

Hartsville/Trousdale County Government
LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Meeting Date: January 19, 2023, 6 p.m., mayor's office

Present: Shane Burton, Steve Whittaker, Grant Cothron, Chris Gregory

Absent: *Tommy Belcher, Judy Kerr*

Others Present: Mayor Jack McCall, Sheriff Ray Russell, EMS Director Matt Batey

Shane Burton called the meeting to order at 6 p.m.

Minutes of the December 13, 2022 meeting were reviewed. Motion to approve by Grant Cothron, second by Steve Whittaker. Motion approved.

Sheriff Russell announced he would be asking for seven new positions in 2023-24 county budget: four deputies, two dispatchers, one warrants clerk. Sheriff wants to break county into three patrol zones (city, 231, eastern) and have a sergeant able to flow between zone as needed. Sheriff said when he started there were 3-4 deputies in all. County population is now over 12,000 and has three deputies per shift. Department has not increased deputies in a number of years. Sheriff has been two spots short for over a year, he said.

Burton asked if department is using overtime to fill vacancies. Russell said sometimes.

Russell said dispatchers' call volumes have increased and calls take longer, especially if dispatch has to give directions for CPR or other medical emergency. This justifies need for second dispatch person around the clock, sheriff said. Warrants clerk is needed to streamline process, as Russell said eight different people are serving warrants at present. Sheriff noted that many other counties have a warrant clerk to handle those.

Cothron asked if warrants clerk would be sworn position or not. Sheriff said not sworn. Burton added that TCSD sometimes serves 50-75 warrants per week, and sheriff said many are from CoreCivic. If county gets new jail, Russell he would like a second warrants clerk (possibly 2-3 years out).

Estimated cost of new positions would be \$174,890 from 101 fund, \$136,744 from 111 fund.

Cothron and Whittaker each said new positions are definitely needed. Commissioners cited increased traffic, call volume.

Russell said that Detective Chaney Wright is serving as a courtroom liaison, so deputies aren't tied up in court and have more time to be on patrol. Sheriff said department is "playing a chess game every day" to fill vacancies and was having to send two to Knox County on a warrant pick up the very next day.

Chris Gregory noted that the cost equaled almost 10 cents on the current property tax rate.

Discussion turned to TCSD's phone server. Burton noted that internet connection to TBI sometimes goes down. Russell wants to move server from Administration Building to Sheriff's Office and presented \$12,180 quote from IT-Voice for new server, software, switches, and license. Motion to recommend to Finance Committee by Gregory, second by Cothron. Motion approved.

Sheriff presented report on status of current jail facility finances. Through four months of the current fiscal year, phone, commissary, and holding state prisoners has brought in \$109,506.46 (currently has 15 state inmates). Sheriff would like to earmark these funds toward a new jail, said previous Commissions have always moved into general fund. If 105-bed recommended facility is built and 50 state inmates are held, it would generate \$1.2 million annually, per sheriff's estimate. Sheriff added that in 26 years, he only knew

of two years in which state prisoners would not have brought in expected revenue. Mayor Jack McCall noted that state has told counties not to count on state inmates for funding.

Mayor McCall said interest rate hikes will hurt county when time comes to fund jail. December presentation to Finance Committee had number of \$25 million at 4.5%, payment of \$2 million per year. Even an \$80 wheel tax would bring less than half that amount, McCall estimated. Mayor noted there is a January 31 meeting with Spirit Architecture to discuss jail project, serve as brainstorming session.

Discussion turned to inadequacy of current Justice Center. Sheriff said last week they had 22 inmates from Trousdale Turner prison due in court, had to be held in vans in the parking lot. Burton said “something bad is gonna happen” if not addressed, added that some had to be transported from Riverbend prison, costs county \$1,290 every time. Russell concurred, said overtime costs are killing department’s budget.

Discussion turned to problems at current jail. Whittaker said recreation area has not been usable in years and that county could face legal action as a consequence. Russell said TCI has advised not to use current rec area as it is unsafe. If a new jail is built, Russell wants to use current jail for a work-release program. Local companies have reportedly expressed interest and there is grant money available to help in that regard, per sheriff.

Current jail does not have enough bunks in cells and some inmates are sleeping on floor on cots. One of the women’s cells has only six bunks. Jail staff having to juggle cell arrangements to handle safety.

Jail also had a water leak last week, wasted 136,000 gallons. Meter is under a concrete slab and staff had to jerry-rig it as a temporary fix. Burton said mold, moisture is also a problem. Commissioners invited to tour the jail to see the problems. Mayor said work session with Commission might be necessary to determine future action. Russell said inmates also recently stopped up a toilet, which cost \$800 for a plumber to fix.

Cothron asked if any state or federal money might be available to help with new jail costs. Mayor indicated not likely.

Russell said he is hoping to restore DARE anti-drug program to schools beginning with 2023-24 school year. SROs are scheduled to train in program over the summer break.

Russell said he hasn’t asked for new staff in the past since pay rates were so low. County has become more competitive with salaries, he noted. EMS Director Matt Batey concurred with needs for dispatchers, said used to be 90 calls a month. Now 120-130 calls a month for EMS, not counting sheriff or fire.

Burton asked committee members to please support the emotional disturbed person transport grant program coming before County Commission at January meeting.

Motion to adjourn at 7:15 by Steve Whittaker. Motion approved.

Minutes presented by Chris Gregory