

## City bumps taxi fares, accepts bid for property

Jacksonville Daily Progress

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Published: March 11, 2009 09:35 pm

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Jacksonville City Council voted unanimously Tuesday evening to increase the city's taxi fares.

The council took that action in the hope the higher fares will allow Jacksonville Taxi Service — the business that received a permit last month, but has yet to start operations — to get rolling.

A survey sent by the city to Tyler, Longview and Nacogdoches indicated Jacksonville's taxi fares were comparatively low.

Ordinance 1353 increased the city's initial taxi fare from \$2 to \$3, increased the charge per mile from \$1.65 to \$2, increased the charge per extra person from \$1 to \$1.50, reduced its liability and casualty rates from \$500,000 to \$200,000 and instituted a new fuel surcharge allowing JTS to increase its fare by 50 cents per mile when the price of gas exceeds \$3 per gallon.

"I wish this could have been addressed prior to the initial approval of the permit; it kind of looks bad to one month grant the issuing of the license and then the next month increase the fares," said Council member Kenneth Melvin. "But I think this is a needed service in our community, so I am going to make a motion that we approve the ordinance to increase our fares."

Samantha Pitcock, owner of JTS, was not present at the meeting.

City Council also heard from Barry Hughes, Cherokee County's representative on the North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority, who presented information on five transportation projects being considered in the county at this time and asked the council to rank those projects in order of importance.

Hughes made a similar presentation last month before Cherokee County Commissioners Court. The five projects under consideration are — the widening of U.S. Highway 69, south of Wells; a roadway to the west of Jacksonville to provide Highway 69 relief around town; a rail spur at the Jacksonville Industrial Park; an expansion of 10.72 miles of U.S. Highway 175; and the widening of U.S. Highway 79 between Jacksonville and New Summerfield.

"Once you decide which of these projects are most important to the city, I will carry your wishes to NETRMA's budget and long range planning workshops where they will be used to determine where projects get ranked for funding," Hughes said.

According to Hughes, he would like the city to finalize its transportation priorities by next month's meeting. The county has been asked to have its choices made by March 23.

Action was also taken to approve a bid of \$60,000 by Stine and Stine Associates for the purchase of property at 507 Frankston Highway, left vacant when the city consolidated the entire public works department inside the Felix Lane Sr. Public

Works Building. The value of the property was appraised at \$92,500 in September 2008.

"According to the appraiser, the buildings on that property are in bad shape, and if we keep it, we won't be able to let it get anymore rundown without needing to spend some money to repair it," Melvin said. "We already know we are going to be saving \$450 or so a month in utilities, so I say if we can get it back on the tax rolls, then it is a plus."

City Council agreed to sell the property with the stipulation the city retain ownership for 90 days while city employees work to clear it out.

Bids had also been sought for the sale of property at 309 Commerce St., but the only bid that property received — for \$57 — was immediately denied by the City Council.

"After the bidding period for 309 Commerce closed we had a couple of people express some interest in buying it, so we are going to reopen the bids as soon as possible and go through the same process again," said City Manager Mo Raissi.

Numerous community members addressed the council during the citizens' participation portion of the meeting. Cynthia Klein invited all in attendance to be a part of Relay For Life on April 24; Nancy Washburn told the council about the activities of National Library Week, starting April 13; Marie Johnson complained about an experience she had with the city's rotating wrecker service; and Paul Travis presented the council with an analysis of the city's January fuel bill.

Because the city of Jacksonville will not be required to hold municipal elections in May, an agenda item to approve the election judge was tabled indefinitely.

Prior to the meeting, Donna Perry was awarded a 15-year pin for her service to the city's utilities department.

In other business the council approved:

- the minutes from previous meetings;
- changing the name of Coleman Avenue to H.V. Jones Street;
- changing the name of Park Drive to M.B. Davis Street;
- abandoning an undeveloped portion of Stevens Street;
- Don Kirkpatrick to lease an additional piece of property in order to allow for the installation of an aerobic sewer system;
- George Griffin to serve on the Jacksonville Planning and Zoning Commission; and
- a service contract with NETPLEA to collect delinquent fines, fees and court costs for the municipal court.

The Jacksonville City Council regularly meets at 6 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month, at the Norman Activity Center. All meetings of the Jacksonville City Council are open to the public.