

# Jefferson County Commissioner Update



By Mark Schoenrock, Chairman, Jefferson County Board of Commissioners

As we enter Fall 2022, children returning to school, and harvest right around the corner, your Jefferson County Board of Commissioners is very engaged in serving the citizens of Jefferson County. The board is in the final phases of an intensive six-week budget review process and we are planning to conduct the budget hearing on September 13, 2022 at 9am in the commissioners' room in the court house. This has been a challenging budget this year with the costs of labor, services, materials and equipment all significantly increasing. Our constant goal

is to provide top quality service to our citizens in a fiscally prudent manner. We welcome and encourage our citizens to attend the meetings of the board. We meet every Tuesday at 9 a.m. in the courthouse except for the fifth Tuesday. The meetings are also available on zoom if you cannot attend, and we encourage you to contact us on issues that are important to you.

Road and bridge maintenance and improvements, and citizen safety and law enforcement will always be our highest priorities. The county road and bridge system is the lifeline of our county and we work hard to maintain and improve it. The county one- and six-year road plan is at the heart of this effort. We reviewed and approved the 2022-2028 plan earlier this year. Every Jefferson County citizen must feel safe, and we work hard to ensure we have a first-class law enforcement department led by our Sheriff. The majority of the county's budget is allocated to these two areas. Additionally, we have been successful in obtaining grants and state programs to help us do even more in these areas, reducing the use of Jefferson County tax money. We ensure we keep our highway and law enforcement vehicles, radios, personal gear and all of our equipment continually upgraded and maintained, as well as recruiting, training and retaining a quality workforce. These are all necessary elements to achieve the objective of providing top quality service to our citizens.

This summer we executed an intensive eight-week process with High Street Consulting, a firm led by former Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) Director Kyle Schneweis, to coordinate the preparation of the Jefferson County application for the Rural Surface Transportation Grant administered by the United States Department of Transportation to complete the PWF road. We obtained the support of Governor Ricketts, the executive NDOT leadership, and Senator Fischer, Senator Sasse, and Congressman Smith. We appreciate the numerous letters of local support from our citizens. We should learn the results this Fall.

We are excited to report that we approved the \$3.83M competitive bid from Cedar Valley Paving LLC to complete the Endicott Clay Road project. This is a team effort between Jefferson County and Endicott Clay Products, with significant grant support from NDOT, Community Development Block Grant, and the United States Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration. We have worked hard to obtain these grants and coordinate this support and are excited to see this vital project getting ready to break ground. This is a significant economic development multiplier for Jefferson County.

The Jefferson County school attendance and diversion and support programs continue to be very successful in helping our rising generation get on the right path towards becoming productive members of society. Peggy Galloway and Heather Watson are champions in this effort. School truancy often leads to other behaviors that are detractors from society and lead to significant societal costs. These costs are measured in terms of increased law enforcement costs, increased court and legal costs, increased family support costs, increased health care system costs, and less probability of having a job or profession that contributes to society, to name just a few. Our goal is to intervene early so that we do all we can to get that young person on a better path that leads to desirable outcomes rather than undesirable outcomes which have the probability of affecting them and society the rest of their lives.

We are working hard to develop the best plan to expand broadband access in our county. We currently have an application pending with the Nebraska Public Service Commission which will bring high speed internet to over 100 additional Jefferson County homes. This will be the first step of a multi-step process to reach even more homes. Our goal is to get the most fiber optic cable to as many homes as possible, maximizing the use of available resources. Broadband access is a huge economic, service and social game changer.

We are leading efforts to consistently review and improve cybersecurity. Every week, there is some county in the United States that is taken down by cyber thieves. As all county operations are very dependent on computer systems, we are diligently working to do our best to keep all our systems operational 24/7.

The county vastly improved communication system is now operational. There are many moving parts to this which will vastly improve our communication abilities and service to our citizens.

Our revamped website to increase citizen access to government services has proven to be very popular. We have received many favorable reviews from our citizens. The website address is [jeffersoncounty.nebraska.gov](http://jeffersoncounty.nebraska.gov).

In this challenging time, county workforce recruitment, training and retention is a vital priority. The county board is constantly reviewing this to ensure that Jefferson County remains

competitive in a very challenging job market. Like all businesses, we need quality people to deliver quality services to our citizens.

In March, we extended the moratorium until April 1, 2023 on commercial wind energy conversion systems. We had contact with hundreds of you our fellow citizens and the consistent message was that our citizens felt that their voices had not been heard in this process. In response to the board's request, the county planning and zoning committee held a meeting on August 18 to obtain citizen input on this vitally important subject. The meeting was well attended and there will be further meetings in the future regarding this vitally important subject. It is the county board's objective through all of this that the voice of our citizens is heard so we know how best to represent each of you.

Support to our veterans is always a top priority. We have made many advancements in this area, led by our Veterans Service Officer Don Cook. It is our privilege to honor the Jefferson County veteran of the month on the first Tuesday of every month.

We are working with the Southeast Nebraska Development District to address the workforce housing shortage. We are very aware of this critical need in our county and are working hard to address it.

Jefferson county board members serve in leadership capacities on the following state and regional boards which provide numerous essential services to Jefferson County citizens: Nebraska Association of County Officials, Southeast Nebraska Development District, Region V Services and Systems, Blue Rivers Area Agency on Aging, Public Health Solutions district health board and Blue Valley Community Action.

We plan to resume coordination soon with our State Senator Tom Brandt and the Nebraska district health boards to further our efforts to eradicate the scourge of methamphetamine from our county. The bill that Senator Brandt introduced in the last session that we coordinated with him and that we testified for, did not get out of the Health and Human Services committee, so we will re-group and draft a new bill that we hope to get introduced in January in the next Nebraska Legislature.

Our central objective as county commissioners is to ensure the coordination and delivery of essential quality governmental services to the citizens of Jefferson County in a fiscally responsible manner. With every decision that we make, we recognize and appreciate the hard work and dedication that it takes to provide the taxpayer provided fiscal resources of our county, for we are also taxpayers. We work hard to ensure that those resources are utilized in a prudent and responsible manner to provide the products and services required to make Jefferson County an attractive and satisfying place to live and work.

We will provide more updates on these and other issues in future discussions. We hope that this periodic column is successful in promoting an increased dialogue and facilitates further communication with each of you reading it. We look forward to working together here in Jefferson County to make our home an even better place to work and live. As always, we welcome your input so we know how best to serve each of you!