



# JASPER COUNTY COURTHOUSE DESIGN COMMITTEE MINUTES OF OCTOBER 29, 2025

A Courthouse Design Committee Meeting of the Jasper County Board was held on Wednesday, October 29, 2025, at 4:30 p.m. at the Jasper County Building, Board Room, 204 West Washington Street, Newton, Illinois. The following committee members were present: Committee Chairman Michael Geier, Eric Spiker, James Judson, AC Pickens, Sheriff Brandon Francis, State's Attorney James Treccia, and Circuit Clerk Jamie Blake. County Board Chairman Jason Warfel, Board Member Doug Weddell were also present. Additionally, Jason Wright and Tim Raibley with ADG and John Stone and Shannon Woodard with Stone and Waggoner were present.

## CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Chairman Geier.

## PUBLIC COMMENTS

Traci Lybarger asked what money the County had set aside for the project.

Design Committee Noted: That after a 3<sup>rd</sup> Year of Grant Funding the County has now received \$2.2 Million in grant funding from the Energy Transition grant that would go towards the Courthouse project. With an additional \$1 Million received from the Illinois Department of Transportation for the Streetscape project around the Courthouse for sidewalks, streetlamps and accessibility.

RJ Lindemann asked the Design Committee to reconsider the entire project.

Matt Tarr with the City of Newton Electrical Department asked the Architect and Engineering team to keep in contact with the City Electrical Department as plans moved forward.

## ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA & MINUTES

Committee Member Eric Spiker made a motion to approve the agenda and the previous meeting minutes. Committee Member A.C. Pickens seconded the motion. The motion carried on a voice vote.

## DESIGN COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN COMMENTS

### Chairman Michael Geier

I would like to take this time to address several talking points that I've heard and seen made by the public, and some elected officials, regarding this project.

#### 1. *"Why can't the building be renovated?"*

- a. A feasibility study was done on the current courthouse at the very beginning stages of discussion, on what to do. Multiple engineering firms independently assessed the courthouse structure and the findings revealed that the structural integrity of the building most likely couldn't withstand the seismic activity of a renovation.
- b. Additionally, any renovation cost that would exceed 50% of the perceived value of the building would mean any outdated codes would have to be updated. This would mean adding bathrooms upstairs, a complete overhaul of the south entrance, possibly enlarging the elevator shaft, just to name a few.

- c. Finally, the feasibility study concluded that an overhaul of the courthouse would end up costing just as much, if not more than a newly constructed building. And how long would that last? Another 20 years and this county would be right back to where we are at now. The responsible thing to do is build new.

2. *“The building is historic.”*

- a. The building is historic in the sense of how many years it’s been there. That’s it. The building has been altered from its original design so much that no one who was there during its initial completion would hardly recognize the courthouse today. I have worked with the State Historic Preservation Office and a recordation firm, and just about every aspect of the current courthouse has been documented for historical purposes, but in regard to the building itself being preserved, even the State Historical Preservation Office has determined that the building does not qualify for preservation because it has been altered so much from the original design.

3. *“I don’t think we should be spending our tax money on a new building.” / “I don’t want the cost of this building to fall on me or my children.”*

- a. By statute, counties are required to have a courthouse. So, something needed to be done. We have a very fiscally conservative board. I would like to point out that every member on the county board voted to build a new courthouse instead of renovate. Why was the decision unanimous? Several reasons. Aside from the results of the feasibility study I mentioned earlier, first, and most importantly, the county is receiving grant money from the Energy Transition Community Grant Program. We are eligible for this grant every year, for the next **several** years. We’ve already been awarded enough money to cover a quarter of the estimated cost of the new courthouse, and we haven’t even reached the stage of this process where the offices need to be relocated. So, if the grant awards continue to trend, hopefully, the new courthouse will be paid for entirely by this program.
- b. Secondly, doing nothing is no longer an option, because that courthouse will eventually be condemned, and the **county** will be on the hook to pay for it all out of pocket. For anyone out there saying we don’t need to spend the money... It’s that thinking from the public and previous county boards that put that courthouse in the state it is in today. If you need a new roof for your home, you get it replaced. If your water heater goes out, you buy a new one. Whether it’s to live in your own home, or for a community to function properly, you have to spend money. What’s important is what you’re spending the money **on**.

Throughout my years on the board, there have been several exchanges, sometimes heated, amongst board members on what we should be spending money on. So, I think the fact that there was a unanimous vote to move forward with a newly constructed courthouse is very telling.

4. *“Why are the design meetings going into closed/executive session?”*

a. Security. We live in a time where people are getting shot over simply disagreeing with someone else’s views. The courthouse can be a place where tempers flare. During these meetings, the sheriff has discussed security best practices... We discuss access to restricted areas, such as prisoner holding areas... We discuss placement of the judge’s chambers and jury room...

We have a responsibility to not only keep the public safe, but those who work inside that courthouse as well. Additionally, this committee is an advisory committee only. Any action that would need to be taken would be done so by the full board, in a public setting.

5. Finally, all the discussion topics that I’ve addressed... I get it. I understand the mindset behind the concern. I understand the logic behind the questions. But we’re now 3 years into this process...? We’ve held multiple public meetings, including one very well attended meeting inside the courtroom, where we gave the public unrestrained opportunity to listen, voice concerns and ask questions. We even gave tours of the entire building afterwards. And every one of these meetings had been advertised in the paper, and on Facebook, and now the county website ahead of time. Almost everything I’ve just stated has already been highlighted in these public meetings over those years. So, I understand for anyone jumping into this discussion now, great. I’m glad you’re taking an interest in what is going on in your community. But please, just ask us. You’re not going to get your answers from Facebook. But you can get them from us board members. So please ask.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **Courthouse Design Discussion**

Chairman Geier informed the committee that design discussion for this meeting covered security procedures as outlined by the Chief Judge and would be discussed in executive session under the following exemption: Security Procedures 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(8)

## **CLOSED/EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Committee Member James Judson moved to adjourn to Closed/Executive Session at 4:44 p.m. under the following exemption: Security Procedures 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(8). Committee Member A.C. Pickens seconded the motion. The motion carried on a roll call vote.

Resident Judge Chad Miller joined the meeting at 4:46 p.m.  
Sheriff Brandon Francis left the meeting at 5:00 p.m.  
Board Member Doug Weddell left the meeting at 5:12 p.m.

**ADJOURNMENT**

State's Attorney moved to adjourn the committee meeting from executive session at 5:43 p.m. A.C.  
Pickens seconded the motion. The motion carried on a voice vote.

No additional meeting has been scheduled at this time.

Jason Warfel, Jasper County Board Chairman