

SUMMARY OF WASHINGTON COUNTY REGULAR QUORUM COURT MEETING 8/20/26

Public comments: SCAAP dominates discussion

3:22–18:28

Seven residents spoke during the initial public-comment period, most opposing SCAAP and the county's cooperation with federal immigration enforcement.

- **3:22 – Sarah Moore**, executive director of the Arkansas Justice Reform Coalition, argued that SCAAP disproportionately affects Marshallese residents, discourages crime victims from contacting police and contributes to jail overcrowding. She said more than 160 people were sleeping on the jail floor.
- **5:34 – Kristen Pawlik** spoke about her November 3 judicial runoff.
- **6:27 – Anne Della Hines**, Candidate for JP District 7, compared the loss of community trust associated with Flock cameras to concerns raised by immigrant communities about SCAAP.
- **8:13 – Laura Villegas** questioned why the county was appropriating an estimated \$100,000 before the DOJ had determined the award. She emphasized that participation is voluntary and discussed the United States' history with the Marshall Islands.
- **11:36 – Abigail Hendricks** said the issue had prompted her to become more engaged in local government and elections.
- **14:25 – Basil Bandom** described how fear of immigration consequences may deter domestic-violence victims from contacting police and destabilize families.
- **16:52 – Sally Ganam** opposed SCAAP, ICE cooperation and Flock cameras.

Minutes and County Judge's report

18:28–20:14

- The July 16 minutes were approved.

- He nominated Emily Pluckett to the West Fork Library Board and William Watts to the Washington Water Authority Board.

Water Authority appointment rejected

20:14–25:20

I asked County Attorney Brian Lester about the potential conflict or independence concern created by placing a county employee on the Water Authority Board.

At **21:23**, Lester acknowledged that potential conflicts can arise but said an individual could recuse when a major conflict occurred. He also said county employees had previously served on boards and that he did not view it as an overriding problem.

At **21:58**, Judge Deakins defended the appointment process and said the nominations were not his personal or political appointments. He cautioned against bringing nominees’ names into public discussion and “making up stories or scenarios” about their qualifications. (I’m pretty sure that was directed at me, because that is exactly what I did)

JP Pond requested that the two appointments be separated.

- Emily Pluckett was confirmed unanimously to the West Fork Library Board.
- William Watts’s Water Authority nomination failed:

Vote	JPs
Yes	Wilson, Lyons, Ecke, Washington, Dennis
No	Pond, Bruns, Dean, Cogger, Leming, Ricker
Abstained	Massingill, Rivera Lopez, Highers, Rios, Stafford

Analysis: The concern was not an accusation against Mr. Watts or a challenge to his personal qualifications. It was a structural question: whether a county employee

could exercise fully independent judgment if Water Authority interests ever diverged from the preferences of county officials who influence that employee's work. The County Attorney acknowledged that conflicts are possible and suggested recusal as the remedy. Ultimately, ten of the fifteen JPs either voted no or abstained.

PACE financing district approved

25:48–43:36

JP Rios Stafford sponsored the ordinance allowing Washington County to join the Arkansas Property Assessed Capital Expenditure Improvement District.

A proposed Fayetteville apartment development is seeking as much as **\$14 million in private PACE financing** for an approximately **\$60 million project**.

Important points from the discussion:

- Participation by property owners is voluntary.
- Financing comes from private lenders, not county funds.
- Repayment is attached to the property through a special assessment.
- Washington County will appoint one member to the statewide board.
- Solar fields and wind farms could potentially qualify, although they would remain subject to county zoning and conditional-use requirements.
- The Arkansas Advanced Energy Foundation serves as the program's third-party administrator.
- If a property defaults, the county's tax-collection mechanism may become involved.
- The program representative said the financial risk rests with the lender and PACE district.
- The county may charge a fee for collection work, but the amount had not yet been established.
- When questioned about what happens to a property in default, the representative acknowledged that he was "not 100% positive" about every aspect of the process.

The ordinance passed **11–4**.

Yes

Pond, Bruns, Wilson, Rivera Lopez, Lyons, Ecke,
Dean, Washington, Coger, Highers, Rios Stafford

No

Massingill, Dennis,
Leming, Ricker

SCAAP appropriation passes after lengthy debate

43:38–1:20:17

The ordinance anticipated and appropriated **\$100,000 in SCAAP revenue**, although the actual federal award has not yet been determined.

JP Ricker moved passage, seconded by JP Pond.

Arguments against SCAAP

At **44:11**, I explained that participation requires Washington County to provide personal information about certain incarcerated people for federal review:

“I’m just not able to separate the money from the process that we use to obtain it.”

I said the county cannot voluntarily provide information, deny the possible consequences and claim to have “clean hands.”

At **46:18**, JP Rivera Lopez said SCAAP damages trust in institutions, particularly in his highly diverse district, and makes residents less likely to contact police.

At **1:03:14**, JP Rios Stafford said she has opposed SCAAP every year, particularly because eligibility is not limited to felony convictions and can include people convicted of two misdemeanors.

Arguments supporting SCAAP

At **47:59**, JP Lyons characterized the ordinance as a mechanical means of receiving reimbursement for correctional-officer costs already incurred. He argued that fingerprints are already transmitted through federal systems and that declining SCAAP would not end other forms of immigration cooperation.

He also said the jail and Sheriff's Office budget was approximately **\$29.9 million** and described the anticipated reimbursement as part of the Court's fiduciary responsibility.

JP Bruns argued that people included in the program were already in jail because they had broken the law and objected to what he viewed as an unfairly negative portrayal of law enforcement.

At **1:00:41**, JP Ecke defended her earlier questioning of the sheriff about whether SCAAP was harmful. She supported accepting the money and noted that earlier SCAAP proceeds had purchased **specialized flashlights for detention officers**.

Sheriff's important clarifications

Sheriff Jay Cantrell made several important statements:

- **56:39:** SCAAP participation and reporting are **not mandated**.
- Eligibility generally requires a felony conviction or two misdemeanor convictions, plus four consecutive days in jail.
- **56:59–57:33:** The county does not yet know the award amount. DOJ will determine the award later based on available federal funding, participating agencies and which submitted records are deemed eligible.
- **58:22:** The county is not otherwise required to report immigration status, although fingerprints are transmitted through federal identification systems.
- **1:00:00:** Previous SCAAP funds were used to buy specialized flashlights for detention officers.
- **1:06:02:** The sheriff believes most people qualifying from Washington County are convicted felons because people serving misdemeanor commitments rarely remain for four consecutive days.

The central distinction

Much of the supporting argument focused on information that is already transmitted through routine fingerprint systems. That is not exactly the same question as whether Washington County should voluntarily compile and submit a narrower set of inmate records to seek SCAAP reimbursement.

The sheriff confirmed both that SCAAP is voluntary and that the final reimbursement remains unknown. Those two facts are important because the ordinance appropriated an estimated \$100,000 before the federal government determined the actual award.

Public response

Members of the public continued opposing SCAAP during the item's public-comment period. Speakers discussed immigrant labor, distrust of ICE, fear of contacting police, poverty, misdemeanor convictions, family separation and the difference between mandatory legal requirements and voluntary participation.

Anne Della Hines noted that \$100,000 represents approximately one-third of 1% of the Sheriff's budget. Laura Villegas argued that people submitted through SCAAP receive additional scrutiny beyond routine fingerprint processing.

The Court extended public comment by three minutes.

Final vote

SCAAP passed **10–5**.

Yes	No
Pond, Bruns, Wilson, Massingill, Lyons, Ecke, Dean, Dennis, Leming, Ricker	Rivera Lopez, Washington, Coger, Highers, Rios Stafford

Capital-outlay controls pass

1:20:32–1:25:49

JP Lyons sponsored an emergency ordinance restricting capital-outlay appropriations to the project or purpose for which the money was originally approved. Using the money for another purpose will now require Quorum Court approval.

Lyons said the ordinance arose after money initially justified for storm-damage repairs was reportedly used for a Paragon architectural-services agreement, even though he could not find an architectural-services appropriation in the 2026 budget.

The ordinance passed with no negative vote recorded in the transcript.

Why it matters: This strengthens the Quorum Court's control over appropriations. An appropriation for one capital purpose should not become a general pool that the executive branch can redirect after the original work is finished. If officials want to use remaining money for another project, they must return to the legislative body and publicly justify that use.

Consent agenda

1:25:52–1:29:15

Items 11 through 15 passed together without opposition. They included:

- Professional-development recognition payments
- **\$22,950** associated with razing a building
- Additional Drug Court grant revenue
- Additional revenue and appropriations for the Sheriff's budget
- Additional General Fund money transferred to the jail fund for Sheriff and jail budget lines

The transcript's automated text did not reliably capture the dollar amounts for the final two appropriations, so I would take those figures from the written ordinances rather than quote the transcript.