

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
November 17, 2025

The Finance Committee of the St. Clair County Board met on November 17, 2025 in the County Board Conference Room. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Marty Crawford at 6:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Marty Crawford, Chairman
Lonnie Mosley, Asst. Chairman
John Coers
Steve Gomric
Sue Gruberman
Jana Moll
C. Richard Vernier

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT:

Mark Kern, Chairman, County Board
Debra Moore, Director of Administration
Robert Allen, County Board
G.W. Scott, Jr., County Board
Robert Trentman, County Board
Phil Henning, County Board
John Lawson, Superintendent, Veterans Assistance Dept.
Terrence Williams, Veterans Assistance Dept.
Alison Moon, Veterans Assistance Dept.
Jackie Krummrich, Chief Deputy, Auditor's Office
Monica McMurphy, County Administration
Sami Gruberman, County Board Office
Kara Hearne, County Board Office
Lexi Cortes, Belleville News Democrat

Jim Page, VAC President
Ron Milton, VAC 1st Vice President
Robert Rosner, VAC Treasurer
Steve Eller, VAC 1st Yr. Executive Board Member
Euphamea Wagoner, VAC 2nd Yr. Executive Board Member
Carina Wagoner, Citizen
Dave Self, Citizen
Andrew Dunham, Citizen
Karen Farria, Citizen
Kevin Bleisol, Citizen
Tracy Schenewerle, Citizen
Linda Schramm, Citizen
Monica Gard, Citizen
Michael Shearon, Citizen
Lachelle Stevenson, Citizen

Don Pierre, Citizen
Larry Harrison, Citizen
Vanissa McCollies, Citizen
Maurice Bridges, Citizen
John Mueller, Citizen
Alan Shields, Citizen
Patti Shields, Citizen
Rodney Buhr, Citizen
Geric Tipswond, Citizen
Matt Kasten, Citizen
Eva Henry, Citizen
Kelly Willis, Citizen
John Rosenbaum, Citizen
Richard Blanchet, Citizen
Amanda Depew, Citizen
Craig Nunnally, Citizen
April Tarbill, Citizen
Kenneth Savchuk, Citizen

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Roll call was taken.

Public comments or questions asked at this Meeting:

John Lawson, VAC Superintendent:

Take a look around the room at the representative of the 25,000 plus veteran. These are the post commanders, state level leaders, and your advocates. I'd like to speak a little be the effect of not fully funding the VAC at the Statutory minimum equal to the 0.02% of the last known EAV in accordance with the Military Veterans Assistance Act otherwise known as the MVAA. The first consequence is an increased delay in accessing their earned benefits. Currently, the staff of the VAC works diligently to ensure veterans are seen within two weeks of contact. Our staff of six is not nearly adequate enough to service 25,000 veterans and an unknown number of surviving spouses of St. Clair County. A failure to fully fund the VAC will force the development of a waitlist for services without the critical ask over additional staff noted in our request. Increased access to the free VA accredited officer of the VAC also protects your constituents from predatory unaccredited claim sharks who seek to illegally grip compensation benefits from veterans for services that they are not authorized to perform by law. As promised in our annual operation summary our total is accumulative awards of cash compensation and ancillary benefits recovered for veterans and surviving spouses has continued to increase to over \$7.2M in FY25 to date. The second consequence is a reduction in temporary financial assistance and delivery. The purpose reduction will necessitate a service line reduction for this important business line. This program has been a lifeline to our most vulnerable veterans to provide near immediate access to healthy fresh food, nearly eliminated the sometime unfermentable burden of utilities. The mortgage assistant program has prevented the

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foreclosure on several homes accorded to land of Lincoln legal aid. Saving these homes not only keeps veterans and their families housed by also preserves property values by not having vacant and nuisance properties in your district. Some may say that we are burning through our budget, however, the VAC is executing its budget and putting taxpayers money exactly where it was designed to go to support veterans in need. To date usage of our financial assistant program by district: Mr. Mosley Jr. \$6,300, Mr. Hollingsworth \$1,300, Mr. Lonnie Mosley \$4,400, Mr. Crawford \$3,400, Mr. Moore \$21,000, Mr. Gomric \$7,600, Mr. Easterley \$34,000, Mr. Greenwald \$540, Mr. Sharkey \$8,700, Mr. Vernier \$13,000, Mr. Reed \$6,900, Mr. Trentman \$13,000, Mr. Dinges \$15,000, Mr. Baricevic \$11,000, Mr. Tieman \$10,000, Mr. Cockrell \$1,700, Ms. Gruberman \$514, Mr. Dawson \$2,100, and Mr. Meile \$5,200. Totaling \$172,365 in assistance delivered to veterans in county districts to date alone. Lastly, the unnecessary legal expenditures. Fully funding the VAC is not only the right thing to do for St. Clair County, but it is the law. Failure to fully fund the VAC will trigger unnecessary legal action as directed in the MVAA when a County fails to minimally fund the VAC according to the statute. The VAC is directed to pressure a written mandamus in the courts, which will be paid for by the taxpayers twice. Once to pay for the County's counsel and once to pay for ours. This represents a terrible waste of important time and resources that could be directed elsewhere here in the county. The programs and benefits administered by the VAC are codified under law, as well as the requirement for the County to fully fund the VAC to perform these functions. We consider the failure to fully fund the VAC under law a violation of the sacred contract members of the Armed Forces signed upon their entry into service in exchange for certain freedoms and the relative safety lead by the citizens of our nations at home we were promised to be "initialed to receive pay, allowances, and other benefits as provided by law and regulation" this guarantee by the government of the United States is binding at all levels of government that are across this nation demanding that elected representatives from the halls of congress to this very County not merely thank us for service, but honor the contract. The VAC welcomes and aspires a non-adversarial relationship with St. Clair County meeting the just and necessary needs of our veterans often intersect with the Act component of the United State Armed Forces. These needs are enduring and adequately meet with one off and coordinated effectors. This County and its elected officials must understand it's one real truth, every single member of the Armed Forces, just assures the sun sets every single day, will in fact become a veteran. Under funding of the VAC that ensures access to their benefits and constant reference to lost revenue for exercising their earned benefit associated with taxes exemption after returning from one of the most toxic battle fields in modern history, mind you only one-tenth of your EAV will heist in their departure from our County. While the label of disabled veteran is not the badge of honor we sought. It also shouldn't be the scarlet letter of shame branded on us by members of this government and employees of the county government. I do not ask you to fully understand the physical and mental health needs which we face. I do ask that you to reframe from discouraging despair of the veterans who utilize their earned benefit to continue to suffer physical and mental effects from war. Freedom never was and never will be free. St. Clair County's uniquely situated to become the standard bare for how we treat veterans and better survive them after service. Collectively we have the resources, talent, and support of a united veterans front, however we cannot move forward together with a VAC that is not fully funded. The VAC is entitled to full funding under law in a budget determined by the delegates of the VAC to meet the just and necessarily need to care for veterans, surviving spouses, and dependent children of the Veterans of St. Clair County has been properly submitted. The veterans and citizens for St. Clair County expect that budget to be filled.

Jim Page, VAC President:

I am the Commander of the Woodford Post 2017 Allegiant in Swansea. Our Superintendent submitted our proposed budget of 2026, and we were informed the County would not be fully funding our commission. Our funding would be about \$203,000 less than requested. This reduction will have a negative impact on our mission of helping veterans in need. Here are some examples, VA claims are filled with an accredited veteran's service officer. These claims have increased this year, so without a staffing increase we will not be able to meet the needs of our veterans in filling these claims for themselves, spouses, or dependents. These approved claims have brought over \$7M into this county this year. Financial aid: you're aware that food and utility costs have increased in the last couple of years. This increase has impacted all citizens of this great nation, veterans included. The VAC has met this hardship head on and in his tenure as superintendent, John Lawson has been able to increase monthly financial aid by over 300% to our needy veterans. This increase demonstrates that its citizens need help. Without full funding we may not be able to help those in need. This past spring there was a

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major increase in utility assistance with an Ameren cost increase, cold weather, and past due account that created the perfect storm, these bills came due in the spring. While we cannot predict the future, we have no reason to believe it will be different this spring. Those needing assistance can get assistance from the VAC. Funding is tight for everybody including St. Clair County, but we are asking you to fully fund our budget as submitted. The VAC continues to work and meet the needs of our veterans. We are not asking you for a handout, we are asking for a hand up to those men and women who have honored the contract. As you can see around the room there are veterans here tonight because this is important to them that we help our brothers and sisters. The VAC veterans service organization that calls St. Clair County its' home and their delegates ask you to fully fund the budget as submitted.

Geric Tipsword Sr. Vice Commander of the Belleville VFW:

We all sit here, and we are all many things. I am a father, soldier, combat veteran, grandfather, lawyer, former teacher, and there is probably a whole list of other things that are in this room. So, we stand here today as a united group not asking for funding but asking that the County follow the law that exists. The law is very clear of what percentage the VAC should be funded and to suggest anything lower than what the state law provides is an embarrassment. It's shameful because everybody that sits here representing a group of individuals who have survived our country and others that have fought for their country and those who have not come back ask, we serve their widows and children. It would be absolutely shameful to think that the county would put funding anywhere else before they would fund the Veterans Assistance Center.

Linda Schramm of Smithton:

My husband Lary was a Vietnam Era vet. He was injured while he was in basic training and suffered the ramifications of that his entire life. This is my niece, Tracy Schenewerle, and her husband was an Army veteran during Dessert Storm and passed away this June. He was 54 years old and if it wasn't for the help of John, Tracy wouldn't know if she could make things financially. She was a recipient of dependent income benefits that were desperately needed. At 54 years old Brian was 15 years from retirement. He and Tracy were not prepared to live on her income alone; they had never done that. Brian thanks to John was deemed 100% disabled shortly before he died. I went to see her when he died, and I could tell you there was desperation on her face, and I could tell you why since I went through the same thing. My husband passed away, and his biggest fear was I wouldn't be able to take care of myself financially when he was gone. I think it's the thing that kept him alive a lot longer. He was 90% disable so thank to John, he took Tracy under his wing and now she is the recipient of those benefits, and I know this is a big relief off her shoulders. John is currently trying to help me get those dependent benefits. I suppose I could live without them, but I want them desperately for my husband who suffered a lot in his lifetime. My kids never knew their dad when he was healthy, it was one thing after the other. With John's help I'm hoping I can get that and make life easier for me. When a dependent or a vet wants to apply for benefits and they need help they have to go through the local state appointed Veterans Assistance. Why don't you fund it the way it's supposed to be funded?

Tracy Schenewerle:

I would not have been able to stay in our home if I didn't have the veteran's assistance. We built our home together as somewhere we were going to stay. I couldn't afford it on my own.

John Mueller:

Past Commander for Catholic War Veterans just south of Bel-Air. I'm a retired marine and I have two sons who are marines. My dad was the first post commander after WWII. I think of all the people the County helps, and I though there are a lot of budget cuts you have to figure out, but St. Clair County has had a long history of helping veterans. I've heard a lot of stories throughout my life, and the VAC had been one of the great ones. We just recently got engaged and we just became cross accredited with them. We had an elderly woman whose husband was a Vietnam veteran who passed away five years ago, and he did not have a head stone. I found out about the VAC and engaged her with one of John's flocks and she now has a headstone for him. It would be a shame if you do not fully fund the VAC because all these stories are legitimate and probably ever person in here could tell a story.

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Doug Stewart: VAC Attorney

When we talk about the money that these guys arrange, we give a lot of credit to John because he is the head of that animal. But there is a whole team here that operates wonderfully and are maxed out to capacity on what they can handle. They are doing everything they can to help every veteran that calls in. The problem is they don't even have the manpower to answer the phones at this point. They need additional manpower and that's the reason for the budget ask. The 7.2M an ever-climbing number. That's just this year and that doesn't count the coming in every year because of those disabilities' benefits continuing going forward, and they spend that money in the county by purchasing things here. Next year they will get another 7M and put that back into the county, so it is a continual benefit, it's not a sump cost. That is why you should provide what they are asking.

Phil Henning: County Board District 19

I represent the County Board on the VAC. I'm retired myself and I am only 10% disabled. The one thing they haven't pointed out is when you apply for disability benefits it's not like going to the DMV and getting your driver's license. It's a two-to-four-year process. You are going to get rejected the first two or three times. The VAC which does have to be approved by the VA. We are lucky to have six staff. I've been retired 25 years and still haven't got my retired disability, which is fine I can live without it, but if you've retired or are a veteran which means year severed 6,8,12 years in the military and you have a disability this thing Agent Orange which came about in 1965 to 1975 in Vietnam. This is creeping up on people in their 60 and 70s because they fought in Vietnam in their 20s, so the VAC on my viewpoint does do a lot of hard work. The VA has been getting much better than it used to be in the last ten years. More cases are being approved. It is not an easy thing to do. There's a lot of paperwork and you get evaluated by a lot of doctors that the VA selects to review your disability claim so it's a lot of work. Another thing is Joe Kombious who is well known in our County and Monroe County, is that he donated office space to the Freeburg Market place for the DAV to have as their headquarters. The Disabled Veterans is to be one of the best arguably organizations that helps the VSO's and the veterans navigate the turning waters of the VA. He has shown his commitment to our County by having a branch office of the VAC plus a VSO that approved by the veteran's organization administration to help veterans with their claims. If it were easy, like Ms. Schenewerle said that income they receive based on the disability level and rank of the person that is benefiting from it, the family, it's not a lot of money. It's \$1,500 a month up to maybe \$3,000 if you are a higher ranking official. That money is needed for many families that their husband or wife that served in the Military passes away because that becomes a benefit to the surviving spouse. So, I will just ask the committee to consider and find a way that we can make this work.

Dave Self:

I am the Commander of the Disabled veterans out there in Freeburg, IL. Phil is right, John does have a satellite office out there. It has gotten much larger with the number of claims and veterans coming in seeking help than when we first started out. As they stated, we are not only out there for the veterans, but also for the spouses, and their children. It doesn't just stop at the veterans, but as time goes on like he said with Agent Orange with this twenty-year war we've had there are more and more of these soldiers coming to the facility and we cannot handle it at all. We need John's crew at the VAC to help us out and some extra help. We are not asking for a lot, but we are asking for our veterans to be taken care of. They've earned that by giving up their life to let each and every one of us do what we do. I hope it gets funded the funding that they need. We are just asking for the board's approval to give us not more than we need, but just what we need to get by.

Chairman Kern:

Maybe we need to talk a little bit. The County Board handles this budget every year, and in order to balance the budget and keep our property tax rate in check and normally at the same rate it was the year prior it requires tough budgeting. Which means we ask people to do more with what they are allocated. This year because we are operating in the same fashion with a balanced budget, we don't spend reserves to pad our budget so that next year it becomes harder for the next County Board or next guy or lady that comes along. We budget so that we can budget in the future, and we know where we are going. This year we asked all departments to operate at the same level they did the year before and when we saw those budgets come in

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would then be able to allocate money for raises for all county employees because we treat all our county employees the same. This year it was determined that a 3% raise could be given to all County employees if all the budget remain the same. The other budget was significantly different this year was the State's Attorney office because state grant was not given that allocate State's Attorney personnel for prosecuting crimes in East St. Louis where the State Police have boosted operations there. There are thirty State Troopers there in East St. Louis that operate, and so the case load in East St. Louis is higher. We had a state grant be able to pay for those State's Attorneys that went away, which was about \$400,000. The VAC came in and asked for a \$282,000 increase in their budget this year. Last year you were about at \$1M, now you want to be \$1.3M, so a 26% increase. When we looked at what that 26% increase was going towards about \$20,000 of that went to aid to indigent veterans. The rest went towards moving to new office for rental expense, for furniture, for travel, and various things. First of all, I want you to know we value all your service, this county board and many of these members have been here for many years. We are the proud recipient of the Abilene trophy from Scott Air Force Base; we are at every veteran's event. We have a had the first Military Affairs Office of the County ever had been under this County Board to make sure that we represent our veterans, that we keep Scott Air Force Base open, which is vital to all of us to access the services that are there, and honor the people who served there. Those budgetary things have always been important to us. Beyond that we are one of the few Joint Airports in the country. We honor the Air Force, and they are our number one customer every day at MidAmerica Airport. We then looked back at the history of the VAC; the budget has gone from about \$600,000 several years ago to now being \$1M. There have been major increases in the budget of the VAC, and I understand there is a maximum that is allowed to be levied, but what that maximum will do is it will raise property taxes in St. Clair County for everyone. Frankly if the \$282,000 increase is granted then property taxes will go up. The VAC budget request is something we need to take a look at because this is the first time the request is being justified for what you're asking for. Before it was just a list of what you want and just left to us there. This County Board is responsible to make sure it's a just and necessary budget. The law says that this Board has to decide if property taxes should be levied at that level for the VAC. The budget balances this year and will not balance with a major surplus. So, what we can do is take a look to see if there are ways to look at what is absolutely necessary for the VAC, and if Mr. Lawson wants to come in and have a conversation that is welcome. Look at what is actually necessary for you and if Mr. Lawson wants to come in and talk to me. I know your attorney is here, but the States Attorney's office could handle your legal work for you, which would save \$50,000 right off the top. There are things that I think we can look at together that maybe get what you want because everybody here tonight didn't talk about infrastructure. You talked about helping veterans, and so if there are specific things, aid to indigent veterans was not part really of the increase of the budget that only went up \$20,000 from what it was this current year. Frankly, it's what Kirk Dash used five years ago so let's talk about this and try to figure out how we can actually get that money in the hands of the veterans. Figure out what those programs are. Are there state grants and federal grants that would be able to come in to help shoulder some of this, so it doesn't all fall on the taxpayers of St. Clair County, because that at the end of the day is, is really what we do. We keep our tax rates as low as we can. That's what we promise the voters and I think it's our number one charge.

Jim Page:

Just understand you, to say is the budget we submitted was not just. You said just, justify. It wasn't justified. Have you tried to take a gurney to the third floor where we are at? Because you can't. If we have a veteran in need up there with emergency needs. He's gonna die.

Chairman Kern:

I don't know if that's the case.

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Jim Page:

The entry way coming into that building is 36 inches, the hallway going to the elevators is 32.5 inches, and the standard striker stretcher at all ambulances is 33 inches wide.

Chairman Kern:

Well then let's look at that. Have John come in and say let's see if we can renovate the space and take care of that. But that's never been an issue before. That's the first time anyone has ever said that. They said that the light pole was in the way. Because the city put a light standard at the at the ramp and we had them move that.

Man's voice:

I mentioned two things that kind of caught my ear. Do more with less taxes. I've been a resident of O'Fallon for 27 years. My taxes have never gone down. And I know. I've worked at Boeing, and I know that there's a lot of money that came into MidAmerica when Boeing built that MQ 25 facility over. Of all the people you're gonna take money from. It's \$200,000, I think that we're asking for, you're gonna try to tell me that because of \$200,000 as it goes to the VAC that everybody's taxes are going to go up and that is somehow a trigger point.

Chairman Kern:

It's the fact.

Doug Stewart:

I will say that I do believe that John has come to the county and maybe not you directly but requested conferences and meetings to explain everything that is in that budget and why it is what it is. And I know the light pole was probably a year and a half project to get that light pole removed.

Chairman Kern:

We stated that right away. Anything on Interstate IL159 takes time.

Doug Stewart:

And I'm not trying to lay that at your feet. Yeah, I appreciate anything in the Government is going to be a process. But at the same point our facilities are inadequate for the services that we are designated to provide, our staff is understaffed with for the work that they're being asked to do, and we're just asking for the funding to be able to get there. Now, I appreciate you gotta cut pennies where you can cut pennies. And I'm not trying to say that we won't work with you on that. But we gotta come to the table and we will be more than happy to find a way to shave, or we can shave to make it work in your budget but also make it work in our budget.

Man's Voice:

If you could find an acceptable place where the veterans can get in and out of the building if there were medical emergencies, or if there is a power generator in case of power outage to handle that elevator. The steps are 8-inch steps which the normal is 12 inches. There's a lot of issues with trying to evacuate anybody out of that building. It was never upgraded properly to be the ADA specifications. I'm not sure if you can even get a stretcher into the elevator. The boards that all of the ambulance services used are 33 inches wide. They will go through that door. If you have to have an oxygen tank to the veteran or person, good luck.

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Linda Schramm:

I have a question. You said something about John coming in and going over things, and you mentioned something about the possibility of grants. Obviously, you don't know if they are up there, but is it too late in your budget process for this stuff to happen?

Chairman Kern:

No, we have not approved the budget yet, that's what tonight's about. It is scheduled to be approved in a week, but we have till the end of the year.

John Lawson:

Part of the issue we would have is we would have to pay a staff member to draft those grants, and to submit them in order to get awarded the money that would then offset the law.

Chairman Kern:

I would encourage you to go out and seek other funding.

John Lason:

We are overloaded.

Chairman Kern:

We do that. That's how we pay the power and light bills of veterans. We do that at the grants department, right? We bury people that that are indigent, and work with, God rest his soul, Joe Hubbard and take of things like that. We have staff that helps veterans so they don't have to pay property tax if they have a disability. I know there are those in the room tonight that have been and were recipients of that when they went to the Assessor's office. But we have staff that do those things too so, maybe we gotta make sure we're not duplicating things.

Doug Stewart:

Some of that work is being passed from the Assessor's to our office because of our ability to verify information through the system. So, it is a coordinated effort with a county department, so it is not duplicated.

Chairman Kern:

I know Kurt Daesch worked well and I'm sure John does too.

Doug Staurt:

Yeah, I do think there's some good synergy in what they're doing. But at the end of the day, we have to cut somewhere too. If our budget is cut with the number you're providing, it's gonna cut people to be able to provide those services whether it is provided by grants.

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Chairman Kern:

Your budget hasn't been cut; it's been increased over what it was last year. It's just not increasing to the amount you are requesting.

Doug Stewart:

The budget request that is being submitted is and that's the way we see it.

Chairman Kern:

Right, but it's an increase over last year, right?

John Lawson:

Let me say one thing about the travel cost that was brought up. Each of our veteran service officers are basically lawyers without a license. They are required to maintain certain levels of continuing education and that are done annually and the training event East Peoria or alternatively any national conference through Mac PSO wherever it may be this year it was in Reno and last year it was in Louisville. It kind of moves around. That's not an option. It must happen where they lose their accreditation and then they lose their job. Nonnegotiable, those things have to be there again. I've been on the job, 460-something odd days, and Mr. Kern, how many times have you called me?

Chairman Kern:

And the phone works both ways, and you make \$40,000 more than I did.

John Lawson:

I've also got a good resume to support it.

Chairman Kern:

So do I and I don't have to say I act like a lawyer, I am one.

John Lawson:

But again, those are requirements set forth by the VA to maintain our accreditation and to also legally represent veterans with the VA. So that's where that some of the amount of that travel cost comes from is there. So, we have to make sure that we're ever mindful of that airline are going through the roof. As we all know, hotel fees are going through the roof. We tried to check these things out several years in advance to get the best possible rates. I'm actually transferring the Illinois conference to St. Clair County. But given some of the environment that's we're dealing with right now, I'm not sure I can do that. But I would love to because I would love to come down and see the Scott Air Force Base. I would love for them to come down and see the archives down at the cave. I'd love for them to come to see what a veteran community is. It's not just the active component of Scott Air Force Base, that's active duty. That's not us. We are all the people that took that uniform off and are now living trying to make it work? We've got surviving spouses here with us tonight. We've heard the story. Homes would be lost without that tax exemption. These are all things that we're doing, we're working with the Assessor's office. We met 2-3 times. Have a great working relationship with them. It helps us kind of tail down some of the rhetoric that has been coming from this county. Deserved or undeserved doesn't matter. Everywhere I went for the past year. Hey John, why St. Clair County hate veterans so much? Geez, it's

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not like that guys, chill. But they went back and actually had to pass a clarifying statute in the General Assembly just to get our county on board. So, we went to the Assessor's office. We've asked how can we help make this better? How can we ease the burden for you? How can we ease the burden for our veterans? Most importantly, how can I ease the burden for our surviving spouses who are grieving and trying to get through this process go told nope go on out the door. Will they come back for that benefit, chances are probably not. It's folks like us that are out here being advocates for these veterans and truly human they deserve. So I'm hopeful that we can get to a budget at some point that we can all agree on and believe to be something that we can work with. I'm agreeable to any conversation, but again, I'm not interested in there are fireballs at anybody. That's not what I do. I'm here to advocate for veterans.

Man's Voice:

Does the current budget proposal include any type of property tax increase to go with it or is it the same from the previous budget last year?

Doug Stewart:

We don't set property tax rates, that as a County Board function.

Chairman Kern:

We will abate less taxes in the spring if we don't find a way to fund this.

Man's Voice:

My question was specific, so the budget that is being proposed, does that include any type of increase in tax, property taxes from the previous budget?

Chairman Kern:

No, it does not increase the tax rate. The tax rate is what people look at on their bill. So, if a new house is built that's added to the tax rules. We keep the rate the same and actually this contemplates a little lower tax rate than the prior year. We try to always because I need to be able to get votes from County Board Members like Phil. We try to lower the tax rate every year just to get there.

Man's Voice:

If you're here and you've been elected at the current tax rate, it seems kind of counterproductive to ask certain members of the community to not have the benefit of the current tax setting while trying to say we can't fund you. At the same time, we want to reduce property taxes, but if we want to fund you then we'll have to increase property taxes.

Chairman Kern:

Well, you're asking for a \$282,000 increase and the amount that it lowers probably won't be that. So, it definitely will require us to abate less taxes, as Phil knows, every spring there's a big debate over how much of our taxes we abate, so that we get to a thing that where people see on their tax bill at St. Clair County's portion. Not the schools, not the cities, not everybody else, but I can say that St. Clair County's portion, that is until the state gets their multiplier and we can't control that, but that's what we tried to do. I think everybody here understands that we've got to keep people in their homes. We can't have our tax rates so high that people don't choose to

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live here. That's why the Board pours over a budget like this. This is the first time we've met. This budget has been online, and it took a couple months to prepare. It's quite ominous. But we do appreciate you being here and we are your service, and we thank you every day. The county always has. We are going to operate Freedom Farms and we're going to do it in the name of veterans. We've committed to that. When we do our renovations, we would love to have a post open-up back out at Freedom Farm. We can certainly work together to try to figure out something to either make our spot handicapped accessible, or figure something out that will also keep the budget in line with keeping taxes in line.

Doug Stewart:

If I can take that Chairman as John should call you and you're going to get a meeting on the calendar.

Chairman Kern:

Yep. Let's try and do it tomorrow.

Upon a motion by Mr. Mosley and seconded by Mr. Gomric, it was unanimously agreed to approve the October 27, 2025 Meeting Minutes.

Upon a motion by Mr. Mosley and seconded by Mr. Vernier, it was unanimously agreed to approve the 2026 Meeting Schedule.

Other Business:

There was discussion about looking into possible locations for the VAC.

John Coers asked about what the minimum requirement the county must

Chairman Kern quoted from 55 ILCS 5/5-2006 "In counties with a population of less than 3,000,000 that operate a Veterans Assistance Commission, the county board may levy a tax at a rate not to exceed 0.03% for the provision of assistance to military veterans and their families. A portion of the taxes collected may be expended for the salaries and expenses of the officers and employees of the Veterans Assistance Commission. Upon petition of the electors in a county to raise the levy to a rate not to exceed 0.04%, the proposition shall be submitted to the voters at the next general election. A majority vote in favor will allow the board to increase the rate of the levy. The tax will be in addition to all other taxes and not included in any tax rate limitation."

Upon a motion by Mr. Vernier and seconded by Mr. Gomric, it was unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting at 7:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Moore, Director of Administration