



**JASPER COUNTY COUNCIL, CITY OF HARDEEVILLE AND THE
TOWN OF RIDGELAND**

**JOINT WORKSHOP
AND EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Location: Hardeeville Recreation Center
258 John Smith Rd., Hardeeville, SC. 29927

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

MINUTES

Officials Present: Chairman John Kemp, Vice Chairman Joey Rowell, Councilman Joseph Arzillo, Councilman Chris VanGeison and Councilman Gene Ceccarelli. Council Members from the City of Hardeeville, and the Town of Ridgeland.

Staff Present: County Administrator Andrew Fulghum, and County Staff, Hardeeville City Manager Josh Gruber, Hardeeville City Attorney Prina Maines, City of Hardeeville Staff, Town of Ridgeland Town Manager Dennis Averkin and Town of Ridgeland Staff, and Videographers.

1. Call the Joint Meeting to order:

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Harry Williams of the City of Hardeeville. He noted that this was a joint workshop between the Jasper County Council, City of Hardeeville Council and the Town of Ridgeland Council for a Joint Workshop.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act the electronic and print media were notified. During periods of review, discussion and/or presentations minutes are typically condensed and paraphrased. The recorded version is available online at: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBmloqX05cKAsHm_ggXCJIA. Closed captions are also available for all of our County Council videos.

• Discussion of Shared Emergency Services:

The workshop was convened to discuss the more efficient use of emergency services across the three jurisdictions. Key factors driving this conversation included:

- Population Growth of Jasper County, City of Hardeeville and the Town of Ridgeland.
- Increased Call Volume noting that the population had led to a corresponding increase in emergency calls, with the cost of providing these services expected to continue rising.

- A primary goal is to stop "overlapping" services, as an example one jurisdiction's vehicle riding past another jurisdiction's station to reach a call.

Fire Service Areas:

The proposed solution involved creating Fire Service Areas based on geography rather than property ownership or municipal boundaries.

- The operational structure would be one organization would be responsible for all calls within a defined boundary.
- Each service area would have its own adopted budget, funded by a specific millage paid by all residents within that geography.
- The transition would involve no reduction in work force and would be supported by a countywide agreement.

Chief Wells presented data from 2022–2024 showing that medical calls (EMS) are the overwhelming majority of the service volume. He also discussed response times and noted that fire trucks respond to medical calls because personnel are cross-trained as EMTs or paramedics, often arriving faster to stabilize patients before an ambulance arrives.

Council Member Perspectives:

The Town of Ridgeland emphasized the importance of their ISO rating and raised questions regarding the custody of funds and financial reporting.

The City of Hardeeville presented maps showing "donut holes" which were the unincorporated county areas surrounded by the city, that they could easily service with existing stations. This they noted would allow the county to reposition its units to underserved rural areas.

Jasper County acknowledged the need to establish a separate rural fire district to comply with the State Constitution regarding debt service for fire stations.

There was debate regarding the hiring of a third-party consultant. Proponents argued for the need for neutral data analysis and specialized financial and operational expertise; while others questioned the cost and whether existing staff could provide the same insights.

In regard to Technology, the need for Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) and upgrades to the CAD (Computer-Aided Dispatch) system were discussed to ensure the closest unit is always dispatched regardless of jurisdiction.

After some further discussion, the participants reached a consensus on the following actions:

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- Staff will share the proposed service area maps (for Jasper County, Ridgeland, and Hardeeville) with all elected bodies.
- Administrators would prepare a report on what a consultant would cost and specifically what they would be tasked to do.
- Staff would look for immediate dispatch and protocol changes that can increase efficiency without waiting for the full plan.
- They would strive to meeting again in mid-January to review these deliverables, with the goal of having a plan ready for the next budget cycle starting in the summer.

Mayor Williams asked for any public comment, but there were none.

For more information on this meeting please go to our YouTube Channel for the video. During meetings and / or workshops periods of review, discussion, presentation, comments, and other sections the minutes are typically condensed and paraphrased. The recorded version is available online at our YouTube Channel video at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBmloqX05cKAsHm_ggXCJIA.

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The Joint Workshop was adjourned by unanimous agreement. There was no Executive Session after this Joint Workshop, so the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:


Wanda H. Giles
Clerk to Council


W.J. Rowell III
Chairman

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