

Wells County Commissioners

Regular Session February 7, 2022

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday February 7, 2022, at 9:00AM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Those in attendance were Commissioners, Michael Vanover, Blake Gerber, and Jeff Stringer. Also, in attendance were County Attorney, Colin Andrews and County Auditor, Lisa McCormick.

Minutes: Motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the minutes from January 18, 2022, regular session. Motion carried 3-0.

Payroll and Claims: Motion was made by Jeff Stringer, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve Payroll #2 in the amount of \$259,212.27, Payroll #3 in the amount of \$255,138.70 and 231 claims totaling \$996,729.27. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 80 inmates, 37 pretrial Superior, 25 pretrial Circuit, 5 F6 DOC and 5 DOC. Construction is moving forward and on schedule. Holliday stated that all county departments handled the snow event well. There were five slide offs and two personal property incidents, but no injuries related to travel.

Highway Supervisor: Shawn Bonar was working the roads and not present at the meeting. Nate Rumschlag updated the Commissioners. Rumschlag gave a shout out to the highway workers and the great job they did. No issues and the snowfall came in under the predicted totals. Presented to the Commissioners was an agreement with PCI specifying the rate schedule and standard agreement between the Owner and Architect for the Highway Garage (Misc. 2022-03). Rumschlag stated that pre-engineering design on the shell of the building should be completed soon. Hopefully this can go out to bid by the end of March.

Highway Engineer: Nate Rumschlag requested approval for a Triathlon, coordinated by Zach Ruble, to use County Roadways for the Cycling portion of the triathlon. The event is to be held on June 11, 2022, starting at 8am, the biking portion should be completed by 11AM. Ruble is expecting 150-200 riders. No road closures are requested, Sheriff Deputies will stop traffic as needed at intersections. A certificate of insurance has been filed in the Auditor's office. Motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve of the road use for the Triathlon. Motion carried 3-0. Rumschlag received a draft bridge inspection report from Butler, Fairman, and Seifert. He will review and have a final format later this month. A summary document was distributed that included bridges that had load ratings taken off. Bid opening for Bridge 403 has been delayed until Tuesday February 8th. Advertising for bids will be February 10th for the Murray Stormwater Project with bid opening on March 3rd. Seven right-of-way documents were presented for commissioner approval. Motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the seven rights-of-way. Motion carried 3-0.

Workers Compensation Renewal: General Insurance presented an updated Workers Compensation Renewal to the Commissioners. The effective date of the policy is 02/01/2022-02/01/2023. Two quote proposals were offered: Bliss-McKnight for \$77,160 and Indiana Public Employers' Plan for \$80,519. Motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to accept the Bliss-McKnight proposal for \$77,160. Motion carried 3-0.

Bluffton NOW! Mike Lautzenheiser, Bluffton NOW! President presented the Bluffton NOW! 2021 Annual report. The downtown assessed value increased \$1,706,503 from 2019. Downtown occupancy has increased: first floor occupancy is at 91%, second floor occupancy is at 69%, third floor occupancy is 69%. Fundraising goals were increased, new business and residential opportunities were attracted to the downtown area. Bluffton NOW! Partnered with several organizations for events and studies concerning the plaza. Eight new businesses were established into the downtown area in 2021. Future plans include a downtown pathways project, which is 61% funded. Lautzenheiser will come back to the Commissioners at a later date for a funding request.

Regional Elected Officials Agreement: Kim Tempel, senior director of business services for Northeast Indiana Works, presented the Commissioners with a Regional Elected Officials agreement. The effective date of the agreement is April 1, 2022, through March 31, 2027. This agreement is entered into by the Chief Local Elected Officials from Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Grant, Huntington, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells, Whitley, and the City of Fort Wayne. This group comprises district 3. Training funding of \$700,000 has been distributed to employers and individuals in Wells County over the last two years. Assisted were 74 employers with recruitment opportunities. Duties and responsibilities listed in the agreement include appointing board members to the Workforce Development Board, selecting a regional chief elected official to act as a contact person for all CEO business, serving as/or designating the fiscal agent among other tasks. Motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to allow the President to sign the Regional Elected Officials Agreement. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Council on Aging: Bonnie Valind presented the 4th Qtr. 2021 reports and invoice via email for the Commissioners. Blake Gerber motioned, seconded by Jeff Stringer to allow President Michael Vanover to sign the 2021 4th Quarter reimbursement paperwork for Wells on Wheels public transit program for an amount of \$188,184.00. Motion carried 3-0. Jeff Stringer made a request for the Wells County Council on Aging to make their future requests in person.

Investment Policy: An Investment policy was presented to the Board of Finance during a board of finance meeting on January 18, 2022. The board of finance approved the policy. Motion was made by Jeff Stringer, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve the Treasurers Investment policy as the Board of Commissioners. Motion carried 3-0.

Unsold Tax Sale Property: Attorney Colin Andrews stated that the unsold tax sale property is under the 120-day redemption period. Andrews stated that there is interest in the property. He will research Certificate sales and return with more information.

Ossian Rescue Truck: Motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the RFP to advertise for funding for the Ossian Rescue Truck. Motion carried 3-0.

Remote Work Policy: Attorney Colin Andrews gave three options for the remote work policy; not allow any requests, qualified employee requests or open employee requests. Commissioner Stringer stated that all current positions within the county were not remote upon the employees hire, so he suggested only emergency requests be accepted. The Commissioners requested a new draft be presented to them on February 22, 2022.

Premier Flats: Fire Chief Don Craig questioned the Commissioners about a barricade that was put back into place at Spruce and Maple Drive in the Premier Flats property. Commissioner Gerber requested more time to investigate similar projects, there is one access point, he felt the barricade was not

hindering access. Approval was given previously by the Commissioners to open the road when it was 80% occupied. Commissioner Gerber suggested meeting with Fire Chief Craig to discuss further.

PTABOA: Chandler Gerber, PTABOA member, was in the audience and spoke to the Commissioners about PTABOA procedures. Gerber is new to the board and his first hearing was five ongoing appeals. He studied 350 pages of testimony prior to the meeting as well as recordings of prior proceedings. The appeal meeting was approximately 3.5 hours long. Larry McChesney, Judy Affolder, Chandler Gerber, Kelly Herman, and Brandon Harnish were present in the meeting. There are three approaches that may be used to assess property: the income approach for business or rental properties, the comparable sales approach, or the replacement cost approach. The lowest of the three approaches is mandated by law to be used by the Assessor. According to Gerber, the comparable properties to the storage units averaged \$22 per square foot. Gerber stated that he made a motion to lower the assessment to \$22 per square foot and should depreciate the structure to the date of construction and use a market factor of 1. He stated that Larry McChesney abstained, Judy Affolder seconded. The next three motions were identical. Larry McChesney made the same motion for the fifth property, Gerber seconded, and the vote was carried 3-0. The meeting then adjourned. Four days later, taxpayers notified Gerber that their assessment they received in the mail was higher than before the appeal. Herman contacted Gerber stating that taxpayers have been contacting her as well. Herman and Gerber met in the Assessors office, Gerber stated that the Assessor commented that “the numbers came out too cheap”, and she was not comfortable with the numbers. Gerber also stated that Judy Affolder and Kelly Herman met to go over the assessments and created new assessments that were mailed out. Gerber requested a copy of the minutes. He didn’t feel the minutes were accurate. The recorder was not functioning properly, so there was no recording of the meeting. He contacted Jennifer in the legal department at the DLGF who met with Judy Affolder and Kelly Herman. Gerber stated that Herman wished to have a new meeting to clarify the board’s decision. Gerber was asking for clarification from the Commissioners on how to proceed. Commissioner Vanover stated that the Commissioners have no direct authority over the Assessor. They do have control over appointments to the PTABOA board. Motion was made by Jeff Stinger, seconded by Blake Gerber to have Attorney Colin Andrews research acting on a temporary suspension of and up to removal of any board member for cause, contacting the DLGF and interviewing Assessor Kelly Herman for her interpretation of events. Motion carried 3-0. Nick Huffman stated that having members on the board from other counties was ridiculous. Commissioner Stringer stated that if someone from Wells County would apply, they would be considered when there was an opening. Randy Harnish stated that the replacement cost of like property is \$19.85/square foot on a property he just completed.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 9:55AM, motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Commissioners

President, Michael K. Vanover

Vice President, Blake Gerber

Member, Jeff Stringer

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor