

WELLS COUNTY COUNCIL
REGULAR SESSION March 8, 2022

The Wells County Council met in regular session Tuesday, March 8, 2022, at 7PM in the Wells County Carnegie Annex Building, 223 W Washington St., Bluffton, IN. Present at the meeting were: Steve Huggins, Seth Whicker, Chuck King, Todd Mahnensmith, Vicki Andrews, Scott Elzey, and Auditor Lisa McCormick. Jim Oswalt was absent.

Minutes: Motion was made by Seth Whicker, seconded by Todd Mahnensmith to approve the minutes from the February 8, 2022, Regular Session. Motion carried 6-0.

Transfers: Motion made by Chuck King, seconded by Vicki Andrews to approve the transfer within the Wells County CASA Grant. Motion carried 6-0.

Additional Appropriations: Motion made by Vicki Andrews, seconded by Scott Elzey to approve the Additional Appropriation requests for the Sheriff in the General fund and the ARP Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery fund. Motion carried 6-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 79 inmates of those 29 are pretrial Superior, 27 are pretrial Circuit, 10 are F6 DOC and 4 are DOC. Monthly reports and the Jail Annual Report were also presented. Sheriff Holliday told Council that the masonry is complete, roofing will start in approximately a month.

ARPA Funds for the Regional Sewer District: Attorney Mark Burry, representing the Regional Sewer District, presented a Resolution for the Appropriation of ARPA Funds. This resolution confirms that Wells County Council appropriated the ARPA funds for the planning, development, and construction of sewer infrastructure projects in Wells County by the Wells County Regional Sewer District. \$2,000,000 was appropriated and will be transferred to the RSD when received by Wells County, under the terms of the subrecipient agreement to be developed and approved between the Wells County Commissioners and the RSD. Motion was made by Seth Whicker, seconded by Vicki Andrews to approve Resolution 2022-02 confirming appropriation of ARPA funds. Motion carried 6-0.

Haven Manufacturing SB-1 Resolution: Wells County Economic Development Director Chad Kline presented an SB-1 for personal property tax abatement for new equipment for Council approval. The machinery cost is \$468,848 and will add 7 new employees to the company. The abatement is for four years, 100% abatement for three years and 50% for the fourth year. Motion made by Todd Mahnensmith, seconded by Chuck King to approve Resolution 2022-03 for Haven Manufacturing SB-1. Motion carried 6-0.

Salary Discussion: At the February meeting Auditor Lisa McCormick and Clerk Beth Davis had requested increases in the annual wages of their deputies, each office was eliminating a deputy position and redistributing those duties to the remaining office staff. That elimination resulted in a cost savings to the General fund. Council approved their request. Recorder Carolyn Bertsch, Treasurer Kathy Peeper, Surveyor Jarrod Hahn, and Assessor Kelly Herman came before County Council to discuss a wage study for all county employees and elected officials. Bertsch requested a wage study to provide useful information at budget time. Hahn stated that if this study was available prior to budgets, they could have a real conversation. Council member Todd Mahnensmith stated that the decision in February was based on efficiencies within the offices and incentive for changes in all offices. Peeper stated she has

two deputies; it would be hard to be efficient if she downsized. Herman stated that some offices might be able to share employees. The City of Bluffton had a wage study completed recently, the cost was \$20,000. Seth Whicker thought he could get additional information on that study. Council will revisit at a following meeting.

PTABOA: PTABOA President Judy Affolder and Assessor Kelly Herman came before Council to clarify events that occurred during an appeal process. The PTABOA board met for a work session regarding the appeal of 5 storage units. Affolder, Chandler Gerber, and Larry McChessney discussed at length the valuations of the appealed properties at that work session. During the work session one petitioner was in the room, Brandon Harnish, he suggested that he might call an associate that just had a storage unit constructed. Harnish was told the cost of the new construction was approximately \$25/foot. Discussion followed with a valuation of \$22 a square foot. In Affolder's recollection, a motion was made by Gerber to value the parcel of the attending petitioner at \$22 a square foot. Affolder continued to study the papers before her. She stated that Assessor Herman was having trouble getting the recorder to work. Affolder recalled McChessney state that he thought it should be \$25 per square foot. Affolder seconded Gerber's motion, thinking that it was \$22 a square foot with no parameters attached, McChessney abstained. They then worked through the remaining parcels and the motions were all for \$22 a square foot. After the meeting Assessor Herman made the adjustments and Affolder signed the Form 15's in the Assessors office. Those forms were mailed out prior to the Assessors Conference on January 18th. Assessor Herman and Affolder were asked to speak to Barry Wood and staff attorney Jennifer Thuma from the DLGF at the conference. Negative calls concerning the Form 15 assessment values had been received and the DLGF staffers wanted to discuss the matter with them. Chandler Gerber had shared with the DLGF officials that the motion was for \$22 a square foot valuation with depreciation and a market factor of 1. She stated she had not heard the additional information in the motion. The DLGF advised the Assessor to redo the meeting to make sure that it was properly advertised and recorded. The PTABOA board did not redo the meeting. Assessor Herman refigured the assessments with the specifications Gerber had stated were in the motion. Affolder did not agree with the accusations directed at Assessor Herman, she does her best to be fair and equitable for all assessments, Affolder stated. Affolder believes a motion should have an actual numerical value that is visible and understandable to all concerned. Herman stated that she could appeal the final decision to the state but is hesitant to do so at this time. Larry McChessney was in the audience and came to the podium and agreed with Affolder's statements. McChessney stated that Assessor Herman had not tried to coerce his decision in any way. Herman has since purchased a laptop that will record and store meetings so the recording failure will not happen again. The board can then pull the information up on the main screens in the meeting room and see and calculate values during the work sessions. Chandler Gerber was in the audience and came to the podium to deflect some of the commentary directed toward him. Gerber stated that he had many hours of prep to prepare for the work session. Gerber felt there was confusion and missteps from the other board members and Assessor. He wants to give the taxpayers a fair shake and give back to the community. In his opinion, his motion was very clear, he felt there was no room for confusion.

Amended 2022 Wells County Salary Ordinance: An updated 2022 Salary Ordinance was presented to Council for approval. The updates had been previously approved by County Council. They included a Sheriff Department payout of unused days, the wage and title change for the Health Department Medical Assistant, the Clerk and Auditor Deputy pay changes, and the Sheriff IDACS Coordinator. Motion was made by Seth Whicker, seconded by Todd Mahnensmith to approve Ordinance 2022-05 Wells County 2022 Salary Ordinance. Motion carried 6-0.

Ossian Rescue Truck: The Wells County Commissioners approved the purchase of a Rescue Truck for Ossian. The financing will be a lease payment through US Bank, 2.394%. This will be a 7 year note with an annual payment of \$83,169.76. The payment will be funded from LIT Public Safety.

Adjourned: 8:50PM Motion made by Seth Whicker, seconded by Todd Mahnensmith to adjourn. Motion carried 6-0.

WELLS COUNTY COUNCIL

President, Steve Huggins

Vice President, Seth Whicker

Attest: Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor