

**Jefferson Central Appraisal District  
Board of Directors**

**Regular Board Meeting  
November 14, 2023 – 12:30 p.m.**

The Board of Directors of the Jefferson Central Appraisal District met in public (open) session on Tuesday, November 14, 2023, at the Appraisal District office, 4610 S. Fourth Street, Beaumont, Texas. The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Lauren Mason.

It was found and determined that in accordance with the policies and orders of the Board, the notice of the meeting was posted in accordance with the terms and provisions of Section 551.001 et. seq. of the Texas Government Code, and that all of the terms and provisions of Section 551.001 have been fully complied with and that the 72-hour notice required by said section has been properly and correctly given.

**CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

Present: Eugene Landry, Lauren Williams Mason, and Robert Thewman

Absent: None (*Dr Louis Reed, Jr. resigned October 7, 2023 and Allison Nathan Getz passed away on October 10, 2023.*)

**ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM**

Chairperson Mason declared a quorum present.

**CONSENT AGENDA ACTION ITEMS**

1. Approval of Minutes: September 12, 2023
2. Receive Taxpayer Liaison Officer Report

The TLO Report was submitted indicating that the Taxpayer Liaison Officer did not receive any communications or complaints from taxpayers for the period ending November 8, 2023.

Mr. Thewman moved and Mr. Landry seconded to approve the consent agenda items as submitted.

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman

Nays: None

**REGULAR AGENDA ACTION ITEMS**

3. Receive Chief Appraiser's Report

**HOLIDAYS**

The District office will be closed Thursday and Friday, November 23 and 24, 2023 for Thanksgiving; Friday – Tuesday, December 22 – 26, 2023 for Christmas; and Monday, January 1, 2024 for New Year's Day.

**HEALTH INSURANCE – 2024 RENEWAL**

The District HSA plan will increase 9.53 percent for 2024, and the PPO plan will increase 11.3 percent, with only one employee enrolled in the PPO. To ensure that the District is receiving the best rate for health insurance, the District's provider reviewed the plans of other carriers, but only one carrier responded. At this time, the HSA and PPO plans with BlueCrossBlueShield are the best plans for the District.

**LAWSUITS AND ARBITRATIONS UPDATE**

To date the District has received 245 lawsuits and 99 arbitrations for the 2023 tax year. This compares to 174 lawsuits and 87 arbitrations in 2022, 191 lawsuits and 75 arbitrations in 2021, and 83 lawsuits and 20 arbitrations in 2020.

**RETAINER CONTRACT FOR LEGAL SERVICES**

The Chief Appraiser stated that with the increase in the number of lawsuits, she feels that the retainer for legal services needs to be reviewed. In 2018, 61 lawsuits were filed, with an

increase to 68 lawsuits in 2019. In 2021 lawsuits filed increased to 185, and it was decided to assign some of the lawsuits to Lance Bradley, who had previously assisted in industrial litigation, and Frank Calvert. Legal expenses for all three attorneys in 2021 were \$372,000. In 2022 all pending litigation was assigned to Lancy Bradley after Mr. Hanna passed away, with total expenses in the amount of \$333,000. At the time of Mr. Hanna's death, his monthly retainer was \$19,000. When Mr. Bradley took over as the District's attorney, his monthly retainer was \$14,000, and his firm has been paid \$215,000 to date for 2023.

In 2023 all but one case has been assigned to Lance Bradley. Mrs. Bellard stated that she feels it would be fair to increase Mr. Bradley's monthly retainer to \$19,000, the same amount that was paid to Mr. Hanna in 2022 with less cases. Mrs. Mason stated that she was comfortable increasing the monthly retainer for Mr. Bradley to \$19,000.

Mr. Thewman stated that he is not in favor of having only one attorney. Mrs. Bellard responded that the firm of McCreary, Veselka, Bragg & Allen are assigned cases involving exemptions or special appraisal issues. Mr. Thewman stated he feels it would be advantageous to look into what other law firms would charge to handle the District's litigation. He suggested contacting Lance Fox, Pete Steele, and Lou Scofield for quotes on litigation services.

The Chief Appraiser will report back to the Board after reaching out to other firms.

#### TAAD CONFERENCE

The Annual TAAD Conference will be held February 18 – 21, 2024 at the Marriott Houston Marquis. Mrs. Bellard asked that any members wanting to attend the Conference let the District know as soon as possible.

#### SOAH HEARING

The State Office of Administrative Hearings (SOAH) hearing on Beaumont ISD's appeal of the State Comptroller's 2022 Property Value Study has been scheduled for December 12, 2023 in Austin.

#### CHIEF APPRAISER ACTIVITY REPORT

Mrs. Bellard submitted the Chief Appraiser's Activity Report for the period ending November 8, 2023 to the Board outlining the educational, District, and lawsuits/arbitrations activities of the Chief Appraiser and the District.

#### CHIEF APPRAISER TRAVEL

The Chief Appraiser will be out of the office Wednesday, November 29, 2023 to attend the TAAD Executive Board meeting in Austin; December 5 – 6, 2023 to attend the State Comptroller's Property Tax Institute in College Station; December 8, 2023 to attend the retirement party for Marya Crigler, Chief Appraiser of the Travis CAD in Austin; and December 12, 2023 to attend the SOAH appeal hearing for the PVS in Austin.

#### PERSONNEL

Mrs. Nicole Middleton was hired effective September 26, 2023 as an Exemption Specialist in the Information and Exemption Department. She operated her family-owned convenience store for many years, and she has a great personality that will help in serving the public.

#### CHRISTMAS PARTY

This year the District will host a Christmas party on December 13, 2023 from 4:00 pm to 5:30 pm for the children and grandchildren of the employees. Santa Claus will be in attendance for pictures with the kids.

#### ARB HEARING ROOM RENOVATIONS

The current Board of Director meeting room has been set up to accommodate for the expansion to nine members next July. The ARB will no longer meet in this room. The District currently has one room set up for ARB hearings; however, three separate meeting rooms to accommodate the three panels are needed. In the past the single-member panel hearings were held in the Chief Appraiser's conference room, which caused problems. The Chief Appraiser is redesigning the ARB hearing rooms to allow for separation from the employees and provide easy access by the public. The District currently has extra space in

both the Mapping/GIS and IT Departments. The employees in the IT Department will move into the Mapping/GIS Department, and the current office for the IT Department will be renovated to provide two ARB hearing rooms. One of these rooms will be smaller to accommodate the single-member panel. The current Board of Director meeting room will be the waiting room for the public.

The District requested proposals on the renovations. Only one company provided a quote, which was a little over \$20,000. This is a small job, and the District had trouble getting quotes.

Mr. Landry moved and Mr. Thewman seconded to receive the Chief Appraiser's Report as submitted.

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman

Nays: None

4. Discussion and Possible Approval of Appointments to Agricultural Advisory Board for 2024 – 2025 Term of Office

The Property Tax Code requires each appraisal district to appoint an Agricultural Advisory Board of at least three members. In November 2017, the Board of Directors increased the size of this Board to four members.

The Agricultural Advisory Board is appointed by the Chief Appraiser with the advice and consent of the Board of Directors to provide input on agricultural values within the District. Board members must own land in the District that qualifies for agriculture-use. The provision that members must have resided in the District for at least five years was removed in the 2023 Legislative session.

The terms of Charles Reneau and Josey Dishman will expire on December 31, 2023. Mrs. Bellard reappointed Mr. Reneau and Mr. Dishman for the 2024-2025 term. Mr. Reneau and Mr. Dishman will serve along with Jimmy Broussard and Billy Wayne Doornbos, whose terms will expire December 31, 2024.

Mr. Landry moved and Mrs. Mason seconded to approve the reappointments of Mr. Charles Reneau and Mr. Josey Dishman to the Agricultural Advisory Board for the 2024 - 2025 term of office.

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman

Nays: None

5. Discussion and Possible Approval of 2024 Work Calendar

Mr. Landry moved and Mr. Thewman seconded to approve the Work Calendar for 2024. The District office will be closed the following holidays, and employees will be granted vacation in accordance with the Personnel Policies based on years of service:

January 1, 2024: New Year's Day

January 15, 2024: MLK Day

March 29, 2024: Good Friday

May 27, 2024: Memorial Day

July 4, 2024: Fourth of July

September 2, 2024: Labor Day

November 28 and 29, 2024: Thanksgiving

December 24 - 26, 2024: Christmas

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman

Nays: None

6. Discussion and Possible Approval of Auditor for 2023 Fiscal Year

Board Policy requires the District to request proposals for the audit of the District's financial records once every four years. Once a firm is approved, the Board must award the contract on an annual basis. The firm of Mitchell T. Fontenote was approved by the Board to conduct the audit for a four-year period beginning with the 2022 fiscal year. The Chief Appraiser recommended awarding Mitchell T. Fontenote the contract for audit services for an additional year.

Mr. Thewman moved and Mr. Landry seconded to approve the firm of Mitchell T. Fontenote to conduct the audit of the District's financial records for the 2023 fiscal year at an estimated fee not to exceed \$17,000.

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman  
Nays: None

7. Discussion and Possible Adoption of Resolution #2023-14 Disposal of Obsolete Equipment

Mr. Landry moved and Mrs. Mason seconded to adopt Resolution #2023-14 authorizing the Chief Appraiser to remove the obsolete equipment as indicated below from the District's inventory listing and to dispose of the equipment in accordance with Section 4-9.05 of the Board Policy Manual.

The following equipment was declared obsolete:

Inventory #	Equipment
226	Etex 4 drawer legal file cabinet
258	Etex 4 drawer legal file cabinet
445	Etex 4 drawer legal file cabinet
454	Etex 4 drawer legal file cabinet
469	A/H 4 drawer legal file cabinet
474	Kodak 6 drawer film cabinet
475	Kodak 6 drawer film cabinet
493	Etex 4 drawer legal file cabinet
498	Mayline drafting table with cover
530	Stand-up station
588	4 drawer legal file cabinet
608	4 drawer legal file cabinet
628	4 drawer legal file cabinet
634	4 drawer legal file cabinet
682	4 drawer legal file cabinet
709	10 drawer microfilm cabinet
711	Hon 4 drawer legal file cabinet
720	Victor calculator 1560
935	Hon 2 drawer legal file cabinet
936	Hon 2 drawer legal file cabinet
1194	Media cabinet with door
1196	Sharp QS-2760A calculator
1296	Dell 17" ultrasharp monitor
1335	Dell 19" E196FP flat display
1455	Sharp QS2760H calculator

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman  
Nays: None

8. Discussion and Possible Adoption of Resolution #2023-15 Annual Review of Investment Policies

The Board reviewed the Investment Policy and the Statement of Investment Policy, Trustees of the Jefferson Central Appraisal District Retirement Plan and Trust and 401(k) Plan as required by Section 2256.005(e) of the Texas Government Code. There are not any changes being recommended to the Investment Policy. However, Wells Fargo, as the District's new retirement advisors, suggested that the Retirement Administrative Committee provide for new investment options for the retirement plans.

Mr. Thewman moved and Mr. Landry seconded to adopt Resolution #2023-15 stating that the Board has reviewed the District's Investment Policy with no revisions. Item 2 of the Statement of Investment Policy, Trustees of the Jefferson Central Appraisal District Retirement Plan and Trust (Money Purchase Pension Plan) and 401(k) Plan is revised in full to allow for new investment funds as recommended to the Retirement Administrative Committee by the Retirement Advisors.

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman  
Nays: None

9. Discussion and Possible Approval of Extension of Depository Contract with Stellar Bank for 2024-2025 Fiscal Years

Section 6.09(c) of the Texas Property Tax Code requires the Board of Directors to solicit bids for the bank depository for two-year periods. Once a depository contract is granted, the Board may agree to extend the contract for one additional two-year period. At the November 17, 2021 Board Meeting, the Board awarded a contract to Allegiance Bank (now Stellar Bank) as depository for the 2022 – 2023 fiscal years. Mrs. Diana Miller, Business Manager, recommended that the Board extend the depository contract with Stellar Bank for the 2024 - 2025 fiscal years.

Mr. Thewman moved and Mrs. Mason seconded to extend the bank depository contract with Stellar Bank for the 2024 - 2025 fiscal years.

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman

Nays: None

10. Discussion and Possible Adoption of Resolution #2023-16 Revising Board Policy Manual Sec. 1-04.02 Board of Directors, Meetings of the Board, Regular Meetings to Change Date of Meetings

Two of the incoming Board of Director members from the County are not available to meet at the current meeting date and time since there is a conflict with Commissioner's Court meetings. The Chief Appraiser is recommending that the Board change the date of the regular meetings.

Mr. Landry moved and Mr. Thewman seconded to adopt Resolution #2023-16 revising Sec. 1-04.02 of the Board Policy Manual, changing the date of the regular meetings of the Board of Directors from the third Tuesday of each month to the second Monday of each month. The time of the meetings will remain at 11:00 a.m.

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman

Nays: None

11. Discussion and Possible Approval of Financial Statements for August and September 2023

Mr. Landry moved and Mr. Thewman seconded to approve the financial statements for the month ending August 31, 2023, indicating expenses of \$420,256.27 and a fund balance of \$1,594,444.46; and for the month ending September 30, 2023, indicating expenses of \$463,541.22 and a fund balance of \$1,634,279.63.

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman

Nays: None

12. Discussion and Possible Authorization/Ratification of Expenditures from Equipment Replacement Fund

Mr. Thewman moved and Mr. Landry seconded to approve the correction to Purchase Approval #2023-12 as approved by the Board at the September 12, 2023. The Purchase Approval was for the replacement of 14 computers; however, only 12 inventory numbers were listed. The correction being submitted adds Inventory #1866 and #1867 to the list of inventory items to be replaced and disposed of.

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman

Nays: None

13. Receive Amendments to the 2023 and/or 2024 Budgets and Instruct the Secretary of the Board to Notify the Taxing Entities

There were no amendments to receive.

14. Discussion and Possible Adoption of Amendments to the 2023 and/or 2024 Budgets

There were no amendments to adopt.

## **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Chairperson Mason recessed the public (open) session at 1:29 p.m. after announcing to those present that the Board would go into executive (closed) session when it reconvened in accordance with Section 551.074 of the Texas Government Code to discuss personnel matters – Chief Appraiser’s contract.

The Board reconvened in public (open) session at 2:27 p.m. taking action as outlined below.

### **REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS (Continued)**

#### 15. Discussion and Possible Approval of Employment Contract with Chief Appraiser for Five-Year Period

Mr. Landry moved and Mr. Thewman seconded to change the term of the contract from five to three years and to approve the Chief Appraiser’s Employment Agreement with Mrs. Angela Bellard for an additional three-year period commencing March 9, 2024.

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman

Nays: None

#### 16. Discussion and Possible Approval of Cost-of-Living Salary Increase for District Employees for 2024

The District typically uses a weighted average of the cost-of-living salary increases granted by the County, cities, and school districts to determine the salary increase it will grant to its employees. However, some of the school districts are granting stipends instead of COLA increases, which make it difficult to determine an average percentage salary increase. Accordingly, the Chief Appraiser recommended leaving school districts out of the weighted average calculation since it would not be an accurate representation of the salary increases being granted. The Chief Appraiser informed the Board that the weighted average cost-of-living salary increase granted by the County and cities is 2.75%. The appraisal districts in the region are granting an average 4% salary increase or 4.6% increase based on prorated allocations. Member appraisal districts are granting an average 4.86% salary increase. The Chief Appraiser is recommending a one-time cost of living lump-sum payment for the 2024 fiscal year of \$2,500 per employee, with the exception of the Chief Appraiser, who will not receive any additional monies. The monies in the 2024 Salary Contingency Fund will cover the one-time payment.

Mr. Thewman moved and Mr. Landry seconded to grant a one-time cost of living lump-sum payment for the 2024 fiscal year of \$2,500 per employee, with the exception of the Chief Appraiser, who will not receive any additional monies.

Yeas: Landry, Mason, and Thewman

Nays: None

### **INFORMATION ITEMS**

#### 1. Set Date for Next Meeting

The next Board meeting was scheduled for Monday, January 8, 2024, at 11:00 a.m.

#### 2. 2023 Budget Transfers

None to present

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to conduct, the meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.