

Features



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Bloomfield, MO - The Stoddard County Commissioners met on Monday, August 30, 2021. Associate Commissioner Carol Jarrell expressed her concern over the notification of an ongoing audit of the Stoddard County finances. The audit has been ongoing for a few weeks and she was not aware of the details.

"Someone mentioned the audit to me, and I actually looked like a deer in the brightest of headlights," stated Jarrell. "My replay was, well I don't know anything about an audit. I haven't been told about the audit. It seems everybody in this building knew about it. I'm hurt. I'm upset!"

Associate commissioner Steve Jordan told Jarrell that the commissioners had discussed the audit.

"No, not in here (referring to the Commission chambers), we had not discussed it," Jarrell said. "Nothing had been discussed about an audit."

This is true as both local press reporters have attended every meeting of the Stoddard County Commissioners and nothing has been noted about a Stoddard County audit.

Steve Jordan, Commissioner, said she might not have been present for that meeting, but if that was the case then the reporters would have put that information in their newspaper.

"I mean, this has really bothered me that an audit is being done," Jarrell said. "Everybody knows about it, but I wasn't included in on any kind of conversation."

“I had asked Danny a couple of months ago about the audit from (state auditor) Nicole Galloway,” she said. “I asked had you heard anything about it? And you told me no you hadn’t. That hadn’t been discussed. But nothing was said to me about an audit going on.”

Talkington said the audit has been going on for about six weeks and is expected to be concluded by mid-September.

The State of Missouri auditor's office requested information regarding the recent distribution of the CARES Act.

Jarrell obtained a list of CARES Act items requested by the state. She questioned some of the requests.

“I want to get the copy of their requests, and I want to look at the vouchers that were sent,” Jarrell said. “There are things on this list that (say) reimbursement. Who was it a reimbursement to? There’s one COVID expense for more for \$32,612. Well, I look back through the copy that (former county collector/treasurer) Carla Moore gave me at the first of the year. And I guess that was a sheriff’s (expense). Another one on here is COVID. But there’s no name.”

Talkington said he was unaware of what was on the list.

Jarrell expressed a concern that she has been left out of the loop in other instances. Meetings are being held prior to or after commissioner meetings between Talkington, Jordan, and Weeks.

“I’m assuming not accusing, but I’m assuming that there (are) things being discussed back there (referring to the Clerk's office area),” she said of pre-meeting get-togethers among county officials. “And I’m not aware of it and this has happened a few times when things have been done, and I wasn’t told about it. And you as a Presiding Commissioner should keep us informed. Steve, you knew so I’m the odd one out that didn’t know.”

In other business during the meeting, Stoddard County Emergency Management Agency Director Andrew Bohnert discussed upgrades to the county's tornado siren system.

He wanted permission from the commissioners to apply for an Emergency Management Performance Grant for the upgrade.

“I would like to do it in a three-tier process,” Bohnert said. “Our No. 1 priority would be to change how our siren system is activated. This new system isn’t like the push-button consoles. It will be computer-based, (featuring) automatic triggering.”

Bohnert said as long as the internet is operational, the sirens will be activated when the National Weather Service issues a tornado warning; however if the internet is down it will not work, you will have to hit the buttons on the screen.

Bohnert said he would like to divide the county into three zones, such as northern, central and southern zones.

“Right now it takes 3 minutes to set (the sirens) off,” Bohnert said. “So if you have to do Puxico and Dudley at the same time, you have to do one and wait 3 minutes while that siren goes through and do the second one, or you do the whole county at the same time.”

The second part of Bohnert's plan would be to establish a backup system to operate the sirens from a separate location.

“Right now, if the building goes down at Dexter, there’s no backup option,” said Bohnert, who received approval from Sheriff Carl Hefner to locate the backup system at the sheriff’s office. “If we get the system put in down there, we would take a different control box, put it up here and have everything set up in case the (Dexter) building goes down, we can still set them off from up here.”

Bohnert said he would like the Bloomfield location to work as a backup for the siren systems at Bernie and Dexter. Those cities are responsible for setting off their own sirens.

“I’ve talked to both of them to see if we can do a backup for them and they were not interested at all,” Bohnert said. “So I’m going to talk to their city boards and convince them that you guys need a backup.”

Bohnert said the automatic trigger software will cost approximate \$13,000, and the grant would cover 75% of the cost. He is awaiting on an estimate for the backup system, but believes the cost will be less than \$5,000 to the county.

Bohnert said he would like the county to add new sirens to the current system in the future as well. He said the larger omnidirectional sirens cost about \$28,000 per unit, including installation. These sirens have a range of only 7,100 feet. The smaller sirens cost about \$20,000 per unit.

Bohnert also told the commissioners he is beginning to track time and expenses for his COVID-19 duties each week.

“Last week alone, I had 21 1/4 hours, which is equal to \$765 (which is) eligible for FEMA reimbursement,” Bohnert said. “I guess I’ll start tracking that every single week, every single month moving forward and submit it for FEMA reimbursement.”

He asked the commissioners whether they had decided to use American Rescue Plans (ARP) funds to purchase the Salamander software, which is used to streamline the process of tracking personnel and equipment during a natural disaster.

Presiding commissioner Danny Talkington said the county would pay for the software through the EMA budget but would not use ARP funds for it. As of this meeting this has not been voted on by the Commissioners in an official meeting. It has not been on any agenda either. The cost is \$6,880 with an annual maintenance cost of \$750.

Bohnert said he has changed the personal protective equipment warehouse procedure to unify and consolidate the approach. All requests made in the county will go through Bohnert.

“I’m already getting requests for PPE for masks and sanitizer and things like of that nature, passing those out and still tracking items,” Bohnert said.

He told the commissioners he was planning to go to Jefferson City on Tuesday to pick up some gloves and half-face respirators. He said the state is currently offering free PPE.

Bohnert also told the commissioners he plans to hold weekly or bi-weekly informational meetings concerning COVID-19 with executive level personnel from the health department, ambulance district and hospital and the commissioners.

“We’re going to have some information sharing ... with what we do as far as approaches and planning,” Bohnert said.

Talkington asked what information would be discussed at the meeting.

“I have insight into what the state is doing,” Bohnert said. “They’re going to share information about current conditions they are seeing. (We can) tell the ambulance district what’s going on so they are ready for it. The health department has information about the Delta variant and how it’s spreading. (The hospital can share what it is experiencing.) We can combine our knowledge to do any mitigation

measures for anything we need to do for public outreach.”

This article:

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