

## **Wells County Commissioners**

### **Regular Session March 4, 2024**

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday March 4, 2024, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Those in attendance were Commissioners, Jeff Stringer, Michael Vanover, and Blake Gerber. Also, in attendance were County Attorney, Ted Storer and County Auditor, Lisa McCormick.

**Minutes:** A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve the minutes from February 20, 2024, regular session. Motion carried 3-0.

A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the minutes from March 1, 2024, special session. Motion carried 3-0.

**Payroll and Claims:** A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve Payroll #5 in the amount of \$284,131.02 and 199 claims totaling \$479,774.51. Motion carried 3-0.

**Wells County Sheriff:** Sheriff Holliday reported 77 inmates, 19 pretrial Superior, 40 pretrial Circuit, 3 F6 DOC and 11 DOC. Holliday reported that the maintenance position has been filled and will have training prior to the current employee leaving.

**Ameresco:** Brad Driver, senior project developer for Ameresco, addressed the Commissioners regarding outstanding punch list items. Many of the issues from the February 14<sup>th</sup> meeting had been discussed with Sheriff Holliday and completed. Of the still outstanding issues, Driver discussed how Ameresco is proceeding to get the issues resolved. The week of March 11<sup>th</sup> the control contractor will be onsite to go through air flows for AHU-4 which serves the Jail Commanders office, I-Con is sending a service technician to resolve an issue with the ADA shower turning on randomly with no one in the shower, occupancy sensors will be replaced in Room 1429 to correct lighting issues, Ashford Finish will be consulted regarding the sealant down the existing corridor that stain when spills occur, Jackson construction will be consulted on caulk that was not properly applied in the corridor edges, and Primary Engineering has been consulted on HVAC concerns in the new conference/training room. Primary Engineering informed Ameresco that trend data would need to be captured and another year of seasonal conditions will need to be observed before a recommendation can occur and submitted a letter to the Commissioners stating the same. There was no retainage for the project, Jeff Stringer commented that all public works projects should have retainage. Sheriff Holliday stated that the project started as an energy contract and then morphed into a construction project after COVID and the need for isolation of inmates. The contract with Ameresco is a 20-year energy contract, required per legislation are annual reviews of the system. Driver stated that an engineered analysis report will be generated annually and provided to Wells County and the state. A discussion followed on partial payment of the final invoice of \$134,830.00. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to withhold \$40,000 from the final payment to Ameresco, which would make the payment \$94,830.00. Motion carried 3-0.

**Wells County Highway Supervisor:** Shawn Bonar informed the Commissioners of Highway Garage updates. The outdoor lighting has issues, HVAC has issues in the administrative area, the pressure washer is not plumbed properly and has no hot water. Bonar presented a letter of financial commitment for Bridge 106. Matching funds for this grant will come from the Cumulative Bridge funds

or the LOIT Special Distribution fund. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the letter of financial commitment for Bridge 106. Motion carried 3-0. Also presented for Commissioner approval was the E&B Paving agreement for CR 450E reconstruction. The year of the project was listed as 2025, Bonar will get updated paperwork listing the project date as 2024. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the E&B Paving agreement for \$555,848.00 with the 2024 project date. Motion carried 3-0. Bonar presented an unofficial detour for SR 218 for a bridge replacement over Rock Creek for spring of 2024. The unofficial detour will be 100E to 700S to 200E returning to SR 218. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the unofficial detour for SR 218. Motion carried 3-0.

**Flood Safety Awareness:** County Surveyor Jarrod Hahn presented a proclamation to the Board of Commissioners to proclaim March 10-16, 2024, as "Flood Safety Awareness Week". Some facts regarding floods; 6 inches of fast-moving flood water can knock an adult off their feet, 12 inches can carry off a small car. The two main instances for death due to flooding are driving into flood waters and homes that flood when the residents are asleep. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to proclaim March 10-16, 2024, as Flood Safety Awareness Week. Motion carried 3-0.

**Corner Stone Administrator Appointee:** IC 36-2-12-11 states that if the county surveyor is not registered, the county surveyor shall, with the approval of the county executive, appoint a person who is registered as a professional surveyor and is a resident voter of the county to administer this section. Surveyor Jarrod Hahn suggested Corey McKinney as the suggested appointment. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to appoint Corey McKinney as the Corner Stone Administrator. Motion carried 3-0.

**Chamber of Commerce Fee for Service 2024:** A revised fee for service contract was presented to the Commissioners for review. The revised contract was received by the Commissioners on Monday morning, day of the meeting, from Chamber President Patty Randol with a final offer, if the contract was not approved that evening the partnership would cease. Commissioner President Jeff Stringer stated that he would not be held hostage and that is where he felt he was currently. The revisions in the contract were not agreeable to the Commissioners. Wells County supports Economic Development annually with a \$100,000 fee for service amount. Stringer felt Wells County needs a seat at the table, with more transparency and reporting from the Chamber. Josh Barkley, Ossian Town Council, echoed that anything that is tied to taxpayer money should be tied to an elected official. Mayor John Whicker added that being so close to an agreement, it would be a shame to draw a line in the sand and quit now. Economic Development Executive Director, Chad Kline, stated that he could not continue in good faith without funding secured. Chamber board member, John Stauffer, suggested a fee for service agreement for several months until a contract could be approved. With that, Commissioner Vanover motioned that Wells County would financially commit through June 2024 with the intent to resolve negotiations, and to allow Scott Mentzer to be the negotiator for Wells County with the Chamber. There was no second to his motion. Commissioner Gerber suggested more time to approve an annual agreement, an agreement that would be solid. Gerber also stressed the need for increased communication efforts amongst the Commissioners and all involved. Chamber Board Vice President Julie Thompson spoke on the disagreements and said the negotiators need to really hear one another, not everyone is going to get what they want, and there needs to be a solid deadline for completion. Thompson stated that we are all here for Wells County. Commissioner Vanover restated his motion to continue the fee for service negotiations with the Chamber of Commerce allowing Scott Mentzer to be the negotiator for the Commissioners, seconded by Blake Gerber. Motion carried 3-0.

**Economic Development Advisory Assistance Proposal:** A proposal for engagement of economic development advisory assistance with CRMorphew Consulting was presented to the Commissioners for review. The contract was designed to be a joint contract between the City of Bluffton and the Commissioners. The consultation contract would assist city and county officials gain understanding of Economic Development. Commissioner Gerber stated that he had not had time to fully digest the contents of the proposal. The proposal was tabled until the March 18<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**ROW & Utility Permit:** Two rights-of-way and one utility permit were presented to Commissioners for approval. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the two rights-of-way and one utility permit. Motion carried 3-0.

**Regional Sewer District:** LA Brown and Ryan Lenfeld PE, project manager for Choice One Engineering, updated the Commissioners on Regional Sewer District projects. They stated that local development has increased because of RSD connections. Craigville, Murray, Kingsland, Liberty Center and Tocson projects have all led to new development and construction.

**Public Comment (Grant Proposal):** Dr. Kay Johnson-Keys asked to make a proposal for increased reimbursement for her services regarding grant work for the Health Department. Addressed were three new labor-intensive grant applications that she has been gathering statistics for. She feels that the current rate of compensation is not enough for the work that is entailed for the applications. One grant had an application deadline of March 15, 2024, two for June 1, 2024. The subject was tabled until the March 18<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**Public Comment:** Council member, Brandon Harnish, shared frustration with administrative and appointed boards, they seem to create separation when it comes to accountability. If an elected body does something the community does not like they can be voted out of office. An administrative board does not have the same accountability.

**Adjourned:** Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 6:59 PM, motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover. Motion carried 3-0.

### Wells County Commissioners

\_\_\_\_\_  
President, Jeff Stringer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Vice President, Michael K Vanover

\_\_\_\_\_  
Member, Blake Gerber

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor