

RESUME OF MINUTES OF STUDY SESSION OF THE
COUNTY BOARD, CHAMPAIGN COUNTY, ILLINOIS
April 23, 2024

The County Board of Champaign County, Illinois met at a Study Session, Tuesday, April 23, 2024, at 6:02 PM in the Shields-Carter Meeting Room, Brookens Administrative Center, 1776 East Washington Street, Urbana, Illinois, with County Executive Steve Summers presiding and Matthew Cross as Clerk of the meeting.

ROLL CALL

Roll call showed the following members present: Greer, Locke, Lokshin, Owen, Peugh, Rodriguez, Rogers, Sexton, Smith, Stohr, Straub, Taylor, Thorsland, Vanichtheeranont, Wilson, Cowart, Farney, Fortado, and Carter – 19; absent: Hanauer-Friedman, Michaels, and Esry – 3. County Executive Summers declared a quorum present and the Board competent to conduct business. One member departed early: Thorsland at 8:16 PM, during the item VI. C. (Current Intent of County Board Members ...) discussion.

READ NOTICE OF MEETING

The Clerk read the Notice of the Meeting, said Notice having been published in the *News Gazette* on April 2, April 9, and April 16, 2024.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA/ADDENDA

Board Member Lokshin offered a motion to approve the Agenda; Board Member Sexton seconded. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Matthew Banach of Champaign spoke about the planned Scott Bennett Family Resource Day on Friday, August 23, 2024, at the Lincoln Square Mall in Urbana.

Elisabeth Pollock, County Public Defender, spoke in support of the Public Safety Sales Tax (PSST), noting the dire need for funding at the Public Defender's Office, which currently relies heavily on temporary grant funding.

COMMUNICATIONS

Board Member Lokshin read a statement from absent Board Member Hanauer-Friedman in support of the PSST.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

Board Member Fortado asked members to systematically, district-by-district present questions about the PSST and once all questions were raised, then the board would answer and address them. Director of Administration Michelle Jett recorded the questions raised. This was done to prevent duplication of questions.

Board Member Wilson (District 1) asked if the planned structural deficit of County Financial Forecast would be offset by the PSST.

Board Member Smith (District 1) asked if studies being done would mitigate expenses to optimize the income.

Board Member Sexton (District 2) asked about cost-savings measures to implement in lieu of the PSST, and he asked about the future of the Brookens Administrative Center and the Downtown Jail facility.

Board Member Farney (District 3) asked for a salary study before placing the PSST question on the ballot, and he asked if departments were being instructed to plan two budgets, accounting for both the success and failure of the PSST ballot measure.

Board Member Lokshin (District 4) asked if there was a specific place to direct constituent questions on the PSST.

Board Member Greer (District 6) stated that her constituents were not supportive of the PSST.

Board Chair Carter (District 6) asked when the current PSST is set to expire and when, if approved, the new PSST would begin. She also stated that her constituents were not supportive of the PSST, noting that Illinois has the seventh highest sales tax rate in the United States.

Board Member Locke (District 9) asked about the circumstances of the success and failure of past PSST ballot measures.

Board Member Straub (District 9) asked if the county had a plan in the event the PSST ballot measure fails.

Board Member Vanichtheeranont (District 5) asked how a failure of the PSST ballot measure would affect county services.

Board Member Taylor (District 5) asked about the balances of the PSST and General funds, using PSST funds to pay bonds, and, in the event it fails, when would budget cuts start.

Board Member Owen (District 7) asked how the PSST would impact various demographics in the county, noting that sales taxes are especially regressive. He also asked how the fund might address concerns raised by the Racial Justice Task Force.

Board Member Thorsland (District 7) asked about the language of the PSST ballot measure.

Board Member Fortado (District 8) had no questions.

Board Member Rodriguez (District 8) asked who would be promoting the PSST ballot measure and if the county had a budget for that.

Board Member Stohr (District 10) stated he would like more time to consider the issue.

Board Member Rogers (District 10) asked if budget cuts could be used to make up the budget shortfalls to avoid the PSST increase, and she asked if the measure must be placed on the 2024 General Election ballot.

Board Member Peugh (District 11) asked if there will be specific line items to fund from the PSST, and he added that his constituents do not want funds to go to the Sheriff's Office.

Board Member Cowart (District 11) asked about guaranteed funding targets from the PSST, especially for the Public Defender's Office, and she also requested a historical review of past PSST ballot measure efforts.

Board Member Fortado and Director Jett next went through the compiled questions raised by the members.

Is the Planned Structural Deficit offset by PSST funds?

Board Member Fortado stated that it is not a question of General Funds versus PSST Funds, but that they work in tandem to address county deficits, but since the implementation of the Property Tax Extension Law Limit (PTELL) the deficit cannot be fully mitigated. Board Members Wilson and Fortado then discussed various, funding minutia.

Are there studies to ensure expenses are mitigated before optimizing income?

Director Jett stated that the expenses are reflected in the County Budget and the Salary Schedules, but the formal studies are limited to large expenses.

Can the PSST increase be avoided by cost reductions?

Board Member Fortado discussed significant and detrimental reductions in the post-PTELL recent past, specifically noting the Great Recession of 2007-2009 and the COVID-19 pandemic prior to the American Recovery Plan Act of 2021, noting that most departments were reduced to skeleton crews, and some have not recovered. Board Member Stohr spoke about the old, very outdated technologies still in use by the county as a cost-savings measure. Board Member Lokshin noted that many departments use grant funding to address budgetary shortfalls. Board Member Farney noted that many of the staffing cuts implemented in the Great Recession have remained in place. Board Member Fortado noted the incredible, fiscally conservative work of former County Finance Director Tami Ogden that kept the county fiscally viable through those times.

What is the future of the Brookens Administrative Building and the Downtown Jail? And, will costs be offset by removing those properties from the county possessions?

Board Member Lokshin noted that this question has not yet been addressed by the Facilities Committee. County Executive Summers stated that the county has communicated with multiple entities about Brookens, with two strongly interested, but if those were to fall through, the county will sell the property on the open market, and he stated the Downtown Jail is still in use, but the board will have to decide what to do with the property once the jail is closed. He added that Brookens is the focus for now, but it has leases through 2026. Board Member Fortado stated that the Downtown Jail is planned for demolition in 2026.

When will the Compensation Study be completed?

Director Jett stated that the study will be completed this summer, but they can use past studies to guide initial work.

Will the departments be instructed to plan two budgets, one with increased PSST funds and one without?

Director Jett confirmed and stated they have already communicated that with department heads.

Where can constituent find more information?

Director Jett stated she will email links to the board members.

When is the end date of the current PSST, and when would the new PSST begin?

Director Jett stated that the current PSST will not end but the proposed PSST will be an increase on the existing PSST.

What circumstances lead to success and failures of past PSST ballot measures?

Board Member Fortado stated the how and whys of success and failure, adding that success will hinge upon public buy-in, from education and advocacy.

Will the department heads be the face of the promotion of the PSST?

Board Member Jett stated that had not yet been determined. Board Member Fortado emphatically that department heads need to be at the forefront of educating the public on the need, noting the department heads present at the meeting.

What is the plan if the PSST ballot measure does not pass?

Director Jett stated that the board will have to decide how to proceed, and how, when, and how much personnel cuts will be necessary. Board Member Fortado added that the county must have increased revenue or drastic cuts, including personnel, will be required. Board Member Lokshin asked about increases to employee health care cost; Director Jett stated that this year was a 20% increase, and the county currently budgets approximately \$3 million per year for the county's contribution. County Executive Summers stated that the county expects future health care to be both more expensive and have less coverage.

How would failure of the PSST ballot measure impact county services?

Director Jett stated that personnel cuts will have a dramatic effect on the quality and quantity of county services.

How do the PSST Fund and the General Fund balances work?

Director Jett stated that the PSST is a supplement to the General Fund. Board Member Fortado added that the PSST Fund is statutorily required to have \$4.2 million, and that the current PSST Fund surplus is in anticipation of large expenses due in the near future.

How does the PSST effect bond repayments?

Director Jett stated the PSST Funds can be used on some bond repayments and the county currently has three bonds set to be repaid in 2039.

What cuts will the County need to make in the event of PSST ballot measure failure and how drastic will they be?

Director Jett stated that will be at the Board's discretion of when and how much.

How much will the PSST cost a person?

Director Jett stated the current rate is \$2.50 per \$1,000 and the passage of the new rate will raise it to \$5.00 per \$1,000, adding that groceries and prescription medication, among others, will be exempted.

Which goals of the Racial Justice Task Force report will be addressed through the PSST funds?

Board Member Fortado stated that current funding for Racial Justice Task Force initiative is very limited and hopefully the PSST passage will improve that.

Can the proposed PSST ballot measure language be altered?

Director Jett stated that most of the text is mandated by state statute, but it might be possible to have a statement explaining the need and function. Various members discussed text specifics. Board Member Thorsland requested the text be as short and clear as possible.

Who will be responsible to promote, and will there be budget to do so?

Board Member Fortado hoped that all board members will support and promote passage of the ballot measure, but she added that the County cannot explicitly promote the measure but can have an education campaign. Director Jett stated the county has approximately \$40,000 that could be spent on education for the PSST ballot measure.

What are the short-term and long-term uses for the additional revenue?

Director Jett stated that the board will need to establish a budget and plan ordinances.

Can cuts make up the expected budgetary shortfall?

Director Jett and County Executive Summers both stated that personnel cuts are possible but would be significant and would have a detrimental effect on the county and the public services it provides.

Can the ballot measure be delayed?

Director Jett stated that the August 19 County Board Meeting is the last opportunity to pass a resolution placing the PSST question on the 2024 General Election ballot. Board Member Fortado stated that the measure can be on any ballot, but question must work in tandem with the department budget planning process. Director Jett added that the County is set to begin AFSME contract negotiations this summer.

Where will the PSST funds be directed?

Director Jett stated that is at the Board's discretion, but she suggested robust listening sessions with constituents. Board Member Peugh asked if there will be specific items funded from the PSST Fund; Board Member Fortado replied that some one-time expenses are dedicated, but most will be recurring expenses. Board Member Peugh requested a specific list of where the PSST funds will be spent; Director Jett promised to provide a spreadsheet to board members.

Can funds be specifically directed to the Public Defender's Office?

Director Jett stated she was unsure if the PSST funds can directly be used for the Public Defender. Board Member Fortado clarified that the PSST funds would relieve pressure from the General Fund to increase funding in non-PSST items. Board Member Cowart asked for a list of what PSST can and cannot be used; Director Jett replied that she will have the State's Attorney's Office review that and provide the information to board members.

Will there be a historical review of past PSST efforts?

Board Member Fortado enthusiastically volunteered to conduct the study.

Board Members then stated their intent of PSST support.

Board Members fully supportive: Rogers, Rodriguez, Fortado, Thorsland, Taylor, Vanichtheeranont, Straub, Locke, Lokshin, Farney, Sexton, and Smith – 12

Board Members tentatively supportive, but requested more information: Cowart, Stohr, Owen, and Greer – 4

Board Members undecided and requested more information: Peugh and Wilson – 2

Board Members opposed: Carter – 1

With the majority of the board supportive of placing the PSST measure on the ballot, County Executive Summers stated he will begin to direct planning. He also noted that Champaign County is a shopping hub for the region, and as such, the PSST would also be paid by non-County residents.

OTHER BUSINESS

Board Member Stohr noted that April 24, 2024, is Administrative Professionals Day.

ADJOURNMENT

County Executive Summers adjourned the meeting at 8:41 PM.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aaron Ammons". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Aaron Ammons, Champaign County Clerk
and ex-Officio Clerk of the Champaign County Board
Champaign County, Illinois