cities (Tampa, Orlando). The department currently has 55 police officer vacancies and a new academy class starts next month. He said hiring a new officer currently costs \$111,807, which includes salary, health insurance, retirement contribution, vehicle purchase, police academy training, uniforms, and equipment. Hiring 200 officers would cost approximately \$22.3M. Commissioner Pryor asked what else could be done to attract and keep officers. Director Kee said higher pay and the return of a defined benefit pension are the biggest issues. The department is doing more advertising via social media to reach the younger demographic. More Mental Health Resource Center co-responders to assist officers in responding to calls where mental health issues are suspected would be a help, but that requires more funding for MHRC since the co-responders are MHRC employees, not JSO. Sheriff Waters said getting mental health clinicians who want to work the hours that JSO needs is challenging. A clinician will not be dispatched in dangerous cases where there is a threat of violence. In response to a question about JSO officers getting more training in mental health issues, the Sheriff said his deputies are not really equipped to be trained as mental health responders.

Chair Hargrove asked about JSO's qualifications for hiring. Director Kee said 21 years old, American citizenship, a valid driver's license, and either a bachelor's degree or varying combinations of an associate degree and previous experience, or military experience, and/or prior police department experience, not necessarily as a sworn officer (i.e. correctional officer, communication officer). Dr. Hargrove said military reservists are a good source of recruits and Director Key said they recruit military bases in the Southeast. Sheriff Waters said JSO has a good record of recruiting and hiring despite lower salaries, but other big cities in Florida pay considerably more and are therefore more attractive to recruits. He said the hiring standards are high, including no drug use, no bad credit, proper temperament, passing a polygraph test, etc., so that tends to weed out a lot of candidates.

Commissioner Henry asked if JSO had considered starting a Duval County Public Schools magnet program. Director Kee said they have the Explorer program for high school aged students and he believes there may be a criminal justice magnet at one of the schools. There are jobs in the department for people under age 21, including communication officers and Community Services Officers (CSOs). Sheriff Waters said they also have a liaison with the local military community. Commissioner Henry asked if the Florida Sheriff's Association has advocated for a state-level COPS program to encourage hiring like the federal government has. The Sheriff said he was unaware of such a program but likes the idea and may suggest it at the next Florida Sheriffs Association meeting. In response to a question from Commissioner Henry about whether JSO has its own grant writers, Bill Clement said they do. With regard to the budget, Mr. Clement said the department uses a zero-based budget process and justifies the amounts each year. The department applied for 40 positions through the COPS program because they thought they had a good chance to get it, so the mayor budgeted for 40 additional using local funds. He said a lot of the hiring costs are front-loaded in the year of hiring (academy training, vehicle, equipment) so that initial cost goes down a little in years thereafter. Some costs are paid via internal service charges from Fleet Management and the ITD radio shop.

Mr. Henry asked for a profile of a good police officer candidate – the Sheriff said a good candidate is calm, level-headed, smart, with no troubled past. Every candidate gets a review by a psychologist experienced in the law enforcement field. In Florida, an officer who leaves their agency under a cloud (fired, under investigation) gets a notation in their state certification file so other agencies know to look deeper into their circumstances. Mr. Henry asked about performance measures in the contract for the new jail health care vendor. The Sheriff said JSO has a new contract manager and auditor to ensure that the terms and conditions are met. Commissioner Tyson asked if there is a path to employment for someone

who may have made a mistake as a teenager but has overcome that and reformed their lives. Director Key said by law they can't hire a convicted felon, but they take everyone's personal circumstances into account to see what the risk is. Commissioner Jones asked about the use of the credit score in the hiring process. Director Key said it's not as strict a criterion as it used to be, but the department can't have officers lots of debts because that might be tempting and problematic in some of the situations in which they might find themselves dealing with large amounts of cash. The Sheriff said he believes in giving second chances which are handled on a case-by-case basis, but they have to be very careful because of the responsibility of the job. Commissioner Jones asked about how purchasing is done. Mr. Clement said City Procurement, Fleet Management and ITD handle the procurements and bill JSO an internal service charge to pay for those purchases. Commissioner Barr asked about using prior job experience as a criterion for hiring apart from a college degree. Sheriff Waters said that people who hold down long-term jobs tend to be very stable and therefore good candidates.

Chairwoman Hargrove asked about crime prevention programs. The Sheriff said they have many, including outreach managers that go to high-risk young men, along with a minister or a mental health professional, and talk to them face-to-face to dissuade them from criminal activity. They hold shooting review meetings every week to analyze what happened and who was involved and try to intervene with people whose names show up in multiple cases. Dr. Hargrove recommended the Officer Friendly program from her school days that helped develop positive relationships between students and the police. Sheriff Waters said the schools are staffed by the school board police department, not JSO. He sees social media as a tremendous problem in police relations with the public since there is so much misinformation that disseminates in seconds and spoils the reputation of the force. The JSO public information unit has been reorganized to try to get good news out. Commissioner Rounsville said she is a member of Sheriff's Watch in her area and sees its value, but not enough people know about it or care to get involved. Sheriff Waters said they do a lot of social media promotion and neighborhood walks to meet people personally, but that unfortunately is not attractive to TV news, and some people just want to remain willfully ignorant of the good side of the JSO. Dr. Hargrove asked about diversity training efforts. The Sheriff said that is constantly emphasized in JSO's training. Commissioner Henry said the recent town hall event at the Prime Osborn Convention Center was great for getting the word out about the JSO and recommended doing it more often to build public trust and understanding. Commissioners Henry and Pryor thanked the Sheriff for his work thus far and the changes he's been making.

#### Approval of minutes

The minutes of the August 14, 2023 special commission meeting were amended to remove an incomplete sentence at the bottom of page 3 and **approved unanimously as amended**.

#### Public Comment

None

#### Council Auditor's Report

Tommy Carter of the Auditor's Office reported that the office has released 1 report since the last meeting – #872 Quarterly Budget Summary for the 3 Months Ending June 30, 2023.

JEA projects a balanced budget but will need to file legislation to amend their FY 2022/23 budget even if total appropriations are within the Council Approved appropriation authority, since there is not an authorized use of reserves stated in the budget ordinance.

JTA anticipates no budgetary stress and projects a \$5.3M favorable variance in bus operations due to higher gas tax and sales tax collections. The St. Johns River Ferry looks like it will exceed budgetary authorization by \$466,000 which will require a budget amendment.

JPA is projecting a \$4.6M favorable variance in operating revenues due to increasing cruise ship occupancy, container revenues, and dry bulk operations.

JAA is projecting a \$39.5M surplus by year's end primarily due to a delay in construction project spending and increased parking and concession revenues due to higher passenger traffic

The City budget projects a \$40.6M positive variance overall (taking into account a negative variance in the Solid Waste Fund) due to higher ad valorem taxes, state-shared revenues and interest income. Projections are for an \$18.4M positive variance in expenditures, largely due to vacancies and positive variances in leave sellback and defined contribution plans. The Solid Waste Fund is projecting a negative variance of \$1M for the year. Federal ARP funds are covering the \$10.4M increased cost this year of rate changes for 2 of the contract haulers – the fund would be projecting a negative variance of \$7.9M without that.

Commissioner Henry asked about JTA's pending budget amendment for FY21-22; Mr. Carter said it will not impact the current budget any but will amend the past budget to reflect actual revenues and expenditures. Mr. Henry asked if position vacancy information can be obtained at the division level rather than at the department level, since that would be more informative. Mr. Carter said he would inquire. Commissioner Pryor asked how independent authorities can over-spend their budget without some kind of approval. Mr. Carter said the quarterly reports give year-end projections during the fiscal year, so it doesn't make sense to amend the budget to reflect trends before year-end since things can change until the fiscal year ends when overspending authority can be actually be determined. The true-up is done after the fiscal year ends and actual figures can be determined for a budget amendment. He noted that the only City funding to the JTA budget is for the Connexion community transportation system for the disable at less than \$1.5 million; the rest is federal and state funds and operating revenue. Mr. Carter said the overspending is in part a result of extra revenue being collected from the sales and gas taxes, grants received, etc. Mr. Henry asked if anyone counsels agencies like JTA about their budgeting practices and projections and tries to get them to be more accurate. Mr. Carter said JTA is an independent authority governed by a combination locally- and state-appointed board, and it starts its budget process earlier than the City because of the state fiscal year. Therefore by the time the budget is ready for submittal to the Council, the Council Auditor often has a month or two of additional revenue actuals to consider. Commissioner Rounsville asked for JTA to come to a future meeting to talk about their budgeting practices. Commissioner Tyson said JTA can't simply stop running buses or community transportation because they hit an appropriation cap short of the end of the fiscal year. There has to be some flexibility. Commissioner Pryor asked if JTA is audited to understand where the overspending happened and why. Mr. Carter said the Council Auditor has audit rights over the independent authorities, and JTA also has an independent CPA audit annually.

**Motion (Pryor):** the TRUE Commission requests the Council Auditor's Office to audit the JTA.

Mr. Carter said the Auditor's Office has audited several specific JTA functions over the years, but not the entire agency. A complete audit of the whole agency would probably exceed the capabilities of the Auditor's Office, and may not meet the risk assessment criteria that are used to determine what the Auditor's Office studies. Staff was requested to invite JTA to a future meeting.

#### Legislative Tracking Committee

Commissioner Pryor asked questions about several pending ordinances:

2023-556: appropriation of \$411,000 for a generator for a Health Department building – Ms. Pryor said that seems like a huge sum to pay for a generator. Commissioner Jones said his employer bought generators recently and that's a reasonable price for units that can power an entire building.

2023-560: transfer of emergency medical transportation certificate of public convenience and necessity (CON) from one company to another – Ms. Pryor asked why the CON was being authorized for transfer before the purchase transaction for the company is complete. Mr. Clements explained that the transfer is being authorized in advance of the transaction closing so that there is no break in service. If the CON transfer is not authorized in advance, the new company could not provide service from the day the transaction closed until City Council acted because it would not have a valid CON. Should the transaction not close for some reason, the purchasing company would not have a valid CON.

2023-561: extension of deadline for Mayport Village Partnership to raise matching funds for development of a Mayport revitalization plan, and waiver of the advance disbursement prohibition to permit City funds to be paid to the Partnership in installments rather than on a reimbursement basis – Ms. Pryor asked what happens if the Mayport Partnership don't raise the private funding as required after City funds have been paid out. Mr. Clements said that would be a policy decision for the City Council to make about how to deal with that situation.

**Motion** (Pryor): draft a letter to City Council expressing concern about the waiver and the disbursement in advance rather than via reimbursement – **approved unanimously.**

2023-563: transferring \$234,672.91 from Various Administrative Expenses in the CDBG fund to a Forgivable Loans account in the CDBG fund and authorizing fund carryover to the next fiscal year – Ms. Pryor asked who oversees the CDBG and if the transfer to forgivable loans is a permissible use of the funds. Mr. Clements explained that the funds are being freed up in the CDBG administrative costs account because the employees being paid from that account are being shifted to another grant-funded account, leaving unspent administrative funds. These are being transferred to a program providing forgivable loans to homeowners still repairing damages caused by Hurricane Matthew, which is an eligible CDBG expense. The CDBG program is overseen by the Housing and Community Development Division of the Neighborhoods Department.

2023-567: ban smoking and vaping in public parks – Ms. Pryor is interested in what the enforcement mechanism will be and what it will cost. Mr. Clements said this is the sort of offense that would likely be enforced only if a violation was observed by a police officer in the course of their normal duties.

2023-590: authorizing use of eminent domain to acquire parcels of property and easements needed for the Old Middleburg Road widening project. Mr. Clements explained the request for emergency approval due to the owner of the primary parcel to be acquired suffering from a terminal medical condition. The City needs to acquire the parcels and easements for this long-delayed project and City Council will be authorizing the use of eminent domain should efforts at voluntary acquisition prove unsuccessful.

#### Audit Committee

None

#### Chair's Comments

None

#### Old Business

- By-laws revision proposal: the matter was deferred given the lateness of the hour and the excused absence of Commissioner Day who drafted the proposed revisions.

#### New Business

None

Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Jones asked if the City Council had introduced an ordinance to purchase the liquor store site near the Gateway KIPP school that has been the subject of controversy. Mr. Clements said that to his knowledge no legislation has been filed as of yet.

Next meetings

Audit Committee – at the call of the Chair as needed when new audits/reports are released

Legislative Tracking Committee – at the call of the Chair as needed

Full commission – October 5, 2023.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:59 p.m.

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Posted 10.6.23 11:00 a.m.